Consuming Bodies

Sex and Contemporary Japanese Art

Edited by Fran Lloyd

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Introduction: Critical Reflections

FRAN LLOYD

Consuming Bodies: Sex and Contemporary Japanese Art focuses on the current resurgence of the imaging of sex and consumerism in Japanese art and the critical connections such images establish within the wider historical, social and political conditions of Japanese culture. Engaging with a wide range of artistic practices, including performance, digital media, painting, sculpture, photography, installation and diverse forms of popular culture, the authors examine multiple ways in which art works act as critical reflections on issues of gender, sexuality and commerce within the highly conspicuous consumer culture of contemporary Japan, while simultaneously exploring how such images intervene in the cultural and economic systems that have long sustained Japanese national identity.

The impetus for this book was a major touring exhibition that presented the work of eight artists, all of whom are discussed here (throughout, Japanese names follow the Western convention of forenames preceding surnames).[1] During research on their work, it became apparent that concerns with sex and consumerism in Japan are part of the complexities of a specifically Japanese experience of modernization and commodification which, embedded in the past, continues to affect and transform the present. However, it is striking that, despite Japan's powerful presence in the global marketplace, Western audiences are generally unfamiliar with these complexities and know relatively little about contemporary Japanese art, its relation to these histories and its engagement with the specific conditions of present-day Japan.

Significantly, in recent years contemporary Japan has been hailed by many in the West as the post-modern society *par excellence*, the 'Empire of Signs' where spectacular economic development, together with the techno-digital revolution and pervasive consumerism, has transformed it into an exemplar of the unreal, a society of endless floating signs, of simulation and pastiche. As a consequence, contemporary Japanese art, frequently framed within the international art world as part of a transcultural post-modernism, is often removed from the specific political

and cultural conditions of Japan and its wider histories, which are radically different to those in America or Europe.

In this context, *Consuming Bodies: Sex and Contemporary Japanese Art* starts from the premise that art is not autonomous but is produced through and against specific historical and material conditions which are central to an understanding of its diverse forms, its preoccupations and indeed its positioning within society. More particularly, concerned with a number of different, but interconnected spaces within Japanese culture which encompass Japan's colonial past in Asia, America's post-war occupation of the country and the economic boom which preceded the current recession, this publication examines the deeper historical, cultural and social forces that have engendered contemporary art practices which engage directly with issues surrounding sex and consumerism.

Clearly sex and consumerism are fundamental and often interlinked parts of the history of all cultures – essential, one might say, to survival – and within the frame of Japanese culture (or indeed Western culture) such concerns are not necessarily of themselves new. However, these two overarching themes embody particularly complex meanings and realities within contemporary Japan where, as a highly developed late-capitalist society situated in Asia, born out of what many writers have seen as successive waves of enforced Western modernization, the rapid escalation of the Japanese post-war consumer market has transformed all aspects of life and resulted in an unprecedented focus on consumption in terms of popular culture, luxury goods and sexual services. In particular, the rapid growth and increasing diversification of Japan's highly visible sex industry, now estimated to gross over four trillion yen or £22 billion a year (an amount equivalent to the national defence budget or 1 per cent of GNP), has given rise to renewed indigenous concerns about the nature of the Japanese experience of modernity and the continuing affects of commodification which, driven by powerful economic imperatives, have a direct impact upon individuals and the cultural life of Japan.

The analysis of the imaging of sex and consumerism therefore moves far beyond the art works or the gallery into the private and public spaces of the city and the nation where the complex network of relationships surrounding gender, sexuality and commerce are directly encountered in both the fast-changing consumer marketplace and the dominant ideologies and systems of control within Japanese society. In short, sex and consumerism simultaneously evoke the individual body and the 'body' of the nation of contemporary Japan. Both are inextricably linked to issues of power, gender, class and race at the level of the individual and of society.

It is the recognition of the convergence and enmeshing of the economic and the political at the level of the specific body, the site of sex and consumerism, and at the level of the nation – state through past and present histories that shape social

1 *Street scene, Kabukicho, Shinjuku*, 2001.

practices which forms the basis of this book. For, if sex and consumerism can be seen as private and personal affairs, they are also highly public activities, governed by economic and state interests, controlled through legislation, material spaces and dominant cultural attitudes, shaped by gender difference in terms of employment patterns, economic status and language, and mediated by sexual and/or racial difference.

Moreover, the imaging of sex and consumerism in contemporary Japanese art, embedded in these economic and social systems, is intrinsically linked to the specific social contexts in which sexuality and commodification are experienced and mediated, directly or indirectly, through the media or the material reality of contemporary urban Japan. This takes many forms, as the following essays show, ranging from the visual imagery of magazines, comics, television, advertising and so forth, to the commercial sites of department stores and the numerous outlets which offer a seemingly endless array of sexual services and goods (illus. 1).

Nowhere is this more clearly visible than in Tokyo. Devastated by an earthquake in 1923 and fire bombings in 1945, Tokyo, like a symbol of Japan's spectacular post-war recovery, has undergone extensive modernization through waves of refurbishment and rebuilding, fuelled more recently in the 1980s by the real estate and construction boom, which – as part of the 'bubble economy' – seemed potentially unending.[2] It is a city of paradoxes, where the visual onslaught of commodity advertising, the various sites of sex and the consumption of goods exist in the frenzy of the high-tech urban environment alongside prevailing social codes of reticence and decorum (illus. 2).

2 Oh! Touch Pub Go Go (Drink and touch all you like), *Shinjuku*, 2001.

The sudden collapse of the bubble economy in 1990, when Japan's Nikkei Index lost almost two thirds of its value, exposed both the precariousness of this faith in continual economic renewal and the extent to which contemporary Japan had become the quintessential consumer society.[3] Most importantly, coinciding as it did with the death of the emperor in 1989, these events precipitated a period of economic and political reassessment where long-standing debates and anxieties about the nature of Japan's modernity were refuelled and revitalized.

The complex issues surrounding the ambivalent nature of modernity in Japan are therefore central to an understanding of its contemporary art and culture. Deeply embedded in Japan's past, such issues are nevertheless at the heart of what many contemporary Japanese cultural historians perceive as an unhealed wound in the nation's psyche, where the enforced adoption of Western modernity is in fact an 'incomplete modernity' which has yet to take account of what was rejected within pre-modern Japanese culture and the implications of this for the individual and collective body of the nation.

The ambivalence towards Western modernization is rooted in the nineteenth century when, following over 300 years of relative isolation from the West, the Meiji Restoration of 1868 imported modernity into Japan. This radical policy of modernization based upon Western technologies, structures and accompanying theories of progress affected all aspects of Japanese life and culture. Following nineteenth-century models in Europe, this importation resulted, as the following essays show, in

the privileging of a 'masculine' language as best befitting economic development and education, and thereby the suppression of an earlier 'feminine' Japanese language: the supplanting of pre-modern indigenous forms of performative pleasure, exemplified by the Shinto fertility festivals and popular forms of the carnivalesque, in favour of art academies and museums based upon Western concepts of 'art'. These cultural divisions are still prevalent today in the separation of *yōga* – literally 'Western painting' (traditionally, oil on canvas and Western techniques) – from *nihonga* – 'Japanese painting', which uses Japanese materials. Paradoxically, *nihonga*, an indigenous tradition, was designated an official category by an American scholar based in Tokyo and was therefore only established through contact with the West.[4]

Further consequences of this adoption of Western models of nation and economic progress can be seen in the rise of Japanese imperialism from the late nineteenth century when, in response to the rapidly expanding European colonial presence in Asia, Japan became the sole Asian colonizing power, first annexing Taiwan (1895) and Korea (1910) and subsequently expanding into North China, Indo-China (now Vietnam), Burma, the Philippines, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia. Not only did this result in atrocities committed in the name of a newly founded national identity, but it also eventually led to Japan's involvement in the Second World War, the horrendous American bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, and Japan's ultimate surrender and occupation by American forces. The New Constitution, enacted in 1948, established the foundations of an American-imposed parliamentary democracy which forbade Japan its own armed forces and ushered in a further wave of rapid modernization in the manner of the West and widespread dissemination of American popular culture.

By the 1960s Japan ranked next to the United States as a world industrial power and by 1971, the year after the World Exposition was held in Osaka, Japan was the third largest exporter in the world. The success of Japanese multinational corporations such as Sony, Toyota, Mitsubishi and Nintendo throughout the 1970s and 1980s led many Japanese commentators to the conclusion that economic imperatives dominated state interests to the extent that the 'nation-state' referred to as Japan, Inc., appeared to many to have lost its identity.[5]

However, in the shadow of these momentous economic changes that created new patterns of production and consumption lies an intertwined history of new patterns of sexual consumption, where 'gendered' and 'raced' bodies became key sites in the furthering of political and economic interests. As Timon Screech clearly demonstrates in Chapter One, sex and consumerism were part of Japan's urban culture well before the impact of Westernization and were utilized by the ruling powers as a means both of controlling the potential political unrest of the male populace and of furthering economic prosperity. However, driven by the new economic and

political imperatives of colonial expansion, an institutionalized system of enforced sex labour which relied upon non-Japanese women was introduced in the occupied territories in order to serve the Japanese military.[6] Later, during the American occupation of post-war Japan, institutionalized military-related prostitution became a vital part of economic regeneration through what was euphemistically called the Recreation and Amusement Association and, in hindsight, this can be seen to have established the basis for the sex trade of contemporary Japan.[7] In this respect Japan follows a well-established pattern of global sex tourism identified by four successive phases: indigenous prostitution; economic colonialism and militarism; a period of occupation involving the restructuring of traditional economies; followed by rapid post-war economic development and the growth of international tourism.[8]

Today, however, Japan's extensive sex industry is largely dependent upon a flow of labouring bodies into Japan to serve a domestic market through the illegal trafficking of women from Southeast Asia, particularly from Thailand and the Philippines.[9] Part of a huge network, controlled supposedly by the *Yakuza*, the Japanese organized-crime syndicates, women are promised well-paid employment only to find themselves delivered to a broker who sells them on into debt bondage within the numerous outlets of the sex trade.[10] Often illegal immigrants, unable to pay back the exorbitant costs of their trafficking, unprotected by the law and in a country which penalizes the victims rather than the traffickers, such women are forced into sexual slavery.[11]

Since the 1990s, when Thailand and the Philippines limited the activities of Japanese sex tours within their national boundaries, sex trafficking within Japan has rapidly increased.[12] Not confined to Southeast Asia, the trafficking of women and children has also become a major issue in both Europe and America.[13] However, it is a particularly lucrative business for Japan because of the sheer size of the domestic Japanese sex industry which, as Yayori Matsui argues, is largely due to the continuing influence in Japanese society of a sexual climate derived from the licensed prostitution system of the feudal era, with Japan's first anti-prostitution law not being enacted until 1956, and a corporate culture in which women are seen as a source of 'comfort' for the 'company warrior'.[14]

However, there are also a number of other economic and cultural factors that have affected the wide-ranging sites of sex and consumerism within Japan. As Nicholas Bornoff notes in Chapter Two, lack of private space in the family home made the Japanese 'Love Hotel', frequently situated near train stations, an alternative space for sex both for parents and for young couples who would traditionally share the family home. With set rates for a short or long stay, such hotels cater for a range of ages and offer a discreet and highly efficient service where visitors can frequently choose from a range of themed rooms to match their desires.[15] By

3 *Street scene, Shinjuku*, 2001.

4 *Telekura RinRin House, Telephone Club, Kabukicho, Shinjuku*, 2001.

contrast, numerous commercial establishments such as the 'Soap Lands', the 'Pink Salons' and sex clubs serve a predominantly male audience in a culture where strong gender divisions dominate the home, education and work, and where Japanese women have, until recently, been marginalized within the political and economic structures of post-war Japan (illus. 3). Long working hours, combined with the ethos of corporate culture alongside the steadily increasing number of unmarried men and the steep rise in divorce, may help account for the highly visible expansion of such establishments and the media attention focused on high-school girls and the related phenomena of 'compensated' dating.[16]

Meanwhile, changing patterns of education and the social structures of marriage mean that 68 per cent of Japanese women are now in employment and their lifestyles have accordingly changed radically. Young Japanese women, frequently living at home and with a high disposable income for luxury goods, are increasingly reluctant to marry given that the majority of Japanese males still wish them to remain at home. Thus, although more marked in Tokyo than elsewhere, the number of young single females and males between the ages of 25 and 29 has dramatically increased from a national average in 1975 of 20 per cent female and 48.3 per cent male to a staggering 48 per cent of unmarried females and 68 per cent of unmarried males in 1995.[17] In this context, the proliferation of *telekura* – sex telephone booths where paying males sit in single cubicles awaiting potential callers – and host clubs for both sexes may indicate both the increasing need for such introductory services and the estranged relationships between the sexes (illus. 4).

The growth of Japan's sex industry alongside the unprecedented consumption of luxury goods also suggests a connection between sexual and commodity consumerism which may be potentially linked to desiring in general. Since the late 1960s, high levels of commodity consumption in many parts of the globe have led cultural theorists to argue that the principal commodity of late capitalism is in fact not the products (with their associated use values) but the images of power or lifestyle that the commodities embody. In this sense, such commodities assume a power over people and may in Marxist terms be a form of 'commodity fetishism' where relations between people start to become treated like relations between things. Similarly, the sexologists Gagnon and Parker have argued that:

> In advanced industrial societies . . . sexual desire is specifically linked to the desire for many commodities (in advertising for instance) and in some cases the experience of desiring things may be isomorphic with desiring sexual experiences.[18]

In addition, Japanese commentators frequently perceive the excesses of consumerism and the proliferation of the highly visible sex market as linked to an endless thirst or desire for the new that covers up the spiritual void at the core of Japan's contemporary culture.

Although this form of critique of Western modernity has always been present to varying degrees within post-war Japanese culture – as Midori Matsui makes clear in Chapter Six – it is perhaps not surprising, given the recent realities of the aftermath of the 'economic' miracle, that artists coming to maturity during the 1980s should engage critically with issues of consumption and sexuality, which are the most visibly transformed areas of contemporary culture.

Bringing together a range of writers, including art historians, cultural historians, curators and artists, the essays which follow provide unique and wide-ranging perspectives on this little-researched area of contemporary Japanese art practice and the critical issues it uncovers.

Certainly, as several of the essays show, Japan's long tradition of sex as a pleasurable social safety valve in the densely populated and highly gendered spaces of the city is counterbalanced in Japanese visual culture by the use of sex as a form of dissent, transgression or disobedience that rejects the effects of Western modernization and frequently returns to pre-modern indigenous traditions which, focusing on the raw body, become metaphors for the violation of the national psyche or body of Japan. Equally, in a culture where sex has always been an instrument of state control and an exertion of power, whether through the organization of the urban sites of sex, through legislation and censorship or through the imperatives of the nation

at times of war or peace, the uncovering of this power is a form of resistance which enables critical reflection.

In this context, the first two chapters provide a much-needed historical perspective on the subject of sex and consumerism and introduce the issues of the public and private spaces of the nation, gender, sexuality and race that are central to this study. Timon Screech's essay examines the nexus of sex and money in seventeenth-century Edo (now Tokyo) and charts the layered power systems that led to an open culture of sex and consumerism under the shogunal regime, whilst historically decoding many ill-informed critiques of sexual and commercial activities that have parallels in current readings of Japanese culture.

By contrast, Nicholas Bornoff's essay takes the thesis that sex and dissent frequently go together and charts a historical and developmental trajectory to the present day of cultural attitudes towards power, the body, commerce and sex. With an overlying theme of the ways in which Japanese artists engage with these issues within the contemporary art world, it also provides an insight into the crucial differences between the conditions for Japanese and Western art practice.

The subsequent three chapters focus on the work of a range of contemporary artists who came to artistic maturity during the height of the 'bubble economy' in the late 1980s and examine their critical engagement with issues of gender, sexuality and commerce within the specific conditions of contemporary Japanese culture. All of the artists have witnessed at first hand the rapid growth of a late-capitalist consumer culture which has transformed the material reality of Japan. They have also witnessed the seemingly unassailable bubble economy collapse; the death of an emperor; the accompanying break-up of an older Japan that he symbolized; and the loss of faith in a political and economic system that has proved (like many others worldwide) to be corrupt.

The first of these essays, Chapter Three, provides an introduction to recent developments in Japanese art and examines the work of several artists who, drawing upon a wide range of indigenous sources from 1960s' counterculture to the highly visible sex industry, engage directly with issues of sex and consumerism in the city. Pointing to highly gendered and contradictory regulatory practices that make certain bodies of consumption visible while rendering others invisible, the essay argues that the artists foreground and undermine the social, political and economic systems that have long sustained Japanese national identity.

Visibly different, Chapter Four is a photo-piece essay of the 1998 performance *Made in Occupied Japan*, a collaboration between the Tokyo-based feminist artist Shimada and BuBu, the Kyoto-based Dumb Type performance artist, sex worker and AIDS activist. Set against the site of a former post-war American airforce base on the outskirts of Tokyo, it focuses on the ambiguities and complexities of the rela-

tionships between American GIs and Japanese women during the difficult years of 'occupation' and dismantles the idea of Japan as one nation. Simultaneously it highlights the problems prostitutes face in a culture which, paradoxically, benefits from them economically but prefers to ignore their presence and their rights.

Yuko Hasegawa's essay in Chapter Five takes as its starting point *kawaii*, or cute style, which dominated popular culture in the late 1980s and 1990s, and relates this to a crisis of masculinity engendered in part by the defeat of Japan in the Second World War. Focusing on the work of contemporary Japanese women artists who draw upon everyday urban sites of consumption and the indigenous popular culture forms of *manga* (comics) and *anime* (animation films), Hasegawa argues that their transformed representations of the indeterminate cute body offer the possibilities of transcendence of the commercial excesses of sex and consumerism and the limitations of national identity. Based on Asian rather than Western attitudes to the body, Hasegawa posits that the works offer a new global vision which could potentially provide the Japan of the twenty-first century with a more complete identity, rooted in collective values rather than in economics.

In Chapter Six, Midori Matsui furthers the debates about the complexities of post-war Japan by focusing on the work of Makoto Aida and his use of popular culture as a critique of Japanese consumer culture. Inspired by *angura* counterculture, a peculiarly domestic artistic movement originating in the late 1960s, Matsui looks at the way Aida's work refuses to conform to the logic of Western modernity and returns instead to an indigenous structure of anti-modernity which embraces the marginalized, taboo-ridden and concealed body of Japan's consumer culture. For Aida, Midori argues, there is no possibility of transcendence. Instead his work is a powerful commentary on the continuing effects of Japan's undigested modernity, which nullifies or absorbs any form of critical resistance.

The essay that follows also examines the ways in which artists have pursued combative strategies towards the two key preoccupations – consumption and sexuality – by focusing on contemporary performance-art media in Tokyo. Here Stephen Barber probes an urban context of rapid transformation and corporate power, focusing on the work of the prominent performance-art group Kaitaisha, who use an imagery of incessant corporeal struggle and sexual tension to incise Tokyo's urban visual cultures. Barber examines the group's sources in the riotous 1960s' counterculture of Tokyo, together with their ambivalent approach towards contemporary digital technologies. In the work of Kaitaisha, Barber argues, sex and consumerism are re-imagined from zero and he explores the ways in which their creative strategies resonate with the vital experiments and preoccupations of European digital art.

The afterword by Yoshiko Shimada is written from a powerfully positioned political perspective of a feminist artist based in Tokyo who questions the implica-

tions of contemporary Japan's rejection of its imperial past and its attitude to history. Based upon her experience of working in Asia, Shimada proposes that pop culture is being used by the Japanese government as a hegemonic tool to extend its powers in the twenty-first century towards a wider Asia, whilst wishing it to act simultaneously as a coda to the past. Focusing on the hybridity of Japanese culture as a counterpart to renewed nationalistic rhetoric, Shimada attempts to provide a space of resistance to the widespread state of amnesia which accompanies Japan's economic developments at home and abroad.

Wide-ranging and frequently provocative, the essays show clearly that Japan's ambivalence to modernity and its continuing affects are crucial concerns in contemporary Japanese visual culture and are rooted in important areas of cultural difference. These differences have tended to be ignored in recent years with the growth of globalization, the new internationalism or transculturalism, which suggests homogeneity of world culture. Moreover, the recognition of Japan as a highly industrialized, information-techno country tends to assume or presume similar or parallel artistic support systems to those in Britain or America.

In fact this is far from the case, and even the questions of what is art and, more problematically, what is contemporary art are highly contested issues. As the curator Fumio Nanjo notes, when Japan opened its borders the Japanese had no word for 'art' in the Western sense and subsequently invented the term *bijutsu* for visual art, 'its direct translation meaning "technique of beauty" '.[19] *Bijutsu* and post-war *gendai bijutsu* (contemporary art or avant-garde art) were therefore terms developed under Western influence. However, as Matsui makes clear in a different context, *gendai bijutsu*, which emerged in opposition to the two official categories (*yōga* and *nihonga*), imported ideas of the 'self' and 'originality' based upon the 'Western post-Romantic conception of selfhood'.[20] Thus, while for the West contemporary art implies the modernity of an avant-garde, many Japanese writers argue that Japanese modernity (as opposed to Western modernity) has been formed through indigenous resistance to Western modern consciousness.

As this suggests, contemporary Japanese art, and indeed the artist, still has a precarious place within Japan, in spite of recent prominence in the international art world. Deeply embedded in nineteenth-century structures and organizational modes imported from Europe, artistic training in Japan is expensive and highly competitive, and exhibition spaces for contemporary art are predominantly commercial and costly. Surprisingly, for example, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Japan, the first government space in Tokyo for a permanent collection of contemporary art, including post-war Japanese art, opened only in March 1995. Previously, the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, first built in 1926, was for many years the only major site for exhibitions of current art, mainly juried exhibitions organized by exhibiting soci-

eties. However, as the chief curator Kunio Yaguchi notes, none of these were organized by museum staff and the 'galleries served simply as rental spaces for the exhibiting societies' until the museum was rebuilt in 1975.[21] Such working practices continue to present major problems for the large numbers of new public art museums built since the 1970s, which frequently lack investment in curatorial staff and fail to address issues of audience and cultural meaning.

Similar differences and difficulties of translation exist in other areas of the contemporary Japanese art world. For example, although Japan does have some curator galleries, *kikaku-garos,* which work on a commission basis similar to those in Europe and America, the contemporary Japanese gallery system is primarily dominated by 'rental galleries', *kashi-garo*, developed in the 1960s, where artists usually pay a large fee to rent the space without the support of a curator or accompanying publicity (see Chapter Three). According to the Japanese art critic Monty DiPietro, almost half of Tokyo's 800 galleries in the Ginza–Yurakucho–Kyobachi district are *kashi-garo*, with an average weekly rental fee of 300,000 yen, about £2,000.[22] In this context the move towards performance-based art in the public spaces of the city and towards the lower-priced, artist-run rental spaces is pragmatic, while emergent artists have an unusually heightened awareness of the positioning of art within the networks of consumerism.

Thus, alert to the precarious placement of contemporary art within a country where there is virtually no government support for young artists and, until recently, little tradition of critical writing and of curatorship, the essays provide an insight into the complexities of contemporary art practice and the current debates about nation, gender and race which are uppermost as Japan enters the twenty-first century.

Situated between what was once regarded as the East and the West, Japan has become a major economic power whose position in the global marketplace is currently being renegotiated in relationship to both Western capitalist societies and the growing markets of Asia.[23] Heightened by the end of the Cold War and the resultant emphasis on the opening up of internal markets and competing internationally, the *Nihonjinron* debates about the uniqueness of Japan, prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s, have clearly given way to indigenous concerns about contemporary Japanese culture, what it represents, and who it includes or excludes. Linked to the death of the Showa emperor and the increasing loss of belief in the myth of one nation and a homogeneous Japanese culture, the work of the contemporary artists discussed in these essays can be seen as part of the unprecedented ongoing debates about the future of a more critically aware and more inclusive Japan.

In spite of the recession, which has lasted for almost a decade, Japan is still the second largest economy in the world with a GDP of 2.5 per cent, which is as

much as the whole of the rest of Asia (including China and India) or four times that of Great Britain.[24] However, Japan is at a crucial point. The steadily declining birth rate, which is below replacement level, and the high ageing population have serious implications for an advanced economy that needs consuming bodies at home as well as abroad.[25] While Japan has concentrated on generating overseas markets, particularly in Asia, other highly developed countries which share similar problems also rely upon immigration as a means of stimulating the economy and creating new generations of consumers.[26] These economic imperatives alone may slowly change the long-sustained ideologies of Japan as one homogeneous nation and force a more diverse and inclusive culture which will, in turn, have as yet unknown effects on the highly gendered and unequal spaces of sex and consumerism within its national boundaries.

Sex and Consumerism in Edo Japan

TIMON SCREECH

1

During the Edo period, the country now known as Japan was in essence a federal state. Some 280 regional lords, or daimyo (*daimyō* literally means 'great landholders'), governed the preponderance of a country which was known to most people as the 'Tenka', or that which lay 'below heaven'. Superior to the daimyo was the shogunal family, the Tokugawa. Their period in office is coterminous with the Edo period, 1603–1868. The Tokugawa controlled some third of the Tenka as their privileged holdings, and these were called the lands of Heavenly Command (*tenryō*). Daimyo states were of varying size, some vast, some little more than a town together with its environs, and they all had their several rights, duties and skills. It is necessary to investigate a little further the nexus of production and rule that pertained in the Tenka of the Edo period to establish how its cultures of consumption worked and how its sexual life was imbricated within them.

PRODUCTION AND PRODUCE IN THE EDO-PERIOD TENKA

The cluster of collaborating and completing states that made up the Tenka offered a wealth of difference, one from the other, in terms of culture, religious affiliation, food, grains grown and animals husbanded; they were as unalike in terms of terrain and weather as the far north of Europe is from the Mediterranean. From the snow-bound vastnesses of Tōhoku to the orange-growing south of Kyushu, there was an abundance of things, and also an abundance of variety. Meats, fish, fruits, vegetables, metals, woods and cloth were diverse, as too were human varieties of facial and, to a degree, ethnic type; there were different eye and skin colours, different regional accents, and dialects that were virtually mutually incomprehensible languages. It is wrong to think of the Tenka as anything equivalent to a modern nation-state of Japan, although, to be sure, the one grew in time out of the other.

But the Tenka was not just a mass of disparate units. It had a number of nodes that functioned like magnets, drawing the regions together. These were the great cities. Foremost were what they called the Three Ports, *Sanganotsu*, although only two were actually coastal: Kyō, also called Keishi (modern Kyoto), Osaka and Edo (modern Tokyo). A more generous formulation allowed for two additional nodes, Sakai and Nagasaki, and in this case they were known as the Five Royal Cities. Collectively these conurbations may have been home to about one quarter of the Tenka's population. We are dealing – and this is important – with a high degree of urbanization.

All the main cities were incorporated into the Heavenly Command (hence 'royal'), as was the great city of Nogoya. It was well recognized that no daimyo should ever be permitted to control an area capable of generating Tenka-wide economic or cultural pull. But several regional cities were large too and could boast sophistication and plenty, offering their hinterlands and areas further afield dreams of art, goods, literacy, learning – and decadence.

The Three Ports were supreme in aura, and they alone would have conjured up images to all inhabitants of the Japanese archipelago. Osaka was the entrepôt for most regional production and was popularly called 'the Tenka's kitchen'. Rice (the staff of life and also a unit of currency) was transported there for redistribution; cloth was brought from its centres of weaving and dyeing; and lumberyards contained arrays of rough and precious wood to be sent out to other places, as required. Like most cities, Osaka was centred on a castle, but whereas, in the case of the daimyo's capital cities, this would be the residential and administrative focus of the original state, in the case of the royal cities the castle belonged to the shogun, who was elsewhere, and so was not occupied for much of the time. Osaka also had very few samurai, or members of the military-bureaucratic class. In other areas of dense population, samurai might constitute one or two in every dozen people on the street. Osaka had but a few hundred in total and was thought of as free. There, merchants engaged in unfettered moneymaking endeavours or in relaxed pursuits.

Kyō was a different kettle of fish. It again was built around a huge castle, although one perpetually unoccupied as the shogun never went there nor, unlike the case with Osaka, did he ever assign a relative to take up position in it. Kyō was governed from Edo by a plenipotentiary, one of whose tasks was to liaise with the *shujō*, ancestor of the present 'emperors' of Japan, who at that time functioned as custodians of the twin lamps of ritual and tradition. Kyō had a carefully honed air of antiquity. I say 'air' because in point of fact, like all the royal cities, it was new in its material fabric. Horrific wars lasting for much of the fifteenth century and all of the sixteenth had put paid to the near totality of real estate, and hardly any architecture, bridges, gardens, wells or ditches survived from times past. People lived in an urban spread

that was of recent erection. Antiquity was only tangible in outlying parts, such as Kyō's hilly skirts, in chattels or in toponyms.

But Kyō's image was old. Unlike Osaka, which was of only mediaeval foundation, or Edo (to which we will turn presently), which dated just to 1590, Kyō had once been the centre of power and activity; back in the mid-eighth century it had been laid out on the international Chinese model to look like a world-class city. It had straight wide boulevards, lined with airy compounds for the secular and clerical rich, leading up to a palace at the northern end. Its name meant 'capital' in the sense of the defining locus where authority resided; its other name, Keishi, was written with characters that could be read as 'metropolitan master' – the city that inculcated into others how to be. Both were Chinese terms and related to Continental (i.e. Chinese and Korean) notions of the preferability of the schooled polis to the rudeness of the countryside. In the Edo period no other city in Japan was using a Chinese-derived name, although in former times some had.

The ideal formation of Kyō as a grid had fallen by the wayside over time, and its streets had deviated in orientation and vector. In more general times, grid cities are hopeless in time of war, and had been found to have been abandoned. Daimyo castle towns were laid out differently, as were the remaining four royal cities, for all that they were assembled from grid chunks in a kind of patchwork. Kyō continued to boast religious institutions which traced themselves back to antiquity, and there were names of great historic resonance. Intangible history was everywhere. Pictures were made to show Kyō's great sites to those who did not know the city or had only passed through briefly. These images appear in the late sixteenth to early seventeenth century as painted pairs of screens. They go by the name of 'Scenes within and without Raku' (*rakuchu-rakugai zu*), where 'raku' is the Japanese pronunciation of the 'lo' of Loyang, the ancient Chinese – and so emblematic – capital. At precisely the moment that peace was returning, with the establishment of wider hegemonies that culminated in the Tokugawa shogunate, and Kyō was being shiningly rebuilt, it advertised its reformulated self as a place of ancient pedigree. The use of paired screens as a support for paintings was standard, but in the particular instance of the 'raku' scenes they allowed the viewer to envelop him or herself in the city. Screens can surround viewers and trap them snugly within, or if in the common practice a person received guests seated in front of screens, the city would offset them with its grandeur. These paintings include copious golden clouds, which flow in and cover unwanted aspects of the city. They disjoint the whole so that there is no panorama, only a series of views: aspects not prospects. This creates an unreal city of abstracted parts and memories. The parts shown include the sites of historic interest and the residences of the great and the good. But also included are the emporia and workshops of fine and intricate craftsmanship (ills. 5). Kyō is full of artisans and its streets swarm

with discriminating, if compulsive, buyers. This Kyō of the painted screen – the Kyō of the mind, if not necessarily the Kyō of fact – is where tradition reigned, and an important aspect of that tradition was the lore of skilled artisanal production. The knowledge to make these items and the discernment to purchase them had accumulated over a long period of time and could not be annulled in the flames of battle.

And then there was Edo. By the mid-eighteenth century Edo was home to one million people and by far the largest city on earth, never mind in the Tenka (though it was not the first city ever to reach the million mark). The Tokugawa family, before their accession to shogunal rank and while that supreme title languished in the abeyance into which war had cast it, moved into the fertile Kanto region following the success of their allies at the Battle of Odawara. What they moved into was a potentially rich, but quite underdeveloped region. The coastal plain stood in marked contrast to the precipitous slopes and uplands of much of the Japanese archipelago. The family head Tokugawa Ieyasu, then a battle-scarred warlord approaching 50, began to turn the unimpressive and dilapidated town of Edo, set on a bluff where the deep River Sumida met the wide bay that ushered it into the Pacific Ocean, into a city that would symbolize his aspirations to unify the Tenka under himself. When Ieyasu died in 1616, he had pacified most of the daimyo states, established the lands of Heavenly Command and forced the daimyo – some willingly, some grudgingly – to accept the priority of his house. On a comparative note, this was also the year of Shakespeare's death.

Edo was a problem. It grew in time to rival Kyō and, by the early nineteenth century, was being referred to as Toto, the 'eastern metropolis', in explicit counterbalance to Kyō, which was no longer seen as central but as western. The two cities are about 500 km apart on a due east–west line; Osaka was merely a few hours from Kyō on horseback. Created *ex nihilo*, Edo lacked cultural baggage, but while an excusable brashness was appropriate to Osaka, which was a merchants' city and merchants were not expected to maintain the decorums of a metropolis, it lacked the craftsmanship of Kyō and the deeply racinated behavioural patterns of that city. It was the shogun's capital and it had an image problem. Scholars, artists and artisans were encouraged to decamp there, sometimes rewriting their old homelands on the vacant spaces of Edo; the fishers' island in Edo Bay was named Tsukuda-jima, since that was the name of the old place where the fisherfolk, cajoled by bluster and tax breaks, had hailed from. Ancient temples set up branch establishments in Edo, often with the same names as the originals: Edo soon had its Kiyomizu Temple and its Hall of Thirty-Three Bays – named after two of Kyō's great religious centres. But this took time. As long as two centuries after Edo's foundation, visitors were still permitting themselves to comment on the uncouthness of the place. The inescapable fact was that Edo was a military city. This was to have a huge bearing throughout its history, even as it mutated

into a place of genuine culture, in terms of patterns of consumption and of sexual encounter. As a man from Kyō could still remark in the early nineteenth century, when he arrived in Edo, 'and saw all the daimyo and lesser lords with their pikes and banners', he was tempted to think 'we were still in time of war'.[1] The Edo street had considerable bravura. Its males adopted a swaggering gait and held that the 'men of the East' were necessarily rough and tough. By contrast (and again this colours consumerism and sex) the anciently settled regions were 'effeminate'.

This was all so much cultural cliché. There was enough elegance in Edo to satisfy most appetites, if people chose to look for it. But as the regions and metropolises struggled to sort out images for themselves and formulate identities, the triple division was established, with Edo as virile and strong, Kyō as old and punctilious, and Osaka as financially absorbed. It was argued that children born in Kyō were more likely to be girls, since the swamp of effeteness infiltrated even the womb, whereas children born in Edo would surely be boys.[2] A traveller to Kyō from Edo in the late eighteenth century was intrigued that 70 per cent of the city's population was female, whereas in his home there were mostly men.[3]

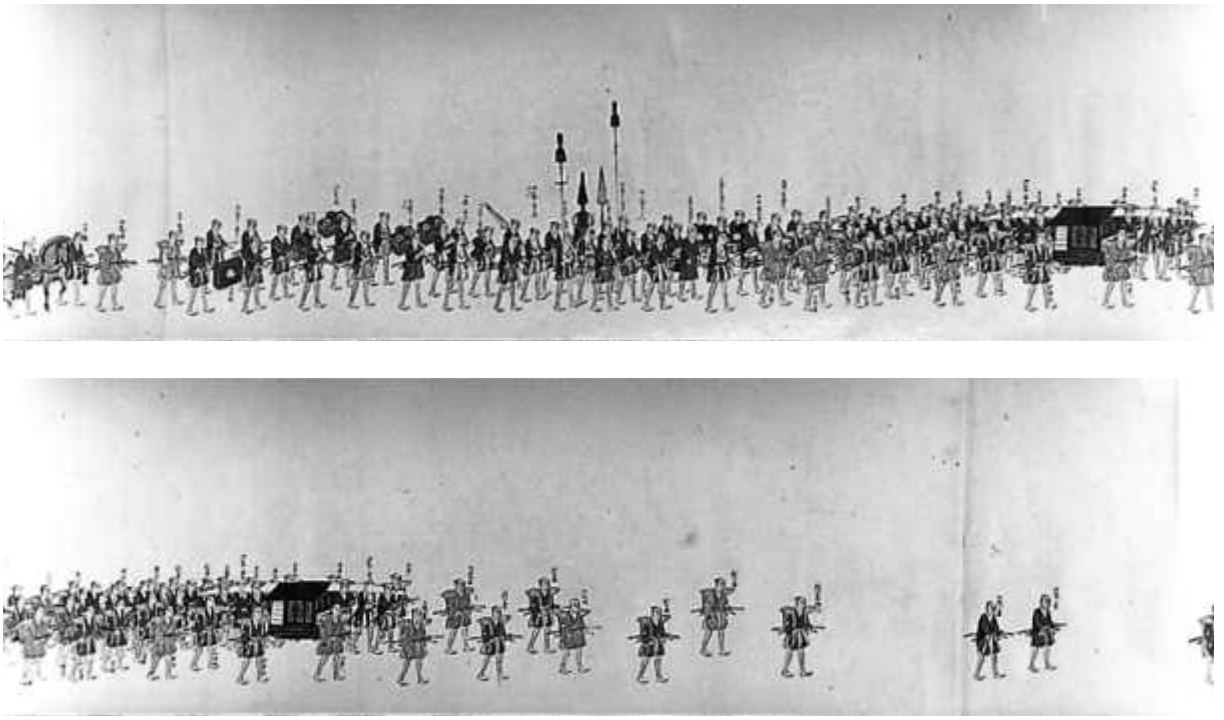
In one sense, Edo *was* virile and our traveller was stating an empirical truth, even if the medical reasoning was wayward. Because of the shogunal presence, Edo had a congregation of officers and staffers unlike any other city. Samurai in direct shogunal employ (called bannermen, *hatamoto*) numbered in the thousands, but this figure rose after the time of the third shogun, Tokugawa Iemitsu, through institution of the system of 'alternate attendance'. Under this policy, all daimyo had to attend at Edo Castle as stipulated, which was generally for one year out of two; they had to leave their principal wife and nominated heir in the city permanently. There was a colossal to-ing and fro-ing as retinues came up and went back to their country seats. Processions could take hours to file past and were made up of several hundred men at a minimum. Whereas the bannermen resided in Edo with their families, it made no economic sense for daimyo to permit their accompanying servants and retainers to bring dependants with them (illus. 6). Edo became a city of men indeed, as it was a city of interim and *faute-de-mieux* bachelors. The single men, of whatever class, from counsellor or ritualist to cook or harness-holder, had needs for distraction, and their consumption desiderata can immediately be imagined. And there was the rub.

How do you keep a city of bachelors under control? How do you retain the proprieties of the family when men are being exposed to the unwonted liberating experiences of being alone in a foreign city for a whole year? And how do you square this with the requirements of dignified comportment in (as they called it) 'the lap of the shogun'? Many of the escapist and arrantly self-indulgent norms of the Osaka merchants were transplanted. Osaka already had a brisk trade in pop-

5 Anon., *Scenes in and around the Capital*, *c.* 1640, detail from a six-fold screen.

ular novels, eroticized pictures and the apparatus that supported a culture of the pleasure districts (illus. 7). Osaka men had their women to hand, but socializing practices kept the sexes separate for much of the time, and it was expected that men would betake themselves to raucous environments occasionally or, if their budget allowed it, often, as well as to the boudoirs of expensive courtesans. The comic writer Ihara Saikaku captured the flavour of Osaka life. Saikaku's bestseller of 1682, *Life of a Sex-Mad Man* (*Kō shoku ichidai otoko*), tells of one Yonosuke (a plausible name, but literally 'man of the world'), an Osaka merchant, who in the course of the book sleeps with hundreds of women and a good number of men. To make the point convincingly, Saikaku informed the reader that he had done about as much himself. He repeated his success in many novels of a similar ilk (illus. 8). Edo was a newer city, with a large percentage of its residents just passing through. There was a concomitant lack of attention to long-term social needs. People did not know who their neighbours were, might never again see the people they encountered in the streets, and were generally without the brakes on loose behaviour that the realization that one is part of a close-knit community exerts.

Osaka gave the lead to Edo, but one was mercantile, the other full of samurai and their employees. In 1617 the shogunate decided to accept the suggestion of an enterprising Edo townsman and set up an official red-light district (*kuruwa*). This



6 Anon., *Procession to Edo of the Daimyo of Owari*, *c.* 1800, multi-coloured print.

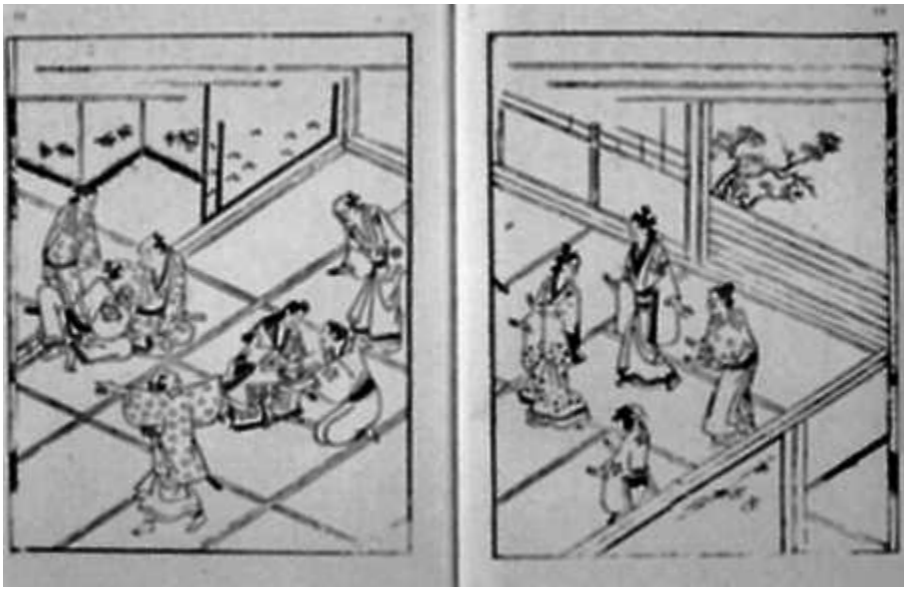
was to be licensed and all sex workers were to be gathered into it, to be indentured to a specified house. The zone was constructed near Edo's centre and named the Yoshiwara, or 'happy fields'. It was some five city blocks in size and may have contained several hundred working women. In 1640 the loose gathering of pleasure houses in Kyō were similarly grouped together and relocated to the Shimabara, and in 1644 Osaka was finally given its district too, the Shinmachi. Nagasaki also had an important red-light district, the Maruyama, where, that city being the one international port, Continental and European customers were to be seen and where one thrill was to engage the services of a half-Chinese or half-Dutch woman; the Maruyama was consolidated in the early 1640s. Other cities had equivalent zones. The process of registering sex workers limited numbers and, whatever the intent, this gave rise to delicately named 'other places' (*hoka-basho*), or unlicensed quarters. Since Edoites dropped their aitches, the 'other places' became known yet more euphemistically as 'hill places' (*oka-basho*). After a dreadful fire in 1657, the Yoshiwara was removed to the city fringe of Edo and renamed the Shin ('New') Yoshiwara, although it continued to be called the Yoshiwara as the old one had been, or sometimes the 'five blocks'.

The creation of licensed pleasure districts did not discipline the libido fully, for they were expensive and not open to those of small means. They also developed

7 Torii Kiyonobu I, *Fujimura Handayū II*, *c.* 1720, multi-coloured woodblock print.

their own rituals and practices, so those not in the know might feel constrained and unwelcome. In Edo, at least, there were other means to keep the samurai in check. First was a sense of *noblesse oblige*, inculcated into the ruling classes from a young age. A samurai was a warrior-bureaucrat (more the latter during the Edo period when there was little fighting to do) who received a fixed stipend, paid by his daimyo or, if a bannerman, the shogun. This status, with its associated privileges, was hereditary, as was the level of the stipend (barring unexpected promotion or demotion). If a samurai enjoyed a surplus in his stipend, he was expected to devote it to worthy ends (collecting books, upgrading his military hardware) or even to return it; he was certainly not supposed to blow it in the pleasure quarters. But this is what many did, donning deep hats to hide their faces as they entered the Yoshiwara and consigning their two swords – the badges of their rank – at the left-luggage offices that opened up for their business along the way.

A second means of control were the sumptuary regulations. These defined who might consume what, from dress and personal adornment to domestic furnishings. Punishments for breaking sumptuary rules were strict, although this rather depended on where and when, since enforcement went through periods of laxity as well as of severity and bribery was common. Such regulations were applied to all classes, but the samurai were especially closely watched. It should be pointed out, though, that the ultimate sanction against the samurai – enforced suicide – is largely a modern myth and did not, in fact, happen; moreover, the term for this was *seppuku*, not *harakiri*.



8 Ihara Saikaku, spread from his *Kōshoku gonin onna* ('The Five Sex-Mad Women'), 1686, woodblock print.

There was a third means of control, perhaps the most interesting. It relied on geomancy, which is the science of imposing human imprints on the land in such a way that the natural forces aid, rather than hinder, the tranquillity and order of human society. At a rather debased level, this becomes the Chinese *fengsui* (*fūsui* in Japanese) by which people decide the positioning of objects in their domestic layout. Like all cities, Edo was established in accordance with geomantic principles, but it was the most problematic since, as a shogunal city, it should be perfect in every regard (many daimyo cities gave more attention to the exigencies of defensibility or traffic than to the geomantic code). Yet Edo had also been built to withstand assault and it did not fit the ideal geomantic plans by any means. For a start, it was not a grid, and neither was its royal abode (Edo Castle) in the north. The streets were a higgledy-piggledy array, which partly reflected how they happened to have grown up and was partly a deliberate messiness intended to thwart invasion, and the castle was safely in the centre. This was difficult to rationalize for a geomancer. The most crucial requirements had been met, despite this, but certainly not all.

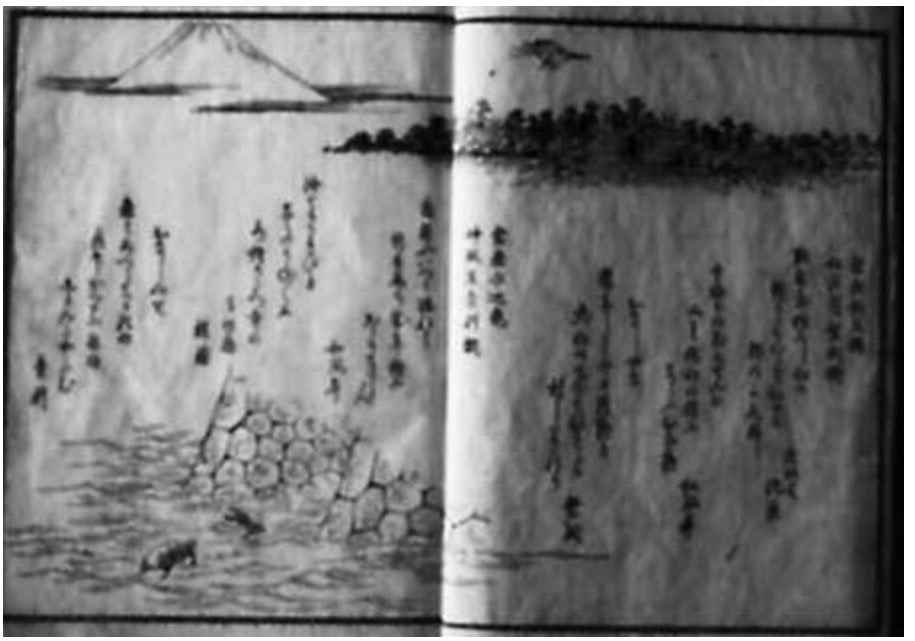
It was the fire of 1657 that allowed at least one major symbolic improvement, and one that affected consumerism and sex. When the Yoshiwara was relocated, it was placed by Asakusa, just outside the city in a northeasterly direction. Geomancy is complex, but its overriding assumption was that the northeast is malevolent: this direction is called the Demon's Portal. A temple was always put in that direction, ideally atop an eminence, first to block and then to neutralize baleful forces. Kyō had Mt Hiei with the Enryaku-ji temple on it. Edo was built with a (rather minor) hill to

the northeast, and this was duly named 'Eastern Mt Hiei' and a temple, the Kan'ei-ji, constructed on it. About half the shoguns were buried in this temple, that their spirits might repel demons and so protect Edo; the others were buried at the Zōjō-ji temple in the southwest, the so-called 'Demon's Rear Gate'. The New Yoshiwara was placed behind Eastern Mt Hiei and the Kan'ei-ji so that its wickednesses might be erased by them before it could infest the city. Assorted other 'bad places' were already sited thereabouts, most obviously the execution grounds.

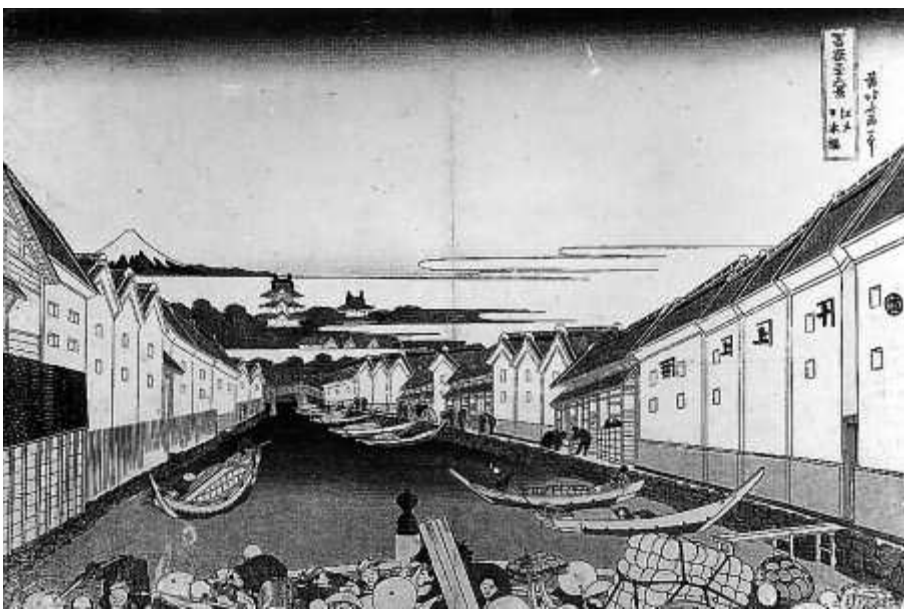
BREAKDOWN

All these preparative measures were not enough. As a city filled with lone men from all walks of life and all regions of the Tenka, Edo pulsated. It was inherently unstable to put in such proximity so many ways of behaving. Edo's differences sent normality into flux and bred within the city of Edo what all observers took to be its prime characteristic: obsession with fashions. What is fashion but the rocking of codes on a sea of uncertainty created by the flow of difference? But to the Edo mind, culture was there to serve as a dyke. The shogunate disliked fashion. For the same reason they disliked any change, or at least historical shifts. The Tokugawa took their regime as permanent. Images made of the castle always show it as the symbol of stasis: cranes, said to live for one thousand years, wheel about its towers, while terrapins, said to live for ten thousand, swim in its moat (illus. 9). Edo Castle was even properly (though not often in practice) called Chiyoda Castle, the 'castle in the ricefields of one thousand generations'. The regime would provide, but it would also stay immutably in place, and woe betide him or her who thought otherwise. When Hokusai depicted the centre of Edo as part of his *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji* in the early 1830s, he used the novel technique of vanishing-point perspective to extend the serried rows of godowns (warehouses) and the labourers unloading boats to fill them (illus. 10). This is a vision of plenty. Regulated and well run, to boot. The viewer imagines stocked and labelled shelves and a bevy of bookkeepers within. The proletariat, squashed onto the bridge in the foreground, having bought their requirements at reasonable prices, make off home with them or carry bulk purchases for sale throughout the city. The castle floats above, removed from the formal perspectival lines of recession, surmounted only by eternal Mt Fuji, whose name 'fu ji' is homophonous with 'never dying'.

Fashion could have no role in this world view. Fashion confused established divisions, tempted people into ever-greater expenditure and uncoupled the behaviour of the young from that of the old, introducing unnecessary ruptures and ruining propriety. Ritual was incompatible with it. And yet in a large, anonymous city its power could not be denied, nor scolded out of existence. Outlying people moved



9 Utagawa Hiroshige, page from *Tenmei Rōjin Naishō, ('Famous Places in Edo'), in 'Mad Verse' (Kyōka edo meisho zue),* 1856, woodblock print.



10 Katsushika Hokusai, *Bridge of Japan* (Nihon-bashi), from the series *Thirty-six Views of Mt Fuji*, *c.* 1832, multi-coloured woodblock print.

into the city to find work, or members of daimyo retinues arrived, and all came into contact with fashion, perhaps for the first time, and could barely resist its compelling torque. An eighteenth-century critic was to write, 'when a country samurai, with his good old ways, comes up to Edo, in just two or three years his whole character will have altered, with his manners becoming superficial and trivial'.[4] That is, he will have abandoned established behaviour for modern trend. If the samurai fell victim, how much more the proletariat! To forsake rural boorishness for urban suavity was one thing, but embracing mode was a different matter. Our writer, Yuasa Genzō, goes on: 'Urban people's customs go from bad to worse; they are like so many floating flowers.'[5] Genzō means that behaviour is froth and prettiness deprived of meaning or fixity. Again, this kind of thing 'infects recently-arrived samurai whose devotion to propriety naturally wanes; while they might previously have had an affection for literature or military practice, they soon give these up in favour of artistic activities'.[6] These 'artistic activities' (*geiji*) are not defined but are clearly to be regarded as trivializing and corrupting ephemeral or showy skills, not genuine art, artisanship or real accomplishment. Genzō was himself a provincial samurai who had moved to Edo in the 1780s; he knew the score. The book in which he unburdened himself was entitled *Medicine for the States* (*Kokui-ron*). He jettisoned his more inflammatory provisional title, 'Thoughts on the Outbreak of Sickness in the States' (*Kokubyo hakki no daii*), which became instead the title of his preface. But it is evident that, to him, as to many others, the realm is ill.

Corrupt behaviour was likened to a malady that had entered the body. Had it only been that people were going about in the wrong sorts of clothes, doing their hair in improper ways and adorning their homes with durables inappropriate to their class, then matters could, perhaps, have been put right: the citizenry could have been remonstrated with and reason might have prevailed. This was of course attempted. Yet an illness is something that corrodes from within until a body collapses as an independent entity and loses its capacity to function: a will to mend avails nothing.

There was in northeast Asia a long-standing trope of considering the state and the body in parallel. A notion of a 'body politic', not unlike that of Europe, existed. The physician, under this strain of mystical thinking, was the king. In the particular Japanese situation, this meant the shogun. Tokugawa Ieyasu had been posthumously deified as a native (i.e. Shinto) god and, as with all the gods in that pantheon, he was assigned a Buddha to overarch his presence and give his Japanese executive powers a global edge. Shinto gods were emanations (*suijaku*) of Buddhas who were referred to as their 'root ground' (*honji*). The scholars pondered which was appropriate for the now divine Ieyasu and chose the Medicine Buddha, Yakushi. It was, after all, Ieyasu who had healed the Tenka after a century of war and closed

the wounds caused by riot, pitched battle and civil unrest. This was an elegant configuration. Wherever a shrine was erected to the god Ieyasu (technically known as The Gongen), one to the Medicine Buddha would be positioned alongside. Icons of the Medicine Buddha were made in honour of Ieyasu's spirit on anniversaries of his decease. This cult of the first shogun persisted into modern times and the site of his burial place at Nikkō (now a World Heritage Site), with its fused Buddhist temple and Shinto mausoleum, became one of the pivotal pilgrimage destinations. It availed one little, though, to pretend that Ieyasu's successors in shogunal office had been as worthy as him. There were to be good shoguns and bad, and in any case their councillors formulated policy. But never again was one to earn the mythic status of a medicine king.

Reforms of 'manners and customs' (*fūzoku*) were periodically undertaken. These took the form of a reinvigoration of lapsed and ignored sumptuary laws. Miscreancy, especially in male youth, was corrected. Loutish comportment or flash, wide-boy vulgarity (the terms for which were various – *kabukimono*, *otoko-date* etc.) was reined in. As one exasperated elder wrote in the 1780s, just before a swingeing series of 'reforms' (*kaikaku*) were instituted by the then shogunal chief minister, brand-new clothing was worn only half a dozen times before being discarded, 'though it might have cost forty or fifty pieces of gold'.[7]

Another critic of the period (actually not a critic since he was thoroughly enjoying himself during this time of libertinism) put it like this:

> The money squandered was regarded as the index of a person's standing. Fans were opened just half-way and held loosely in the hand; no one was without his imported European pocket watch, slipped in at the fold of his costume. In summer and winter it was crisp white socks. Truly all these fashions were hardly of much help towards 'military might in the service of peace' [*taiheibu*].[8]

But then in came 'reform' and there was a total about-face: 'A sombre coat good enough to ward off inclemencies became the order of the day . . . how stern people looked as they went up to attend at the castle!'[9] But sadly, only for a while.

Consumerism was everywhere. Fashion (its greatest engine) emerged from the pleasure districts. Parents had become used to their boys asking to be dressed like actors and their daughters begging to be bought the sort of hairpin sex workers stuck into their chignons. These two nodes – the red-light zone (be it the Yoshiwara, Shinmachi, Shimabara or wherever) and the theatre districts – were like two sides of a (bad) penny. Kabuki had come to be written (as it still is) with characters meaning song (*ka*), dance (*bu*) and refinement (*ki*), but originally the 'ki' had been written

11 Okumura Masanobu (attrib.), *Kabuki Theatre Interior*, c. 1748, multi-coloured woodblock print.

with the homophone 'prostitution'. The name comes, anyway, from the verb *kabuku*, 'to be warped'; those miscreant vulgarians that the shogunate felt compelled to control were called *kabuki-mono* ('bent' people).

As places of entertainment had to exist, the crux was how to keep them in their proper place. The authorities were aware of the necessity of allowing some form of liberating experience. But the theatre and red-light districts, collectively called the Floating World (*ukiyo*), were not supposed to impinge on the world of fixity and propriety. Floating lifestyles were supposed to offer less appearance of reality than fixed ones and certainly were not intended as lifestyle aspirations.

Theatre is inherently false. It shows what does not happen in the real world. Popular drama, furthermore, revels not only in what does not but in what *should* not occur. The urban hordes loved kabuki, with its tales of samurai getting the rough end of urban commoners' wit, of love affairs in defiance of parental wishes, of historic personages exhibiting the folly of fashion-conscious moderns. Prints of playhouse interiors (often made with the latest apparatuses of multi-colour printing and imported European perspective) show the enthusiasm of the theatre-going public (illus. 11). Young, old, male, female, samurai, townsperson, even cleric and layman, are all in there together. And there will infallibly be a few men and women sidling about arranging off-stage exploits with the better-looking actors for later that night. Kabuki (all actors are male) carried an indelible tinge of the commercial procurement of boys. Many paintings of actors, enjoyed today by connoisseurs around the world,

12 Yamazaki Joryû, *Kabuki Actor Holding Irises*, *c.* 1725, hanging scroll.

13 Kitagawa Utamaro, from the triptych *Complete Illustrations of Yoshiwara Parodies of Kabuki (Seirō kabuki yatsushi ezukushi)*, 1798, multi-coloured woodblock print.

depict youths whom the first owner would have enjoyed in physical proximity. It is for this reason that they often lack inscribed names: the man (or less frequently woman) knew well enough who the boy was, to the touch indeed as well as to the eye (illus. 12).

The official pleasure districts offered the same, only more so, with women in the place of boys. Whereas most theatres were located within a city's confines, the licensed quarters, as we have seen, were somewhat outside. It took over an hour to get to the Yoshiwara from central Edo. The journey was conceived as a means of distancing the traveller in terms of psychological state as well as of real space. Actual and notional distance provided a *cordon sanitaire*. In the quarters the men (women could not enter) paid for the female company that they might not otherwise find in their barrack-room lives. It was not just about sex (plenty of poetry and music went on too), but a libidinous cloud hung over the place – or should one say a libidinous sun shone on it? Pictures of the Yoshiwara always and only show it in springtime, by far the pleasantest season in the Japanese archipelago (where summer is furnace-like); spring is a period of bright but kindly radiance and (as we all know) of cherry blossoms (illus. 13). The further anxiety provoked by the quarters was that they were melting-pots for the classes. Samurai and townsmen could not be told apart. Moreover, policing of sumptuary laws was not carried out. Visitors dressed according to budget, not status, and in this set-up the samurai (on fixed and non-inflation-proof stipends) came off worse than their merchant inferiors. But, for all, it was supremely relaxing, enjoyable and

unusual to be able to enjoy discourse and joviality across class barriers. In the quarters only money mattered – although one of the things money had to buy was nonchalant elegance, for the crass spendthrift was not admired.

The Floating World could not be constrained. Boundaries leaked. One shogunal official moved his desk into the Yoshiwara and told any would-be solicitors of his bureaucratic services that they had better come and find him there! Conversely, during the time of the eleventh shogun, Ienari, a brothel exactly resembling those along the main street of the Yoshiwara was built in the Fukiage Gardens within Edo Castle. This allowed the shogun the thrill of an evening's fun in the quarter to which protocol forbade him real access. All thought (according to a scandalized retainer, who nevertheless had to express himself with due circumspection), 'what a thing for him to take august delight in; there was a general raising of eyebrows'.[10]

The Yoshiwara's commerce made sense on its own terms. True, the women swore love for money and made oaths that evaporated at dawn. True, the men paid for what they knew was falsity and in turn made promises of return visits, presents and even marriage or concubinage that were forgotten once they got back to the city and began to pursue more dynastically useful relationships. In a sense all knew the rules of the game. But when the token of the quarter began to circulate in the city proper, the denominations of civic living, of hierarchy and of language itself were undercut. The prime mover in the spread of Floating World norms were pictures. These were thoroughly complicit in the seeping-across of norms from the enclosed world into the open one. The scenery of the Yoshiwara was known, the faces of ludicrously expensive courtesans – or, for that matter, of actors in or out of their kabuki greenrooms – became familiar through pictures (illus. 14). Paintings had a limited circulation, but this was an age of printing. The 'Japanese woodblock print' is the pillow on which countless encomia have been rested by collectors and scholars alike. They are generally fine products indeed. But their politics are unsavoury. They would have been inexpensive (about the price of a cheap meal out), but colourful and attractive. They reached the sight of those who seldom saw, and never owned, paintings. They were hawked about the streets as well as sold in temporary booths at fairgrounds, beyond the registered premises of publishers (illus. 15). The shogunate hated such things.

Many 'pictures of the Floating World' (*ukiyo-e*, as the genre has come to be called) are among the most sublime examples of Japanese art, as the canon now defines it. Others are pornography for use by solitary people who had insufficient funds to obtain the things represented (illus. 16). The same artists and publishers produced both sorts of image.

14 Kitagawa Utamaro, *Yosoi of the Matsubata-ya*, from the series *Selections from Six Houses in the Yoshiwara (Seirō rokkasen)*, c. 1801–2, woodblock print.

15 Unidentified, *Selling Ukiyo-e Prints*, c. 1790, woodblock print.

16 Kitagawa Utamaro, *Lovers*, from the series *Utamakura*, 1788, multi-coloured woodblock print.

CONCLUSION

The Tenka, then, was a complex social entity. It has suffered from too many ill-informed critiques that would seek to turn it into a commercial and sexual free-for-all, or pornotopia, or again into the opposite – a draconian space of stillness and isolation. Neither of these extremes is true. But it is clear that commerce and sex formed part of the discourse of the shogunal regime. The authorities had built it into their polity and they had, therefore, likewise built it into their systems of control.

Sex and Consumerism: the Japanese State of the Arts

2

NICHOLAS BORNOFF

Among the art events featured during the year-long Japan 2001 Festival in Britain was an inspired exhibition focusing on 'Sex and Consumerism: Contemporary Art in Japan'. An intriguing title. In the United Kingdom, where awkwardness about sex remains endemic and the kind for sale is greeted with paroxysms of righteous indignation, some would construe it as an accusation. To see how very un-British it is, just substitute the word 'Japan' with 'Britain' and think about it. For the Japanese, however, the premise is apt. Behind an austere façade dictated by strict codes of decorum, they are perfectly comfortable with sex. And consumerism? Well, the notion that making money is not quite nice is something the British and Japanese once held in common. If the attitude still lingers faintly in the breeze in Britain (notably in the ebbing exaltation of art for art's sake), in Japan it vanished well over a century ago with the ousting of the ruling samurai, who considered commerce beneath contempt. Having benefited from their all-out drive for reconstruction after the total devastation of the Pacific War, the Japanese expanded and globalized their commercial and technological potential; in Japan, consumerism rules. So, given the prevailing attitudes to sex and consumerism, why should the Japanese be fazed by a combination of the two? Either way, can sex and consumerism possibly have an impact on *contemporary art* in Japan?

Yes they can; they do. In many instances, however, the 'Sex and Consumerism' picture comprises another component: dissent. The sex serves a purpose beyond being celebrated for its own sake: it almost invariably seeks shock value. Used derisively and corrosively above all by the post-war baby boomer generation, it gave the finger to stuffy traditional institutions, including to the Japanese art world of the more official kind – which could make Britain's Royal Academy of Arts seem positively frolicsome. For better and worse, socio-political commitment has currently gone out of fashion and artistic academism is dying; but the reasons underlying the deployment

of sexual imagery in the art of emerging generations remain much the same. Whichever way they go, these art manifestations belong to a context different from their Western equivalents. To begin with, there are substantial differences between the way the arts are perceived and practised in Japan and in the West.

FINE ART VERSUS COMMERCIAL ART

The realm of fine art in Japan was and, although to a rapidly diminishing extent, still is dominated by antiquated and stodgy art academies. They produced the kind of artists who like to paint impressionist landscapes with cherry blossoms and Mount Fuji and who favour nudes in the nineteenth-century European saloon-bar style. Their kind of art is called *yōga* ('Western pictures'), a term coined during the 1870s to form a contradistinction to the traditional *nihonga* ('Japanese pictures'). Still overwhelmingly (and once exclusively) male, the exponents are grouped in hierarchical cliques; they have their annual exhibitions, magazines and client networks. The same applies to *nihonga* to an even greater degree, for it is even more hidebound. Today, Japanese arts universities tend to be more broad-minded, and neither extreme any longer exerts much influence on contemporary art. Nonetheless, for a figurative painter of the more conventional kind in either camp, the right schooling and membership of the right academy are a *sine qua non* for success.

As a countermeasure to protect *nihonga* from possible annihilation by Western art, a government-funded academy was created to protect and perpetuate it in 1889.[1] The burgeoning art schools in the Western tradition had to make do with funding from the private sector – as they overwhelmingly still do today. Excesses of orthodoxy in both camps over the years prompted a debilitating degree of fossilization; having been pupils in either (and sometimes both), Japanese artists wishing to branch out and explore new horizons were on their own.

Patronage by private individuals is an unlikely option today, so Japanese artists with no independent means look to the commercial sector for corporate sponsorship. Corporations have foundations offering awards and funding; department stores contain exhibition spaces. Whatever their persuasion, artists can expect no government subsidies. There is no Prix de Rome; there is no unemployment benefit. With the debatable exception of contributions to various aspects of traditional culture and the more prestigious universities, the Japanese government spends nothing on art or artists at all. However indifferent to culture the government actually may be, this state of affairs did not suddenly emerge from a philistine policy of recent origin but is rooted in history.

Until relatively recently, art and craftsmanship were as indistinguishable in

Japan as they were in mediaeval Europe, where painters were members of craftsmen's guilds. Japanese artists similarly took on pupils and trained them, the pupils often inheriting their mentor's name. European artists began breaking away from craftsmen's guilds during the Renaissance, but in Japan they had to wait until after the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Meanwhile in Europe, almost a century worth of French Romantic ideals had found the artist even further elevated above the craftsman. Esteemed for original creations born of the spirit and the intellect, the artist in Europe was elevated to lofty heights; by comparison the craftsman was a mere bricklayer. Hence the Western schism between 'fine' and 'commercial' art. Relegated to the second-rate realm of craft, commercial art was either dismissed as decoration or condescended to as illustration. At best it was for the walls of the petits bourgeois, for publishing and for the new and growing field of advertising. In Japan such lines of distinction are seldom drawn; few indeed are the artists who ascend into ivory towers.

In the West, successful artists become arbiters of taste; their pronouncements can have untold influence on the currents of culture. In installation and conceptual art, without pronouncements, in many cases the works would mean nothing. The concept of the 'fine' artist as sage and cultural icon has had some appeal in Japan and has, to some extent, been taken on board, but a successful commercial artist will enjoy just as much (and often a great deal more) kudos. As consumerism took off commensurate with Japan's economic success from the 1960s on, art leaned more heavily towards the commercial camp. By the end of the 1970s there was little doubt that much of Japan's greatest talent lay in the commercial sector; graphic designers such as Yokō Tadanori and Tanaka Ikko were virtually household names. The multi-talented and inventive Ishioka Eiko – who battled her way into becoming the first female member of the exclusive, male-dominated Tokyo Art Directors' Club – helped launch the careers of many new artists and was instrumental in changing the course of creative advertising all over the world.

And as there is no stigma attached to commercial art in Japan, so Japanese artists increasingly reflect the world of commerce in their works. They have recently used cheap automatic cameras to make ephemeral, disposable-looking images, made sculptures and paintings inspired by animated cartoons or comic books and have devised performances echoing youth idols and TV shows. From the 1990s many Japanese artists began producing work visibly and deliberately looking to the commercial – rather than the intellectual – environment for inspiration.

SEX AND DISSENT

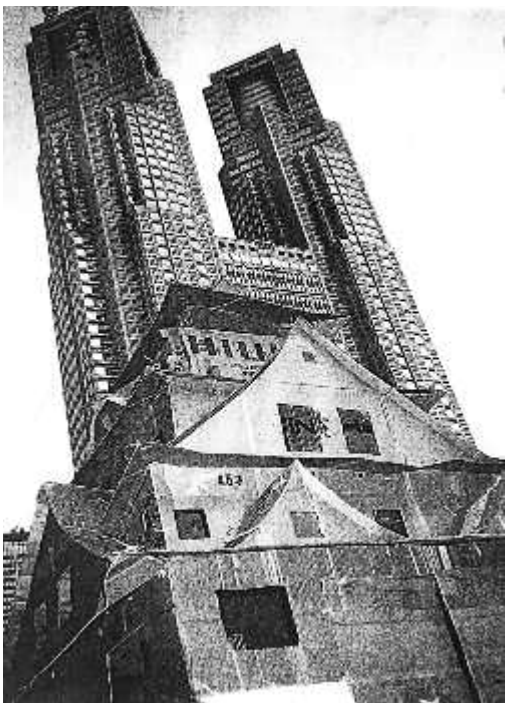
Sex and consumerism characterize a strong current in contemporary Japanese art,

17 Makoto Aida, *Dog (Snow),* 1998, panel, Japanese paper, Japanese mineral pigment, acrylic.

18 Makoto Aida, *Mutant Hanako*, 1997, black and white photocopy on coarse paper, colour photocopy.

but rarely without dissent. Sex and dissent go hand in hand. The currently popular artist Makoto Aida (*b.* 1965), who often opts for a staid and traditional Japanese style to paint deliberately confrontational subjects, would be a paradigm. His *Dog* series, for instance, depicts a nubile nude crawling happily along with a leash around her neck (illus. 17). What makes the picture stand out is not just that she is pretty and overtly sexy, nor even that she looks a tad under the age of consent – which is not unusual in Japan. What really hits home is that she happens to be an amputee and advances daintily forth on the bandaged stumps at her knees and wrists. Perfectly outrageous; perfectly in tune with the times. This stuff is confrontational and sexy, and it sells.

Since his works variously tend to reflect different current cultural trends, Aida not unpredictably also created a manga comic book. Called *Mutant Hanako*, it was sketched in pencil to give it a rough, unfinished look – perhaps a ploy to emphasize it as 'art' and distance it from the mainstream of the genre (illus. 18). Set during the Second World War it features Hanako, a girl pulverized in the Hiroshima A-bombing, resurrected and mutated into a naked super-heroine dedicated to preventing the atomic bombing of Nagasaki. Violent, sadistic, sexy and politically naïve, the comic book has everything needed to ensure it a brilliant future as a manga cult classic. As unconventional and perverse as it may seem, Aida's imagery



19 Makoto Aida, *The Shinjuko Castle*, 1995, cardboard, cord, craft tape, wood.

is still spawned by the anime/manga and video-induced sexual fantasies shared by untold legions of young men in Japan.

Aida's purpose is nonetheless slanted more towards provocation than titillation. His output doesn't always batten solely onto sex fantasies. Creating an installation that reflects Japan's currently bleaker economic outlook, he recently made a replica of a samurai castle out of cardboard boxes: a statement for the benefit of the growing legions of 'box men' – the derelicts haunting the areas around Tokyo's terminal stations and sleeping in cardboard boxes (illus. 19). A former political activist, Aida is similarly known for a traditional *byobu* screen painting (the kind that rose to prominence with the Kano School in the sixteenth century), in his case typically with subject matter departing radically from the norm: a burning New York City under attack from Second World War Japanese Zero planes (see illus. 116).

Thus Aida, despite his leftist background, would appear to glory in Japanese warplanes victoriously trouncing New York. Apparently irrational, this contradiction is a symptom of a curious political ambivalence typical in Japan, where the far left and the far right are forced into unhappy agreement over the one issue they share: their rabid anti-Americanism. The right because they see Japan as having been unjustly crushed and humiliated by the US during the Pacific War; the left because they share the hatred that Communists internationally harboured for

America during the Cold War. The extremes meet; both sides are tainted with no small degree of xenophobia. Aida also has his *Mutant Hanako* raped on a bomb site by brutish, animalistic GIs – very much as in the opening sequences of several *Yakuza* gangster movies popular in Japan during the late 1960s. It doesn't matter anyway that the ostensible socio-political messages underlying his and comparable works are often incoherent, puerile, questionable or even absent. Meaning is not always a prerequisite for dissent in Japan. That the images shock is dissent in itself.

Although tastes have been undergoing radical change in recent years, Western culture still tends to expect its artists to maintain a certain stylistic consistency, so that Aida may seem too unfocused and eclectic to be important. At home, however, he is almost an archetype of Japanese contemporary art. Like most of his peers, his strength, as it must, lies in the ability to match talent with versatility. In a country in which commercial art is, in a sense, the only art there is, he is merely swimming in the stream. Like the overwhelming majority of artists in Japan, Aida has to weather the tides of fast-changing fashions. Otherwise, despite formidable talent at the very least as a draughtsman, he would perish like the flavour of the month.

Look what happened to Numata Genqui, aka 'The Bonsai Kid'. Numata Genqui? A minor but significant figure of the Tokyo art avant-garde during the 1980s, Genqui assembled objects, made installations and painted. Above all he was famous for his ironical stage performances as a human bonsai tree – with a samurai top-knot and an outsize flowerpot around his midriff. Invited to New York, he was much acclaimed by the late Andy Warhol – something countless Japanese conceptual artists dreamed about. But by now Genqui is widely – and quite archetypically – forgotten. His public was overwhelmingly young; his fame amounted to the same flash in the pan as a band with a single hit record. While other young Japanese artists earn accolades at the time of writing and have exhibitions overseas, there is a strong possibility that they will be travelling along the same road up and down. As eclectic, versatile and stylistically opportunistic as the majority of Japanese avant-garde exponents today, Genqui similarly experimented with wholly different media and styles. A highly talented, creative polymath, he is better known now as a writer and photographer; his role as performance artist, trouble-maker and darling of Tokyo's small, if artistically significant, avant-garde art community spanned just about the decade.

Not unlike Makoto Aida, he was a master of everything, but of nothing in particular; he liked to make trouble. Provided you are not breaking the law, you can shock and scandalize in Japan, but doing anything likely to upset the status quo or challenge sacrosanct national institutions will result in more trouble than you bargained for.

In the autumn of 1988, Hirohito, the Showa emperor, was in terminal decline. There was a bizarre, pre-funereal media circus lasting months. The sombre mood

was concocted with early closures in urban entertainment districts and dire daily progress reports on TV and radio. Knowing that the emperor's days were numbered, the media discreetly referred to the final one as 'X-Day'. Like many other Japanese, the disenchanted Genqui regarded the emperor as inextricably linked to the Pacific War and to the perpetuation of an archaic socio-political system. His latest performance work, which was backed by a wholly unwitting and venerable camera company responsible for imperial photo-portraiture, was entitled X-Day. It had a cast of two: Genqui and Momoko, a painter and performance artist who was known rather better for her antics on the hard-core striptease circuit.

Wearing a black kimono during the event, Momoko danced demurely around a coffin surrounded by candles in the centre of the hall. In one hand she held a white fan – the kind with a red sun in the centre, though this time it was pitch black. Pushed from the inside, the coffin lid clattered to the floor. Out of it emerged Genqui as the Art Angel: an absurd character in nothing but a loincloth, a golden crown and a pair of feathery white wings affixed to his back. Naturally, the sponsors were unaware that this character was a Genqui stock-in-trade designed to ridicule the ossified official Japanese art world.

The significance of the Art Angel and his suggestive cavorting with Momoko were lost on the po-faced officials of the camera company, especially once she had shed her kimono and was stark naked. When the police arrived, she was dragged out indignantly kicking and screaming, and the Art Angel made a surreptitious escape through the window – the entire event being scrupulously recorded by Genqui's video crew. Fortunately, the sponsors were both sufficiently powerful and shy of scandal to have any charges the police might have liked to levy against Genqui and Momoko dropped. Unreported, the affair was swept under the carpet. Troubled by verbal and physical threats from rightist thugs lurking outside his house for weeks, however, Genqui stepped pretty much definitively out of the limelight.

The number of plastic arts exponents crossing over onto the performance stage is very substantial in Japan. The trend became apparent almost immediately after the Pacific War ended, notably with the 'happenings' and action-painting events staged by the famous Gutai group during the 1950s. In fact it had already made itself felt in the 1920s, when the Japanese took on board such movements as Expressionism and Dada. By the 1960s, the *angura* (underground theatre) was tightly interwoven with performance art. Of this melding of art forms, the late, great Terayama Shuji (1935–1983) – poet, artist, film-maker and, above all, theatre director – was the paradigm. Among those involved with him were the world-famous graphic designer Yokō Tadanori (who often produced the sets) and Tatsumi Hijikata (1930–1986), the revered father of *butoh* (dance of utter darkness), which is still on the cutting edge of both the Japanese and international avant-garde. Surrealistic,

20 Hiroshi Masuyama, *The Girl Next Door*, 1999, *Bon-Sai*, vol. 2, acrylic on canvas.

confrontational and much imitated, Terayama's theatre incorporated rich and imaginative visual qualities steeped in Japanese retro to reflect sex, violence and oedipal Freudian symbolism. His frequent and provocative use of nudity was so much of the essence that he exploited it quite nonchalantly, and it frequently got him into trouble with the law. 'All life', he was fond of saying as a riposte to his more moralistic detractors, 'is scandalous'.

Being scandalous was and remains a *sine qua non* for countless exponents of the Japanese avant-garde; performance artists habitually incorporated sexual elements purely for their shock value, though there is always something more. However modernistic the approach, in many cases the works contain elements drawing upon traditional culture and Japanese historicity with a peculiar admixture of derision and respect. Traditional Japan was much in evidence in Terayama's rich Taisho-period (1912–26) imagery. The kind of dance Momoko performed, fan in hand, in *X-Day*

21 Hiroshi Masuyama, *Bon-Sai*, 1998.

reflected the gyrations of a Shinto shrine maiden. As in Terayama's plays and depictions of sex in Japanese art in general, there is an undercurrent of Shinto phallicism, a faint echo of the ritual orgies of the fertility festival – in some cases abandoned or banned in rural areas as little as 50 years ago.

Like Genqui, the artist Hiroshi Masuyama (*b.* 1944), uses the bonsai tree as a symbol of Japanese culture: it is omnipresent in his paintings of meretricious schoolgirls (illus. 20). As such the bonsai is an icon for an older Japan which, always perceived as pure and unsullied by nefarious modern (i.e. Western) influences, now finds itself stunted and dwarfed by rampant materialism. Large in scale and deliberately rough and unfinished-looking, Masuyama's paintings are based on photographs – the kind illustrating the *pinkku bira* (pink leaflets), which call-girl rings post in city phone booths (illus. 21). Seeing such work in a gallery has obvious shock value. In Japan, as elsewhere, we are all conditioned to expect that whatever is exhibited therein is the fruit of creativity: what the artist could describe as 'all my own work'. Masuyama has merely blown up and crudely sketched out advertisements for prostitutes familiar to every city-dweller in Japan (and latterly, since the importing and exporting of ideas occurs also in the underworld, in Britain too). As such, his

22 Hiroshi Masuyama, *High-school Girls*.

works would be far indeed from what is conventionally construed as 'art'.

Unlike other Japanese artists using sexual images or references to the sex industry, Masuyama's intentions are neither provocative nor titillating. Far from the stuff of rebellion and nihilism, his schoolgirls are intended to shock the viewer into realizing just how far materialism has eroded the fabric of society (illus. 22). Masuyama disapproves. The schoolgirl icon, one that even shop-worn harlots aspire to emulate, has by now been a staple in Japanese sexual iconography for 50 years. Many Japanese men are galvanized by what they call Roricon – short for 'Lolita Complex'. Recently there has been a rash of teenage prostitution in Japan, for which no one entertains any doubt about the materialistic motivation – least of all the acquisitive Lolitas themselves. Although widely reported and occurring on an

unprecedented scale, the phenomenon is not especially new; scandals involving unrepentant teenage prostitutes have been surfacing in the Japanese press for 30 years. This is the ultimate consumer society, where the lust for 'musts' (mobile phones, designer clothing, gadgetry both audiovisual and digital) and luxury lifestyles has gone over the top.

That dissent and sex make fine bed-fellows in Japanese contemporary art there can be no doubt, and this has been true for quite some time. During the Perpetual Fluxus Festival in 1965, the seminal conceptual artist Shigeko Kubota, one of the many Japanese members of the international Fluxus group, shocked a New York audience with her Vagina Painting, which found her squatting over sheets of paper and making paintings with a paintbrush wedged in her privates. It is interesting to note that this rather recherché slant on calligraphy is not infrequently performed in Japanese striptease theatres. It was also revived by BuBu, who used to be a member of the prominent and provocative Dumb Type troupe led by the late, lamented performance artist and drag queen Teiji Furuhashi.[2]

One should be aware of the fact that women's attitudes towards sex and prostitution are very different in Japan than in the West. Unlike the overwhelming majority of their counterparts in countries where Anglo-Saxon culture is dominant, Japanese feminists do not necessarily see prostitution as evil or degrading in itself. Rather, what is really degrading is the way men and society generally use and view prostitutes in Japan. In a country in which prostitution has a long and, until fairly recently, not especially undignified history, prostitutes are often nonetheless despised by polite society (including by the men who avail themselves of their services). Moreover, the very real problem of sexual slavery, notably involving a lucrative *Yakuza* trade in women from overseas, is often ignored.

As for the combination of sex and dissent in art: there is nothing 'contemporary' about this as a trend, which has existed as an undercurrent in Japanese culture for centuries. Perhaps the only aspect that is really new is that so many of the artists using this formula are female. The blatant physicality of their works propounds liberation from the strictures long imposed on women in Japanese society. To Japanese women, the fight for liberation and equality doesn't involve male emulation: penis envy isn't on the agenda. Rather, many young ones tend to dress up to the nines in teeny-tiny little skirts showing a whole lot of leg; girls just wanna have fun. The aggressive sexuality and self-assertion of pop stars like Madonna have had tremendous appeal for young women in Japan. Though it often takes the back seat to narcissism, sex is part of the package for their liberation. The trashing of the Confucianist ideal of woman as demure and submissive is one of the essentials of Japanese feminism.

ART AND SEX IN JAPAN: PAST AND PRESENT

Public nudity is illegal and punishable by a fine in Japan but, generally seen as a peccadillo, it seldom is. After all, notorious for their gynaecological explicitness, Japanese striptease theatres only get busted when they go too far over the top – typically with live sex performed on-stage. Performance artists have to be more careful: nudity is a vehicle for political dissent. Unlike the avant-garde theatre, strip parlours are not deliberately setting out to challenge or ridicule authority – premises officialdom meets with even grimmer disapproval. In his X-Day performance, for example, Genqui made fun of the emperor – something a lot of older and conservative Japanese find intolerable. To offend people like that goes straight against the grain of Confucianism.

Adopted from China well over a millennium ago and becoming more cogent at intervals during the Edo period (1603–1868), Confucianism is patriarchal and survives in synergy with a highly conservative and intensely hierarchical male-dominated society. Insisting upon feminine subservience and modesty, it decrees respect for elder males and their authority, and hence abidance by rules imposed by time-honoured institutions. Favouring the concealment of feelings, it also insists upon a strict sense of propriety and decorum. If it puts face and appearances first, it does not, however, dictate much by way of morality in Japan; within reason, anything goes at the right time and place. The stamp of Confucianism is often seen on the faces in the street. In more formal contexts Japanese men are required to look stern and stoic, women blank and demure; if the occasion requires, everyone excels at looking the perfect part. Notwithstanding, the majority of Japanese are quite unfazed by sexual matters, which they regard as matter-of-factly as they do eating or sleeping. In Japan, as in most places, on the other hand, authoritarian interference in sexual matters is a primary instrument of social control.

Though the retentive veneer imposed by authorities thickened during the nineteenth century with the adoption of Victorian modesty, the Japanese attitude to sex was sinless; it was never tainted by Christian guilt. In the eyes of the more austere samurai rulers and, especially, their scholarly Confucian advisers, dissipation and licentiousness were deplored not as tickets to damnation but as the stuff of self-indulgence and weakness. Then again so were pleasures of all kinds, including taverns and theatres. Believing that it was better to place all their rotten eggs in one basket, the samurai authorities began grouping theatres, taverns and brothels together in special licensed quarters, starting with the super-eminent Yoshiwara in Edo (now Tokyo) in the seventeenth century. Although prostitution was outlawed (well, on paper . . .) in Japan some 300 years later, it is interesting that the rotten eggs should still be lumped together: bars, pachinko parlours, game centres, discos and sexual

entertainments all come under the 'Law for the Regulation of Businesses Affecting Public Morals' drafted in 1947.

With its grand brothels and kabuki theatres, its tea houses and entertainments of all persuasions, the Yoshiwara shone, along with its equivalents in Kyoto and Osaka. Austere and dictatorial, the shogunate forbade samurai from going there, but they went anyway – usually in disguise. Together these islands of tolerance formed the Floating World (*ukiyo*): the haunt of the demi-monde, dancers, dandies and fun-seekers of all persuasions, as well as artists, writers, poets, painters, musicians and kabuki actors. Although grim realities of female slavery lurked behind the glittering façades of what was essentially a colossal red-light district, the Floating World was about much more than brothels. Both the focus and the nucleus of art, literature and the theatre, it was in fact a crucible for an emerging popular culture.

By the late seventeenth century, the samurai were already in decline. Meanwhile, ostensibly placed beneath farmers and artisans in the samurai-dominated social hierarchy, many of the merchants (for example the Mitsui, founders of today's Mitsui Bank) were on the rise, some growing fabulously wealthy. With generous patronage coming both from the moneyed aristocracy and ostentatious merchant princes, the arts flourished as never before. Edo was the largest and most populous city on earth; it had all the conditions necessary to foster a thriving popular culture. Nearly half of the urban population of Japan was literate by the mid-seventeenth century; books and illustrations were being mass-produced. By the dawn of the eighteenth century, book illustration became a sideline for artists of the traditional painting schools. Among the most popular of these publications were those called *warai bon* (laughing books) and *share-bon* (stylish books), and the content of the most popular of these was satirical and/or erotic – and not infrequently blatantly pornographic. The medium being used was the woodblock print and it soon proved so popular that the prints were being made on their own. For the first time ordinary townsmen could afford art to take home. Covering subject matter of all kinds in addition to the carnal, the pictures were collectively named *ukiyo-e* – pictures of the Floating World – after the source of inspiration for the entire genre. As the noted *ukiyo-e* scholar Howard Hibbett wrote:

> Uninhibited sexuality, in ukiyo art as well as in the Yoshiwara . . . was one of the few freedoms claimed by townsmen under their severely repressive system. In a thriving commercial society which made salons of its exclusive brothels and great ladies of its high-priced prostitutes, the artist was naturally interested in exploring the preoccupations of the pleasure quarter. And he was interested in making money.[3]

The system isn't quite so repressive and prostitutes rarely ascend such lofty heights, but, 200 years later, this could apply equally well to artists such as the photographer Araki Nobuyoshi (discussed below).

Although the government's Confucian reforms sporadically prompted clamp-downs during the Edo period, the artist remained relatively free to depict sex. Sex books were ubiquitous; they were given to brides to inform and/or inspire them. They were left around in parlours and waiting rooms of all persuasions for the amusement of customers and guests. Though almost none did so exclusively, starting with the early pioneers such as Moronobu and Sukenobu, nearly all *ukiyo-e* artists produced some pornography. Hokusai (1760–1849), for one, was famous for painting just about everything. His subject matter was naturalistic or historical, mythological, ghostly and – since such themes constituted a subject just like anything else – pornographic.

Utamaro (1750–1806) was the past master at painting all aspects of life in the Yoshiwara brothels: from beautiful portraits of courtesans and geisha, through genre scenes, to *shunga* featuring detailed copulations on the tatami floor. All that was fine. On the other hand, when he decorously depicted the sixteenth-century shogun Hideyoshi in the company of his five concubines as a book illustration, it was considered a slight on the samurai caste, earning him a spell in prison in 1804. This not only marked the end of his career; the humiliation of being manacled for two months was said to have devastated him. He died two years later.

The samurai government launched Confucian reforms at intervals throughout the Edo period. Spawning ludicrous sumptuary laws to curb ostentatiousness, they decreed what those beneath the samurai caste could own, wear and use to decorate their houses. The object was to bring those unruly merchants and townsmen to heel; an already very repressive military dictatorship got that much worse. The government's motive was naturally tied to imposing sumptuary taxes and fines or confiscation for disobedience. Of course the laws slackened and tightened commensurate to how much attention the public paid them. Nonetheless, the picture darkened by degrees. By the mid-1820s the pleasures of the Floating World had became pretty much the only ones there were and, now that they had almost consciously become an antidote to despair, their pursuit had become something rather desperate. The trend was reflected in the arts.

Having by now lost their novelty value, *ukiyo-e* were beginning to deteriorate and the genre entered its decadent stage. Sex became a subject even more favoured than before. A note of satire had crept in – although taking extreme care to ensure that the targets were only famous courtesans and kabuki actors, and not samurai. The style had become almost expressionistic in its exaggeration: couples with outsize interconnected genitalia grappled on the floor, their bodies awkwardly twisted

in the sinuous folds of their clothing and their eyes rolled back as though in extreme pain. It would only be a few more years before *shunga* would anyway be shut up in the closet.

'Japan', declared a visiting US senator in the 1870s, was 'a country of nudity, lewdity and crudity'.[4] This must have stung the Japanese, who had been going all out to adopt (or at least appear to adopt) Victorian morality for a good five years before the Meiji Restoration of 1868, when the emperor was restored as head of state after the overthrow of the shogunate. Now devoid of their cultural attributes for about 50 years, the pleasure quarters were no longer even called the *ukiyo*. They had become mere red-light districts. Droves of Westerners were flocking over to improve the nation's trade and technology. To show them just how modern they were, the Japanese began cleaning up those little indelicacies, or at least keeping them off the streets. Women no longer dropped their kimono tops to sit fanning themselves, bare-breasted, in the kabuki theatres in summer, the hot spring bath-houses were sexually segregated and *shunga* prints had virtually disappeared: for the first time, their sale and distribution had become illegal and the trade went under the counter.

In any case, now that many artists were travelling abroad to study, Japanese art was in the process of changing forever. Spearheaded mainly by the influential Seiki Kuroda (1866–1924), who studied in Paris, Western art was common currency in Japan by the end of the nineteenth century. Now that nudity, lewdity and crudity had been forced behind closed doors, the unruly townsmen had to find some way of getting around the bans placed upon them by the authorities. They still had brothels, of course, but could no longer be quite so open about collecting naughty pictures.

Following the demise of the samurai, the caste system they had imposed had been abolished. However, since the ruling Meiji politicians were of samurai descent and the majority of the people were not, the rift between rulers and ruled remained. Today, although a great many politicians are of much more humble descent, the Edo townsman's innate mistrust of authority remains among the populace. If the pursuit of pleasure has been thwarted, there will always be some evidence of popular defiance. Artists fighting censorship and denizens of the demi-monde are one in that they play the same game of brinkmanship with the law.

Although it was underground, there was still plenty of pornography around on the eve of the twentieth century. It was characterized by the Western realism that had replaced traditional stylization and was complemented by photography. Elsewhere, innuendo and symbolism came to replace the explicitness of *shunga*; the compromise laid the foundations for kitsch. The Meiji era discovered a profusion of novelties with little hidden things. The beautifully sculpted *netsuke* – a kind of small wooden or ivory toggle used for affixing things such as purses to the kimono sash –

had often had erotic themes throughout the Edo period, as had *inro* – the little lacquered medicine cases dangling from them. Even though men took to wearing three-piece suits during the nineteenth century and the *netsuke* and *inro* were going out with the male kimono, there were still a sufficient number of collectors (including many foreigners) to make their manufacture worthwhile for craftsmen during the Meiji period.

During the 1910s, Japanese porno-kitsch was at its zenith. There were teacups that showed a hitherto invisible nude girl appear with the addition of hot tea, or saké cups with a copulating couple in the bottom. A popular item was a seated statuette of a demure geisha in a kimono which, upon being turned upside down, revealed very graphically that she was in the process of playing with herself. The artist and satirist Gaikotsu ('Skeleton') Miyatake filled his famous *Kokkei Shinbun* (comic newspaper) with a wealth of sexual innuendo very similar to the British seaside postcard, though the hints were more carnal. There were phallo-vulvar symbols and all kinds and hints of sexual pastimes and phenomena – the most daring probably being the maid with the Japanese flag wrapped around her waist and carrying a sign saying 'Today we are closed for a holiday'. The hint at a monthly indisposition was suggested by having the red sun placed directly over her genital area. It can hardly have endeared Miyatake to the authorities; it pointed clearly to a certain dissent in attitude, if not in fact. Had he done it a decade later, by which time emperor worship had entered into distinctly unholy matrimony with militarism and the police were throwing dissenting artists in jail, he would certainly have suffered a similar fate to Utamaro at the beginning of the preceding century.

During the early twentieth century, sexual innuendo and symbolism clearly belonged more to the realm of humour and kitsch than to serious art. Today much the same applies; it occurs in *manga* comic books and in stand-up comedy. Then again, taken quite seriously, the work of Takahiro Fujiwara (*b.* 1969) tends to reflect how Japan has entered a more frivolous age. Fujiwara makes bizarre objects looking like outsize sex toys. He claims he got his conceptual inspiration from the hugely popular 'All-Night Nippon' show of comedian 'Beat' Takeshi (better known in the West as film director Takeshi Kitano), where oblique sexual innuendo was very much the order of the day. In an interview, Fujiwara explained: 'Using sexual subjects, he [Takeshi] made people laugh by not expressing them directly, and I thought that was amazing.'[5]

My, how the Japanese love hidden innuendo! Fujiwara's work reflects it. A transparent pink plastic object looking like a round, featureless doll, for example, presents built-in orifices at the head and front. It thus manages to suggest a 'Dutch Wife', without actually looking like one. Large objects made of brown rubber with wheels at the base and a dog's head at the tip were recognizably dildos; sold in sex

23 Takahiro Fujiwara, *For Pleasure! Dogs!*, 1995, fibreglass, iron, rubber.

shops, the real thing is frequently shaped to represent the goddess Benten (illus. 23). Fujiwara also made a rotund figure representing a naked female lying on her back with legs folded against her breast: an object (incidentally reminiscent of Allen Jones's *Coffee Table* in the 1960s) which he placed experimentally in a children's playground as a new kind of hobby horse and which no one found particularly obscene. Fujiwara acknowledges that this is something that one could only do in Japan. Nonetheless, he likes to play safe. 'Sex is something everyone is interested in', Fujiwara said in an interview, 'but using real experiences is too physical, so by using something like a sexual toy which does not refer to one's life and body but which is cute, one can get away with dealing with a taboo . . .'[6] But clearly the taboo lies much less in the toys or sex *per se* and far more in the ban on their representation decreed by the authorities.

ART AND CENSORSHIP

Pornography and risqué *objets d'art* continued to circulate underground during the 1920s and '30s, but serious Japanese artists were flirting more importantly with Fauvism, Expressionism, Surrealism and Dada. As the gathering political darkness

of nationalism deepened into militarism, however, they had to be increasingly careful of putting across subversive messages. By this time the risqué was almost equally dangerous, unless heavily cloaked in artistic alibis. It is curious to note that until only a few years prior to this, the Japanese had anyway long been perplexed by the Western nude. It was only when Western art took hold in Japan from the late nineteenth century that they had any regard for it at all. In *shunga*, the protagonists had been half-clothed; indeed the beauty of the clothing was one of the sought-after characteristics in *ukiyo-e*, those with the finest and most elaborately patterned clothing being known as 'brocade prints'. So used to seeing nudity that it was generally neither titillating nor aesthetically inspiring, nineteenth-century Japanese artists produced no girlie paintings dressed up in classical alibis like those by European contemporaries such as Ingres or Frederic, Lord Leighton. They liked clothes as embellishment but, when it came to erotica, they simply homed straight in on the sex.

The nude – that peculiarly Western celebration of the human body as a thing of beauty – had even crossed over into the traditionalist *nihonga* (Japanese picture) camp by the 1920s. Having adopted Western artistic principles, modern woodblock-print artists such as the inimitable (but much imitated) Goyo Hashiguchi (1880–1921) were turning to the nude just as frequently as their *yōga* counterparts.

Under all circumstances, the nude during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had to be as decorous as the erstwhile counterpart in the West. If painter Tsuguharu Fujita (1886–1968) managed to get away with some pretty explicit drawings, it was because he lived in Paris; the rules about the depiction of genitalia in Japan were strict. The Japanese laws regarding sexual imagery and obscenity have been gradually relaxing since the end of the Second World War (beginning with a timid, hitherto forbidden on-screen kiss behind an umbrella in 1946) but still have some way to go. Far behind the permissive outlook of the majority of Japanese, during the twenty-first century they are, if possible, even more ridiculous than the British equivalent. Typically in Japan, logic takes the back seat to authority; if the master says the crow flying overhead is white, goes an old Japanese saying, then it is white.

Japanese regulations permit the depictions of pubic hair in paint, pencil or engraving, but not in film or photography. Hence the proliferation of nudes popularly produced and consumed among exponents and admirers of antiquated Japanese Western-style art academies. Under no circumstances may you, in any medium, explicitly depict genitalia or – heaven forbid – their interconnection. This explains the strange, phallic-shaped blank-outs in *ero manga* (erotic comic books) and animated cartoons. These deploy an imaginative array of symbols; typically one discovers gentlemen playing with an inspired array of molluscs which females

apparently keep between their legs – the encounter culminating with the explosive entry of an express train into a tunnel, or perhaps a pestle pounding home into a mortar full of glutinous rice. When dissent was as fashionable in Japan as anywhere during the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was an explosion of sex as provocation. It was apparent in *manga* comic books, in the sudden deluge of underground-style magazines combining sex and art, and in the *angura* (underground) theatre. Much of the *angura* battened onto hysterical happenings, in many cases with a hefty emphasis on sex.

The craze for sex as dissent was very much in evidence in the work of radical film directors.[7] As Japan's cinema audience dwindled drastically in the wake of the TV onslaught, the venerable Nikkatsu film company (founded 1912) took to making soft-core roman poruno (porno romance) films to survive. A lot of fine directors, as well as actors, cut their teeth with roman poruno and similar *pinkku eiga* (pink films) produced by other companies. The resulting 40 – minute features were shown on triple bills daily in thousands of seedy, specialized movie theatres around the country. In all cases, extreme caution was exercised to ensure that there were no visible genitalia and no pubic hair. On the other hand, films and, especially, comic books could freely depict women being humiliated and abused, raped, tortured and murdered – and the authorities, ever mindful to protect public morals from the sight of pubic hair, never minded a bit.

The furore surrounding Nagisa Oshima's film *Ai no Korida* (In the Realm of the Senses, 1976), acclaimed by many critics overseas as the world's first hard-core masterpiece, became nothing less than a showcase for the battle between art and censorship.[8] Shot in Kyoto, but developed and edited in Paris, it was released in Japan with all the naughty bits blanked out. This is a time-honoured malpractice still applied to the most mundane movies in Japan, and all the more cogently to imported ones. Ironically, it wasn't the film that found Oshima hauled before the courts, for it had been acceptably mutilated: it was a glossy book about the film, which in fact showed nothing illegal at all. It was as though Oshima had laid a trap for the authorities and they had fallen right in. Oshima argued it thus:

> Article 175 of the Penal Code is their [the government's] only means of showing their power to repress the people's self-expression . . . Those accused under Article 175 are not in fact being tried for the crime of 'obscenity' but as opponents of authority.[9]

Indeed. At least the authorities had been smart enough to suspect that if Oshima, notorious as a left-wing intellectual agent provocateur, made a film about sex, then it was about a whole lot more. A circus with both sides wanting to make an example

of the other, the trial lasted four years. Oshima won.

Photographs in imported publications, from *Playboy* to fashion magazines, are scrupulously examined for 'pubes' and the offending portions duly inked out by hand. In 1981, the government officially authorized a 5 per cent increase in the amount of pubic hair visible in photographs, thereby making Japan the only country which apparently uses percentages to measure the crop in the crotch. Many magazines made a point of playing a game of brinkmanship with the law, notably those employing the photographer Araki Nobuyoshi. A compulsive shutterbug who never goes anywhere without snapping it all on 35 mm film, like the artist Hokusai over 150 years earlier Araki is fond of depicting everything and anything, though sex is substantially higher on his agenda. The sex magazines used to feature Araki's photographic sex diaries, documenting his encounters with students, housewives and prostitutes in Love Hotels and massage parlours. On one occasion he famously circumvented the law on pubic hair – simply by photographing female genitalia in close-up too extreme to show any. The result, which would have been purely clinical had it not been in monochrome, became pussy à la Hans Arp, a pleasing sculptural abstraction hung in galleries with impunity. By now the single most famous photographer in Japan, Araki is hailed as a conceptual artist all over the industrialized world.

As obdurate and hypocritical as any, Japanese censorship is precisely what has fired so many artists with rebellion. Today censorship has nonetheless somewhat relaxed. Although the old rules about imported magazines mainly still apply, books about *shunga* appeared without blank-outs for the first time in over a hundred years around a decade ago and 'hair' nudes (the ones with bush instead of brush-out) are all the rage in Japanese photo galleries. The porno-video industry currently blanks out genitalia with a mosaic technique used on TV to protect identities.

In the Anglo-Saxon world, attitudes to pornography have been conditioned by a long history of guilt-ridden Puritanism; where pornography is perceived as degrading to women, it is. In Japan, however, women would mainly baulk at having nude portraits taken because they wouldn't want their neighbours and parents to see them. In Japan too, there are plenty of women who find in nude photography an outlet for latent exhibitionism. Among the young, the thirst for freedom from Confucianist strictures can prompt the shedding of clothing out of sheer defiance. Legions of Japanese women seem to fall over each other for the honour of being the subject of one of Araki's bondage fantasies, or simply photographed nude. Prominent among his admirers and protégées are the photographers Hiromix (*b*. 1977) and Yurie Nagashima (*b*. 1973). The former started to use the same compulsive shutterbug technique as her mentor to depict her daily life. Using a cheap Konika 'Big Mini' automatic camera, she photographed herself nude and semi-nude. She

took snaps of her environment: her tabletop full of dirty dishes, an ashtray, a party with friends, her bathroom, a bunch of flowers, a wastepaper basket – anything. Nagashima followed suit, taking nude photographs of herself and of her family. Both published hugely successful books in 1995. The photographers became so famous that young women began to view the Big Mini as a fashion accessory as important as a mobile phone. Photography became all the rage. Often blurred, unfocused, uncomposed and unframed, the pictures had to be bad to be good. They had entered the realm of conceptual art.

ART AND SEXUAL IDENTITY

Segregating the sexes from childhood, Confucianism turned marriage into a duty. Married to the man chosen by their parents, women were virtually imprisoned in the inner recesses of the home as dutiful wives and demure daughters. Women of the other kind were freaks, outcasts or prostitutes. Emancipation and the right to vote came to women with the New Constitution of 1946, when occupied Japan had little choice but to adopt American-style democracy. Despite persistent grumblings (on both right and left) that it's high time Japan had a constitution of its very own, the benefits of the American model still far outweigh the shortcomings. Today there are powerful women in the government, something inconceivable even twenty years ago. Continuing to enjoy a paradoxically long-standing and much greater degree of influence in the household than their Western sisters, women have also recently gained much clout outside the home, notwithstanding the fact that the numbers of females at university and management level in Japan are still paltry compared to the West. Beneath the modernist veneer, old concepts often die hard. Although it is now implicit rather than actively taught in schools, Confucianism has long coloured an education system which is only now getting the overhaul it has needed desperately for over 50 years. Even mixed schools have long been sufficiently Confucian to keep the boys separate from the girls, even in integrated classrooms; discouraged from socializing after school, the sexes grew up apart. Even now, the majority of Japanese tend to prefer the company of their own sex.

Schools used to be stricter. It was work-work-work and precious little play, all for the benefit of taking crushingly competitive exams to enter university. Passing such exams required only tedious rote-learning; candidates ticked boxes – there were only right and wrong answers. Shunning essays and precluding opinions, the entire education system was devised to nip individualism in the bud and discourage abstract thought. Over the past decade things have been changing pretty radically for the better in education, but the social pendulum, it appears, may be in the process of swinging too far in the opposite direction. In Japan, where consensus,

24 Hiroshi Masuyama, *Ganguro*.

peer pressure and the strictures of the group have reigned for too long, individualism is welcomed as a key to Utopia but, unfortunately, little understood. Still deplored as mere selfishness in the eyes of older generations and even exalted as such by some of the young, individualism is producing alienation. According to many of the Japanese baby boomers, especially former radicals, the young are devoid of political awareness and completely passive. Enjoying freedom undreamed of by former generations, many of the young see individualism as a passport to self-gratification and not as an existential tool. Showing poor social and communication skills, they withdraw into themselves.

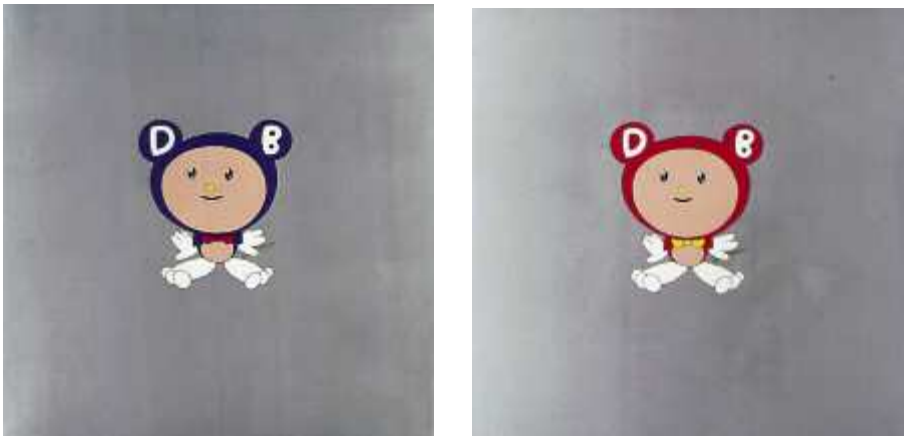
Wearing provocatively sexy outfits, the leggy little *body-con* (body-conscious) and bleached-blonde *ganguro* (dark-faced – because of their deep artificial tan) girls are less concerned with luring males than they are with competing with each other and pleasing themselves (illus. 24). They go out to discos together in droves and dance together. Meanwhile, many boys stay at home surrounded by barrages of audiovisual and computer equipment. These are the *otaku* – the in-the-house people. Fun is to stay indoors alone, collecting *manga* comic books and videos, and to go online and communicate with brother-souls. Fond of *anime* cartoons, pornography and often combinations of the two (*hentai anime*), the *otaku* have their own websites. If young men go on to become employees in conservative companies (and many companies still are), they will work long hours and sleep in dormitories with curfews. There is little opportunity to mingle with the opposite sex anyway. This, along with the fact that around a third of marriages are still arranged, explains why Japan should have such a disproportionately large and varied sex industry. Although most of what it offers remains illegal on paper, government officials have been using the word 'safety valve' to justify a tacit policy of tolerance for decades.

Given this background, certain things become clearer on the contemporary art front where notably the proclivity for socio-political messages decreases from the post-war generation onwards. In the case of Takashi Murakami (*b*. 1969), for example, his work currently reflects the puerile obsessions of a rampant consumer culture and is the very epitome of the age. He is currently one of the most famous artists in Japan.

Murakami is not afraid of being labelled *otaku*: on the contrary. Making garish, cartoonish paintings and sculptures entirely inspired by *manga* and character-merchandising, he cultivates what he calls *poku* (pop + *otaku*) and sees himself as the high priest of the genre. His most famous icon is probably his polychrome plastic sculpture entitled *My Lonesome Cowboy* (illus. 25), which stands very much for the male sexual zeitgeist. It represents a young male nude fashioned in the *manga*-hero style doing what one suspects *otaku* probably do best – masturbating. The figure is ejaculating; from his improbably large penis there spurts a frozen jet of white sperm

25 Takashi Murakami, *My Lonesome Cowboy*, 1997, oil, acrylic, synthetic resins, fibreglass and iron.

26 Takashi Murakami, *Hiropon*, 1996, oil, acrylic, synthetic resins, fibreglass and iron. © 2002 Takashi Murakami/Kaikai Kiki. All Rights Reserved.



27 Takashi Murakami, *I Can't Touch (blue and red)*, 1996, acrylic on canvas mounted on board.

which, echoed in the designs on the wall behind it, seems to spray around the room. There is also a female counterpart, *Hiropon* (named after a methamphetamine popular during the post-war period), which is a three-dimensional interpretation of an archetypically insipid female *manga* character, complete with outsize doe eyes and a smooth, featureless mound instead of genitalia (illus. 26). Despite her obviously prepubescent status, her outlandish breasts are colossal, the huge nipples spurting with a frozen jet of milk. Murakami has inadvertently created a reassuringly sterile Adam and Eve for the *otaku*; while Adam masturbates, Eve, safely devoid of genitalia, becomes an icon for Mummy.

These works featured prominently in Murakami's 1999 exhibition in New York, *The Meaning of the Nonsense of the Meaning*, a title the artist chose carefully to show how much he glories in inconsequentiality. Trash is cool. There are polychrome plastic sculptures and paintings of cartoon characters of his own invention, notably DOB, the Mickey-Mouse-eared, *Pokémon*-type character that Murakami has been aggressively merchandizing for children, including over the Internet (illus. 27). Everything about Murakami is commercial – and derivative. The objects themselves echo contemporary Japanese pop culture and kitsch rather than the American equivalent, but this should not be allowed to obscure the fact that it all looks like Jeff Koons. Koons, on the other hand, got mileage out of a calculatedly confrontational plastic sculpture of the artist making love to La Cicciolina, while Murakami contented himself with an icon for masturbation. This is Jeff Koons revised, or porno-kitsch for perpetual adolescents.

Sporting a hipster image, the goateed Murakami projects attitudes emulating the late 1950s and early 1960s. There are hints at sex (if masturbation is sex) and drugs (hiropon); he adopts the trappings of protest and anti-art, but not the content.

Above all, he is a passionate admirer of Andy Warhol, as the fact that he refers to his studio as the 'Hiropon Factory' suggests and the title *My Lonesome Cowboy* (a Warhol movie) confirms. His work would also appear to owe much to such artists as Gary Panter and Keith Haring, both popular in Japan in the early 1980s.

Conceding that the artist has much visual flair, critic Jerry Saltz wrote in the *Village Voice* about the exhibition:

> Murakami's lack of depth may be dazzling, but his essential vision of this world of surface is fairly clichéd and immature. His ideas about sex, consumerism and fantasy – especially in recent works – have a dated familiarity. If you want substance or meaning, you're barking up the wrong show. You will leave here empty, irked at Murakami's 'boyishness,' his hackneyed ideas about sensuality, his imitations of Warhol and his ironic lack of imagination.[10]

Love Murakami or hate him, he is highly representative of contemporary Japanese art, where his lack of depth would go overwhelmingly uncriticized. One of the most salient characteristics of Japanese culture has always been that form tends to triumph over content. Whether an exponent of noh or kabuki theatre, potter or painter, a traditional Japanese artist has always aspired to the perfect emulation of pattern and technique learned from a master; the individual input takes a low priority. 'Meaning' is not of the essence. Things have certainly changed, but individual creativity is still perceived very differently in Japan than in the West. Such artists as Aida and Murakami are eclectic; their images are borrowed. They are admired not for producing something new from their own imaginations, but for their imaginative way of making use of what there is – whether traditional *nihonga* painting, *anime* movies or *manga*. They stand out for altering and reassembling what they have picked up from their cultural environment; they have seized material from the floodtide of images in the media like gulls picking fish.

Among the pickings out there, plenty of it is sexual. From the dissenting Japanese artist's point of view, the depiction of sex once challenged authority because it shocked the priggish conservatives and reactionaries perceived as the ones making the rules. Now featured in glossy magazines weighing down the shelves of convenience stores, inherent in neighbourhood video-rental outlets or turned into comic book fantasy, sex rarely has the power to shock anyone at all. The sight of salarymen avidly perusing *ero manga* (erotic comics) on Japan's commuter trains has been commonplace for 30 years. For many people who are isolated, alienated and/or terrified of AIDS, Internet pornography and *hentai* cartoons are a simpler and less dangerous substitute for the real thing. In the wake of this, it isn't so surprising that

the nerdish *otaku* should by now have entered into the Japanese cultural mainstream: for some, going so far as to become a male role model. Nor is it surprising that so many girls find themselves consequently or deliberately on their own. Wielding Big Mini cameras and taking pictures of themselves, they revel in narcissism.

Both redolent with sexual infantilism and notable otherwise for their lack of formal originality, the perverse but trite fantasies of Aida or the mercantile plastic fetishes of Murakami, given this background, enter the realm of art. Japan has the world's most rapidly ageing society. The exaltation of artists who create toys of a staunchly adolescent cast perhaps signifies a disproportionate and desperate emphasis on youth.

Lamenting how groupist behaviour was often to the detriment of personal initiative, General Douglas MacArthur, commanding the US occupation of Japan, once famously infuriated the Japanese by dismissing the country as 'a nation of 12-year-olds'. Now that puerility should have become so pervasive in the plastic arts, perhaps in this particular area his unworthy remark has been vindicated. But let no one think that it couldn't happen in the West. Video games, *anime/manga* cartoons, *Pokémon*, girl and boy pop groups artificially created by producers, wacky TV game shows, virtual sex and, indeed, the 'Meaning of the Nonsense of the Meaning': all these are concepts either made in Japan or which have progressed there further and earlier than anywhere else. When art becomes nothing more than a facet of consumerism and the computer a substitute for sex, this is what happens. Japan, ever more the mirror of the future to the rest of the world, merely got there first.

Strategic Interventions in Contemporary Japanese Art

3

FRAN LLOYD

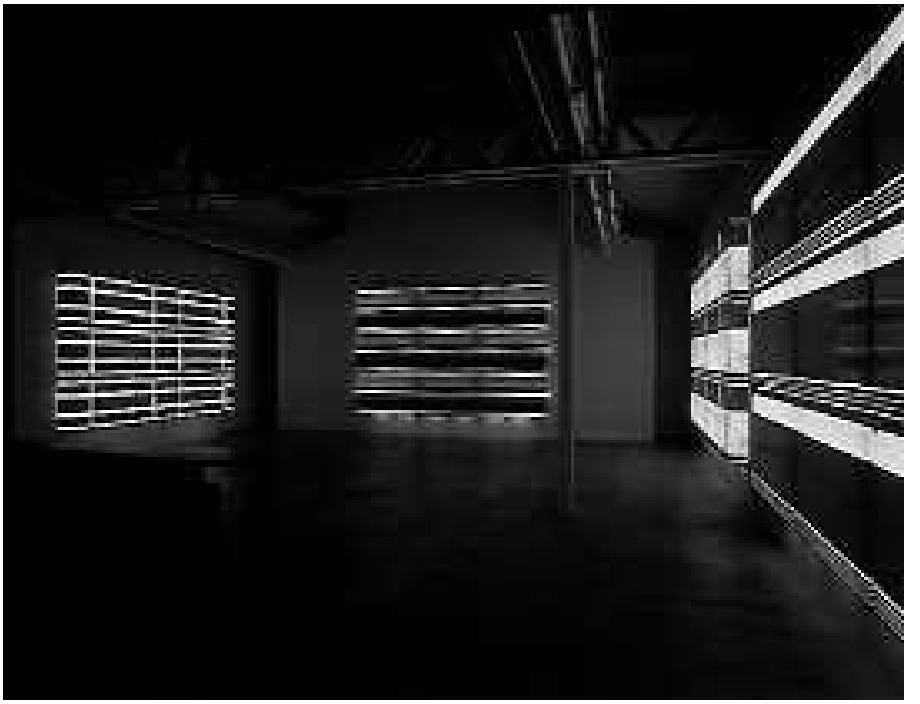
This essay focuses on the work of seven artists living and working in Japan who are engaged with sex and consumerism as dominant aspects of present-day urban culture.[1] Representing two generations working in a 'post-Hirohito' era, all of the artists, albeit in very different ways, focus on different forms of consumption and its relationship to the sexualized, 'gendered' and 'raced' bodies experienced in contemporary Japan. As such, I will argue that their work is a negotiation of and a strategic intervention into the day-to-day reality of a high-tech, media-saturated commodity culture where the results of rapid modernization and economic growth have radically affected all aspects of contemporary life, including the sexual.

Preceding generations of Japanese artists, experiencing different forms and patterns of consumerism, have explored the powerful subjects of sex and consumerism as key means through which to articulate a myriad of differing responses to the changing conditions encapsulated by Japan's experience of modernity. However, in the 1980s and more recently in the 1990s, these critical concerns can be broadly characterized by two dominant, but different artistic tendencies, which focus respectively on the signs of consumerism and on an indigenous erotic popular culture associated with the *manga* and *anime* world of the *otaku* (see Chapter Two).

The first of these tendencies is most widely known in the international art world through the computer-generated photographs of Yasumasa Morimura (*b.* 1951), who appropriates images from the worlds of luxury fashion and Western art to critique Japan's obsessive preoccupation with the consumption of luxury goods and the appropriation of status and culture through money.[2] Younger female artists born in the 1960s, such as Miran Fukuda, Miwa Yanagi (see illus. 88–90) and Minako Nishiyama (see illus. 85–87), have fruitfully extended these critical methods to issues of gender and consumerism, while Masato Nakamura, who operates in the quite different spaces of multinational corporations (illus. 28 and 29), appropriates

28 Masato Nakamura, *QSC+mV*, 1998, installation view at SCAI THE BATHHOUSE, Tokyo (reconstruction of 8 McDonald's M signs).

29 Masato Nakamura, *TRAUMATRAUMA*, 1996, installation view at SCAI THE BATHHOUSE, Tokyo.



the brand logos which dominate Tokyo and re-presents them within the gallery.[3] Meanwhile, the international success and notoriety from the 1980s onwards of Nobuyoshi Araki, whose erotic photographs map the various sites of sex in the city, has led to a explosion of photographers who, following in his footsteps, document all aspects of Tokyo's consumption of sexuality, from Yoshiko Kamikura's life-size portraits of female sex workers to Hiromix's images of young girls in bondage.[4]

By contrast, the self-named ero pop artist Takashi Murakami, born a decade later than Nakamura (see illus. 25–27), represents the fascination with comic books, video games, television cartoons and computers of the post-sixties' *otaku* generation, who use this imagery to reflect critically upon the condition of contemporary Japanese culture. Widely shown in Japan and America,[5] Murakami's work focuses on the pleasures of consumption whilst displaying, as Midori Matsui argues, 'the emptiness at the core of contemporary youth culture' which is both paradoxically untranscendable and the basis of Murakami's resistant artistic practice.[6] Best exemplified by his 'Theory of Super Flat Japanese Art',[7] Murakami argues that *anime* and *manga*, as part of a continuation of the *ukiyo-e* tradition, are the basis for a specific Japanese form of artistic expression where surface prevails and the distinctions between commercial art, fine art, and entertainment are fused. Similarly, Mariko Mori (who is discussed in Chapter Five), shares this interest in indigenous forms of popular culture but uses these to create images of a transcendent future.

Most importantly, as Alexandra Munroe has shown, these recent tendencies, although linked to a broader history of post-war Japanese art, represent a significant shift of emphasis where 'Japanese artists of the 1990s have made *themselves* the subject of voyeurism, deconstruction, and discourse'.[8] It is within these wider developments that I want to focus on a group of artists who, while sharing several common points of interest with the two broadly defined groupings above, differ in that they are primarily concerned with a particular kind of consumerism of sex which directly affects the body at the level of the individual, the group and the nation.

Firmly located in the spaces of the city, their work engages with the realities and complexities of the contemporary experience by examining the multiple sites through which sex and consumerism are visibly embodied and negotiated within contemporary Japanese culture (illus. 30). Encompassing the multifarious sites of the sex industry, the media and the art gallery, the artists use these departure points as a way of enquiring into the social and economic systems which have helped shape current attitudes towards sexuality, the body, gender and race. Furthermore, aware of their positioning within and as part of this system, their work is just as much about articulating the complexities of their own critical placement within a culture that is highly ambivalent about the past, the present and its imagined future.

30 *Kabukicho, Shinjuku Street Scene, Tokyo*, 2001, image clubs, sexual services and restaurants.

I want to begin by discussing the work of Peter Bellars (*b*. 1959) who, having lived and worked in Tokyo for over fifteen years, provides a cross-cultural perspective on the experience of negotiating the complexities of contemporary Japanese culture and the diverse sites of sex, consumerism and contemporary art in the city. Part of Masato Nakamura's non-profit-making Tokyo art group, Command N, which recently showed in London and at the Venice Biennale,[9] Bellars occupies an intermediary position within the Japanese art world through his practice as both artist and critic. Bellars was trained in Britain. His work changed radically once he became resident in Tokyo and it provides insights into the differing cultural and economic systems that operate in Japan.

Impression Sunrise (illus. 31) is a series of small, hand-crafted books which are the result of Bellars' day-to-day recording of his impressions of Tokyo and the inherent difficulties of negotiating a new culture and language. Bellars uses the title of Claude Monet's famous painting *Impression Sunrise* (shown at the first 1874 Impressionist exhibition in Paris) like a key word which provides a familiar starting point for exploring the multiple layers of Japanese culture. It refers simultaneously and succinctly to a pre-war Japan, 'The Land of the Rising Sun'; to the enthusiasm of Monet and others for Japanese prints following the opening of Japan's borders in the mid-nineteenth century; and to the staggering prices paid for Monet's work in the late 1980s by business corporations, private collectors and the newly inaugurated Japanese museums of modern art.[10] Signalling a number of key historical moments which have changed and affected Japanese patterns of consumption, Bellars also uses the title as a way of engaging with his impressions of Tokyo's current sites of consumption, most notably the highly visible sex industry.

Shocked initially by the contradictions of a culture where traditional values and codes of decorum coexist with a highly organized and professional marketing of sex for consumption, the small diary-like 'date' books record his encounters with this widely distributed material. Specifically drawing upon the ubiquitous mini-magazines left in telephone booths throughout the city, Bellars' little red books replicate these magazines which openly advertise sexual services by including images of the women, contact numbers and price lists (illus. 32 and 33). Shown in the spaces of the art gallery, usually a site for unique objects, the works disrupt expectations and focus attention on the naturalized but rarely discussed images that have come to dominate visual culture in Tokyo. Ironically, these photographic images have become period pieces in recent years as the demands of the consumer marketplace, dependent upon ever new forms of advertising, have resulted in a fashion for more explicit images, drawn in cartoon-like style.

31–33 Peter Bellars, *Impression Sunrise*, 1992, printed booklets, leather bound.

34 Peter Bellars, *Impression Sunrise (Signboard)*, 1993, aluminium, acrylic sheet and cutting sheet.

Bellars' subsequent work in this series, *Impression Sunrise (Signboard)* (illus. 34), extends the connections between sex, consumerism and art by focusing on Tokyo's rental gallery system. Intimately linked to Japan's historical structures and the more recent escalation of land prices, the renting of gallery space has become the norm in Tokyo since the 1980s. Disturbing to Bellars, a Western artist brought up within a modernist culture which has, until recently, sought to elevate art to a purer realm and distance it from the world of commerce and commodity, the work critiques a system of artistic validation based upon the ability to buy space.

Shown as part of the 'Ginburart' street event[11] organized by Nakamura, Bellars' information sign replaces the various Tokyo Love Hotel rates – to 'rest' (a two-hour period) or to 'stay' (overnight) – with those of the one-day and six-day rate of the highly priced rental galleries located in the surrounding streets of the Ginza (23,000–55,000 yen and 138,000–330,000 yen). As a strategic public intervention, Bellars' work exposes the underlying market forces that determine which artists' works are available to the public. It also draws attention to the soaring prices of these rental gallery spaces and to the proliferation of Love Hotels which, with over 35,000 in Japan and about 3,000 in Tokyo alone, it is estimated, make up about a quarter of the revenue from Japan's sex industry.[12]

Preoccupied with negotiating Tokyo's complex commodity culture, Bellars' more recent work focuses on the most obvious contradictory experience of the highly visible sites of sex for sale in a country where prostitution is technically illegal (illus. 35 and 36). For example, in the series *La Trahison des Mots (Soap)* (The Treason

35 and 36 *Host Club Biblos, Kabukicho, Shinjuku, Tokyo*, 2001.

of Words) (illus. 37), he places this contradiction in the foreground by referencing the numerous Soap Lands which provide a predominantly male clientele with a wide selection of sexual services (illus. 38). Previously adult bath-houses, these establishments offer what Richie describes succinctly as 'a suggestion of cleanliness – soap – and a proposal of pleasure – Disneyland'.[13] Bellars presents the small soap bars, carefully and exquisitely inscribed with Japanese characters, as everyday consumer items, although, as the title of the work suggests, the inscriptions carry unexpected meanings. Taken directly from advertisements which appear in daily newspapers and readily available Soap Land magazines, they carry on one side the names of women working in different Soap Lands located within the various districts of Tokyo and, on the other, their ages and prices. Displayed in the gallery in small, traditional

37 Peter Bellars, *La Trahison des Mots*, 1994, resin, wax crayon.

38 *Soap Land Lemon, Shinjuku, Tokyo*, 2001.

39 and 40 Peter Bellars, *La Trahison des Mots*, 1994, resin, wax crayon.

treasure boxes, the inscribed tablets of, for example, Ryou, Kobe, 20, ¥27,000 (80 mins), or Haruna, Shiga, 20, ¥35,000 (90 mins), become an index of women's current commodity prices mapped against and across the more fashionable, or less fashionable, districts of Tokyo (illus. 39 and 40).

Bellars' interweaving of the traditional cultural values of craftsman and beauty with present-day patterns of sexual consumption is similarly evident in *Pillars of an Empire* (illus. 41). This series consists of 30 lacquered headrests or traditional pillows, known as Yoshiwara pillows, referring to the old red-light district of Tokyo. Playing with the associations of 'pillow books' (traditional erotic illustrated books), Bellars has embroidered each pillow with the names of girls working in Soap

41 Peter Bellars, *Pillows of an Empire*, 1999–2001, cotton, wood, stuffing, series of 30.

42 Peter Bellars, *Pillows of an Empire*, 2001, cotton, wood, stuffing, series of 30.

Land establishments in what was once the old Yoshiwara district.[14] Presented as traditional handcrafted objects, the word play on pillows/pillars suggests that prostitution is still clearly as much a part of the controlling systems of economics and nation in present-day Japan as it was in previous eras when it was a legitimate practice (illus. 42). In this sense, Bellars' beautifully displayed objects act as critical reflections on contemporary Tokyo and subtly, but inoffensively, seek to disrupt naturalized patterns of production and consumption which rely upon the objectification of the female body predominantly across the material spaces of the city.

43 Hiroshi Masuyama, *High-school Girls*.

44 Advert for Japanese School Girl Collection, *Map* (October 1998), Tokyo magazine.

The work of the Japanese artist Hiroshi Masuyama, like that of Bellars, is also concerned with the commodification of the female body in contemporary culture, although his work focuses on a particular group – the much hyped high-school girls, images of whom circulate widely through the media world of magazines, comics, newspapers and television. As Nicholas Bornoff's preceding essay (Chapter Two) indicates, the phenomenon of high-school girls, *kogyaru*, is not new, but in the 1990s it acquired a more pervasive presence through endless media attention, obsessed with their changing fashions and lifestyles, their increasing economic independence, frequently linked with sexual freedom, and their seeming resistance to authority. Presented by the media as bodies to be consumed, they were also seen as consuming bodies who congregated in Tokyo's fashionable shopping centres awaiting opportunities to acquire the latest luxury goods (illus. 43).

Significantly, Masuyama (*b.* 1944) is part of a post-war generation that can personally recall the dramatic effects of the rapid escalation of consumerism and he sees his works as a critical intervention against the pejorative images of high-school girls widely disseminated by the media. Particularly aware of the role the media play in mass marketing through his previous experience as a fashion designer, in his representations of this specific group Masuyama questions both the social and the economic systems that have engendered such a phenomenon and its wider implications for Japanese society in the present and the future (illus. 44).

Masuyama's early works of 1998 and 1999 typically juxtapose the image of lone prepubescent schoolgirls in their customary short skirts and loose socks with the more traditional image of a delicately drawn bonsai tree (illus. 45). Conscious of

45 Hiroshi Masuyama, *New Year, Bon-Sai*, 1999.

the overtones of careful nurturing and cultivation associated with the art of growing bonsai,[15] Masuyama's depictions of the eroticized images of young girls, placed on the same level and occupying the same indeterminate space on the canvas, present the spectator with two contradictory and conflicting images which embody the different values and cultural sensibilities of past and present-day Japan.

In contradistinction to the media vogue of the 1980s and early 1990s for 'cute', narcissistic young females who 'effectively signify sheer consumption',[16] Masuyama's images of weeping girls in dejected poses imply that they are the objects of consumption, caught in a system of signs, which bears no relationship to their lived reality. Masuyama focuses on the ordinariness of the girls and the mundaneness of their lives through titles such as *The Girl Next Door* (see illus. 20), *Hanging Around* and *Dumped* (illus. 46 and 47). Strategically the titles work to demythologize them and indeed to de-objectify them by suggesting that they are vulnerable individuals who could be known as daughters or sisters, thus emphasizing an erosion of traditional family values and cultural debasement.

Masuyama's recent work is more confrontational and directly engages with the various systems of production and consumption which are central to the construction of the high-school girl, particularly in the tougher economic climate of the 1990s. In response to the numerous stories about their materialistic greed, the selling of worn underwear or participating in *enjo kosai*, compensated dating (exchange

46 Hiroshi Masuyama, *Hanging Around,* 1999, *Bon-Sai,* vol. 2, acrylic on canvas.

47 Hiroshi Masuyama, *Dumped*, 1999, *Bon-Sai,* vol. 2, acrylic on canvas, 194 x 150 cm.

of commodities or money for dates with older men), Masuyama's work focuses on the interconnections between consumerism, commodification and sexual desire, based in part on interviews with the young girls conducted with the help of a female assistant.[17]

These concerns are evident in the publicity postcard for Masuyama's 1999 exhibition, *Bon-Sai,* vol. 3, held at the Toki Art Space, which depicts one of Masuyama's works against the city space of 109, the department store in the fashionable shopping area of Shibuya, which displays the latest must-have items and acts as the main meeting point for these females (illus. 48). By linking the high-school girl to the recently refurbished consumer spaces of Tokyo, Masuyama highlights the speed with which Japanese manufacturers produce a range of goods catering for this particular group and extensively market the products through specialist fashion catalogues and magazines.[18]

A culture of commodification is also emphasized within the gallery space by a number of strategies. For example, the canvas *Flyer Board, no. 1* (illus. 49) – the work reproduced on the postcard – is mounted on wooden supports that echo the

48 Hiroshi Masuyama, *Bon-Sai*, vol. 3, Exhibition publicity postcard, November 1999.

49 Hiroshi Masuyama, *Flyer Girl, no. 1*, 1999, Bon-Sai, vol. 3, acrylic on canvas.

50 Hiroshi Masuyama, *Flyer Girl, no. 6*, 1999, Bon-Sai, vol. 3, acrylic and glitter on canvas.

51 Hiroshi Masuyama, *090, magazine cover* (Tokyo, March 2000).

advertisements found in the streets of Tokyo, while the text, significantly written in reverse, re-presents the phrases and prices of the 'sex for sale' culture. Here Masuyama blatantly replicates the colour of the glossy advertisements or flyers which feature images of young girls in school uniform, an accompanying menu of sexual services, price lists and telephone numbers. Framed and overlaid by the signs of commerce, the figure of the high-school girl is locked into cycles of consumption as sign, object and subject (illus. 50).

Shown within the spaces of the art gallery, Masuyama's dominant images are seen by Japanese critics as cutting social commentaries which aim to shock and to focus attention on the more troubling aspects of Japanese consumer society, where markets need ever newer objects of consumption and consumers eternally want.[19] Masuyama describes his artistic strategy as part of 'a desire to change through presenting images of what we have become' in the immediate aftermath of Japan's bubble economy of the 1980s.[20] However, in his small magazine booklet *090* (illus. 51 and 52) Masuyama also shows awareness of a much longer, often ignored, post-war history that connects sex, money and the young female body through the juxtaposition of his 'flyer girls' paintings alongside cutesy 1970s' cartoons, 1990s' comic images and 1950s' American advertisements.[21]

Within this broader context, Masuyama's work clearly has much to do with issues of gender and power, and how females have been positioned within the changing economic and social systems of Japanese post-war society. Although traditional values which relegate women's role to the home are embedded in the Japanese language and in Confucian ideals of subservience,[22] recent feminist research has shown, as Skov and Moeran note, that the 'definition of women as mothers', which dominated post-war Japanese society until at least the 1970s, only became fixed during the

52 Hiroshi Masuyama, *090, magazine cover* (Tokyo, March 2000).

1930s and 1940s and has obscured other histories of women's labour and economic participation.[23] Nevertheless, within this dominant post-war social pattern, the growth of a rapid consumer culture in the 1960s has had a particular effect on young women who, as Sharon Kinsella argues, excluded

> . . . from most of the labour market and thus from active society roles have come to represent in the media the freest, most un-hampered elements of society . . . associated with an exotic and longed-for world of individual fulfilment, decadence, consumption and play.[24]

This is particularly true for young girls since the 1980s who, situated between childhood and adulthood, have no place in the economy as active producers but have relatively more money than teenagers in other advanced consumer societies.[25] Consequently, this group has become the major target for manufacturers within Japan where, as Skov and Moeran point out, 'market segments are far more narrowly defined and managed' than in Europe or in the United States.[26] Thus, as Masuyama's work implies, the schoolgirl phenomenon is a complex one, especially in the difficult economic and social climate of the 1990s. Associated with the excesses of consumerism and presented by the media as a new generation of 'manipulative, choosy, cute young women' who humiliate men,[27] they also publicly repre-

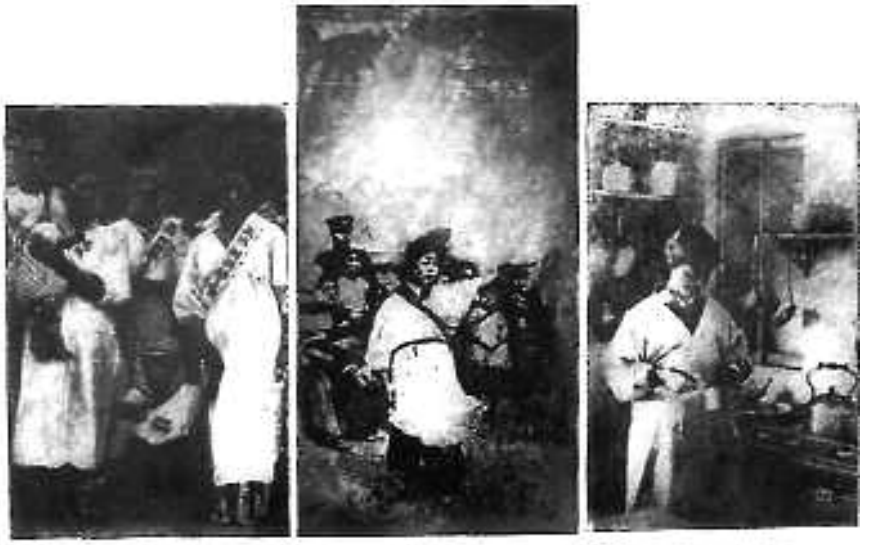
sent a performativity of independence through exaggerated dress and language in a society where traditional ideals of women and marriage still dominate. Masuyama's images of laughing girls making V signs refer to the media's focus on their defiant gestures and use of informal male figures of speech which transgress codes of decorum and politeness.[28] However, by presenting such images in the gallery, a site for looking and for consumption, the complex interrelationships between art, marketing, sexuality, money and power become uppermost.

Questions surrounding the positioning of the female within Japanese culture are central to the work of the Tokyo-based artist Yoshiko Shimada who, within Japan, is seen as a radical feminist and, at times, an 'offensive' artist.[29] Exploring issues of gender, power and nation, which are frequently considered to be politically unsuitable or taboo, especially when they concern suppressed histories, Shimada's work focuses on key events within the broader frame of Japanese modernity that continue to shape current ideologies.

Crucially Shimada, who studied fine art in America and has travelled widely in Europe and in Asia, firmly locates her work within the social and political context of being Asian, Japanese and a woman.[30] These distinctions are significant, particularly within the context of sex and consumerism, because they reject the popular myth of the nation as one homogeneous family and focus on the different ways in which different women have been positioned differently in terms of gender, race and nation within Japanese culture. In addition, by questioning dominant ideologies of gender, power and nation, Shimada's work frequently uncovers often unexpected, contradictory and uncomfortable issues that necessitate a rethinking of her own multiple positioning in relationships to these naturalized systems.

Using a highly effective range of artistic practices which include installation, performance, text and image and, more recently, video, Shimada's work centres on issues of sex and consumerism which skilfully uncover layers of history and make connections between the war years, characterized by the rise of nationalism and imperialism, the immediate post-war period, when Japan was occupied by American forces, and, more recently, Japan's current cultural position within Asia.

From 1993, Shimada has produced a series of works as etchings, installation and performance and in book form which focus on Japan's 'comfort women' who, drawn from Japan's colonies, particularly Korea, were forced to service Japanese soldiers during the imperial war years.[31] This seemingly forgotten part of Japanese history came to the forefront in 1991 when three Korean comfort women filed a lawsuit against the government. The military initially refused to acknowledge responsibility for the system, but once substantial written evidence showed the extent of this highly organized form of sexual slavery, which involved about 139,000 Asian women, politicians were reluctant to compensate the women because they were regarded as prostitutes.[32]



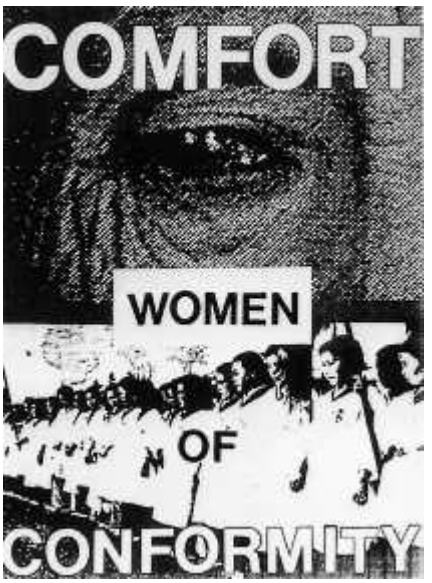
53 Yoshiko Shimada, *White Aprons*, 1993, triptych, etching.

54 Yoshiko Shimada, *Shooting Lesson # 11*, 1992, etching.

White Aprons, Triptych (illus. 53) and *Shooting Lesson 11* (illus. 54) are key works in which Shimada explores the contradictions of an official history that had stressed the elevated status of Japanese women as sacrosanct mothers of the empire and defenders of the nation during the same years that comfort women, being non-Japanese, could be used as sexual commodities without public discussion. *White Aprons* represents three different wartime photographs of Japanese women as housewives, as defenders of the new colonies where they are learning to protect

55 Yoshiko Shimada, *A House of Comfort*, 1993, etching.

themselves from anti-Japanese guerrilla attacks, and as members of the National Defence Women's Organization sending Japanese troops off to war.[33] In spite of their very different roles in protecting the nation, each woman wears a white apron, *kappogi*, the uniform adopted by the national defence organization and a symbol of purity and motherhood. In *Shooting Lesson 11* the focus is on the Japanese women learning to shoot, while relegated to the four corners are the images of the forgotten Korean comfort women who were forced to service Japanese soldiers in these new colonial territories. A further etching, *A House of Comfort* (illus. 55), similarly works through the disarming juxtaposition of the found images of a mansion-like military brothel, of the Asian prostitutes at the bottom and the central image of the undressed female to question the idea of whose home or nation, whose comfort and at what price.



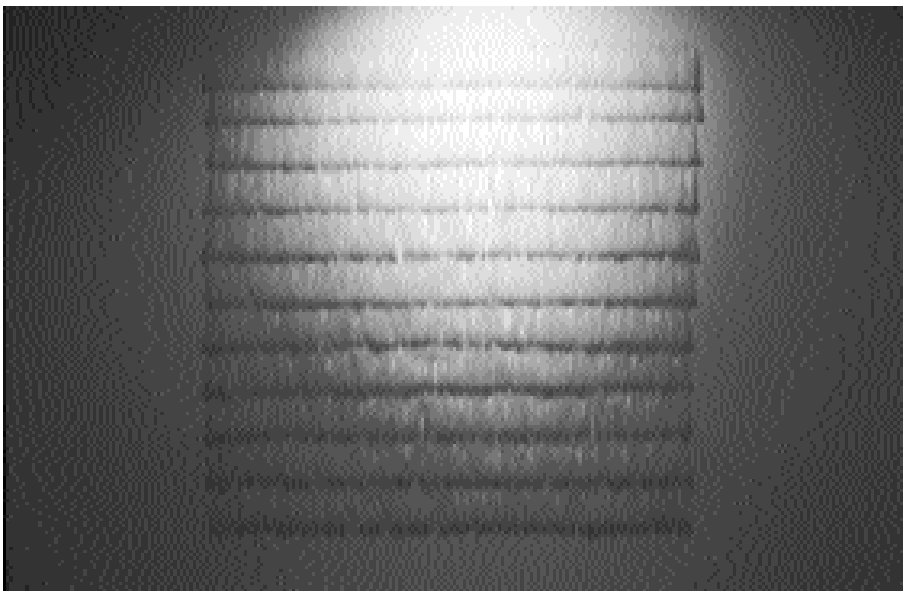
56 Yoshiko Shimada, *Comfort Women*, 1994–5, etchings.

57 Yoshiko Shimada, *Comfort Women*, 1994–5, etchings.

Comfort Women, Women of Conformity (illus. 56 and 57), a handmade artist's book, provides another perspective on the powerful contrast of the differing experiences of the two groups of women achieved by juxtaposing images and statements by the Korean women on the left with texts on the right written by Japanese women, including several feminist writers, who supported ideologies of the nation and reproduction during the 1930s and 1940s. The Korean women's accounts of kidnapping, rape, violence and forced sexual slavery are harrowing, particularly against the rhetoric of nation, motherhood and nurture cited opposite them.[34]

The effectiveness of Shimada's work to disrupt dominant views about the commodification of women in the past in order to question what has become naturalized in the present is evident in the installation *A Month's Work* (illus. 58) of 1995. Made up of 600 pink condoms in serried rows, it refers to the Korean comfort women's accounts of the number of men they were forced to serve in a system of enslaved labour, even though many suffered from the painful effects of venereal disease. In a contemporary context, the installation questions whether the current sex industry, based predominantly on female commodified labour, is any different, particularly given the number of non-Japanese women employed within Japan and Japan's alleged control of the sex industry in neighbouring Asian countries.[35]

For Shimada, as her subsequent publication *Art Activism* makes clear, the root of the 'comfort woman system' and the official denial of it 'lies in the central dichotomy of Japanese sexuality' where, historically, Japanese women were imaged in the two roles of 'sacred mother' and 'prostitute'.[36] Linking this conceptually and



58 Yoshiko Shimada, *A Month's Work*, 1995, installation.

visually with the 'Emperor system', where women were 'mothers of the empire' whose chief role was to protect the 'pure' nation against the non-Japanese, Shimada argues that 'both men and women were co-opted into a system of racist and sexist discrimination'. Shimada continues by stating that this is a 'peculiarly Japanese system of patriarchy' where, because there is no clear paternal figure, but an embracing 'maternal quality' of whom 'all women were his children', the patriarchal centre was masked by a motherly character which 'made its power less immediately visible'.[37]

Unwilling to create victims, scapegoats or victors, Shimada emphasizes in such statements that it is this hidden power, symbolized by the divine figure of the emperor but linked to the adoption of Western values of imperialism and empire, that has helped create a culture of 'divide and rule' which encompasses Japanese women who, seen as the exotic other by the 'Western colonialists' gaze', have become colonizers who see themselves as 'honorary white' women against Asian women, both at home and abroad.[38] In this sense, Shimada regards art as a powerful means to change people's views and she is committed to a critical agenda of freedom from hierarchies for all: male and female.[39]

Keenly aware of the Japanese desire to forget a painful past of imperialism, sexism and racism, Shimada forcibly argues that it is only a collective acknowledgement of the past which will resist the continuation of these forms of inequality and prejudice in the present. Thus, works such as the installation (*How much is your*) *Labour of Love* (illus. 59) focus on the concerns created by the dichotomy of women's

59 Yoshiko Shimada, *(How much is your) Labour of Love*, 1996, multi-media installation, including satin, bedsheets, salt, photographs, dimensions variable.

traditional role as wife and mother and the forgotten prostitute as the other in present-day Japan. The centrepiece of the installation is a round bed of red silk which, as Catherine Osbourne notes, resembles the Japanese flag.[40] Surrounded by different media images of women and by four model houses which represent domesticity, Shimada used the installation as a site for talks and discussions which transgress the usual tightly enforced traditional boundaries of the public and private associated with sex and consumerism.[41] Based upon past and present conditions, Shimada has created a powerful and complex body of work which explores how attitudes to women, sexuality and the commodification of sex in contemporary Japan are related to deep-rooted issues of nation, race and gender.

Since 1996 Shimada has collaborated with the performance artist BuBu, who of all the artists discussed here is the most radically positioned in relation to issues of sex and consumerism because of her direct involvement with the sex industry as a sex worker and AIDS activist. Known as BuBu when artist, she has another name as sex worker (her preferred term to prostitute) and yet another as AIDS activist. It is these complexities, necessitated by the illegal status of prostitution, Japan's extreme reluctance to acknowledge AIDS publicly and the accompanying contradictory attitudes to sex, that inform her work as a performance artist.

BuBu, based in the old capital of Kyoto, initially briefly studied painting and then photography and performance art at Kyoto City University of the Arts in the early 1980s, subsequently joining the radical theatre group Dumb Type. Formed in 1984 by fellow student Teiji Furuhashi,[42] Dumb Type sought to take art outside the gallery and to create a new type of mixed-media experience independent of words.

As a direct response to Japan's increasingly technological, advanced consumer culture, Furuhashi, as collaborative director, defined Dumb Type as 'a reference to a society overstuffed with information, but cognizant of nothing'.[43] Using LCD video projections, set against a post-industrial backdrop, their highly polished performances use sight, sound and text to expose dominant controlling systems within contemporary Japanese society.[44]

Dumb Type was central to BuBu's formation as an AIDS activist and a performance artist for a number of reasons. Rejoining Dumb Type in 1992, BuBu played a key role in *S/N* (1993), which focused on the taboo issues of sexuality, gender and AIDS. *S/N* used a variety of shock tactics to disrupt the audiences' prejudices and stereotypical views about prostitutes, gays and AIDS. BuBu, who performed the prostitute role, horrified the audience by the act of pulling two dozen flags out of her vagina, while Furuhashi used his body to question the signs of gayness, straightness or AIDS. To date, AIDS continues to be a taboo subject in Japan, with official statistics invariably attributing at least half of the almost certainly understated figures to foreigners.[45] Clearly, for BuBu and Furuhashi, *S/N* was a deeply personal work: Furuhashi tragically died of AIDS two years later at the age of 35.

Increasingly aware of the lack of support networks for AIDS sufferers and the general ignorance about it, even within the sex industry, BuBu became the spokesperson for Japanese prostitutes at the tenth international AIDS/STD conference in Yokohama in 1994 and subsequently initiated various activist newspapers. Alongside this, BuBu also initiated a series of strategic interventions which challenge the stereotypical view of sex workers and their clients. This is most effectively expressed in the diaries that she and fellow sex workers kept and subsequently published. Like modern day 'pillow books', BuBu describes the publications as a form of 'empowerment' for sex workers and a valuable source for women to understand what safe sex, sexual pleasure and displeasure are.[46] Beautifully written, they represent a poignant world of both ordinariness and diversity which undercut preconceptions about clients and sex workers. More recently, as previously mentioned, BuBu has produced a number of works centring on sex and consumerism in collaboration with Shimada, who was introduced to her through Furuhashi.

The collaborative project entitled *Made in Occupied Japan* (1998) consists of two elements: an installation work of photographs of BuBu and Shimada: and a video performance. As the title implies, the work humorously draws together the threads of sex and consumerism within the initial historical context of America's post-war occupation of Japan. Wide-ranging in its references, the project plays out a larger history of the Americanization of Japanese culture and post-war prostitution through BuBu and Shimada's use of their own bodies to restage the imagined experiences of a US soldier, a Japanese military prostitute and a Japanese housewife.

60 Yoshiko Shimada and BuBu, *Not (Made in Occupied Japan)*, 1998, photocollage, 3 panels.

In the photograph *Not* (illus. 60), for example, BuBu and Shimada play out the complexities of post-war prostitution, where Japanese women, the sacred mothers and wives of the previous war years, uprooted in the chaos and poverty of a devastated Tokyo, sold their bodies in order to survive. By inscribing and presenting both of their bodies against this binary of prostitute/mother, the work collapses the distinctions and raises questions, especially in the context of both artists' previous work, about power structures which regulate or 'occupy' women's bodies, including the bodies of the artists, whether in times of peace or war.

In terms of race, the cutting humour of such images as *Birth/Concealment of Venus* (illus. 61) focuses on the continuing national acts of amnesia which obliterate the traces of Japanese woman/prostitute within national boundaries and make invisible the prejudice experienced by Japanese women who married American GIs in the post-war occupation years, particularly if the latter were black.[47]

However, characteristically of both artists' work, the issues raised by these different forms of sex and consumerism are not simply resolvable in terms of the binary of victim/aggressor. This is evident in the video work *Made in Occupied Japan* (1998), reproduced in Chapter Four, which is based upon Shimada's experience of growing up in a western suburb of Tokyo that was a military base in the 1950s and 1960s. Recently redeveloped, Faret Tachikawa is now an international 'public art site' where all traces of its previous history have been removed. Shimada and BuBu restage the imagined histories of the site as an American soldier, a

61 Yoshiko Shimada and BuBu, *Birth/Concealment of Venus*, 1998, photo collage.

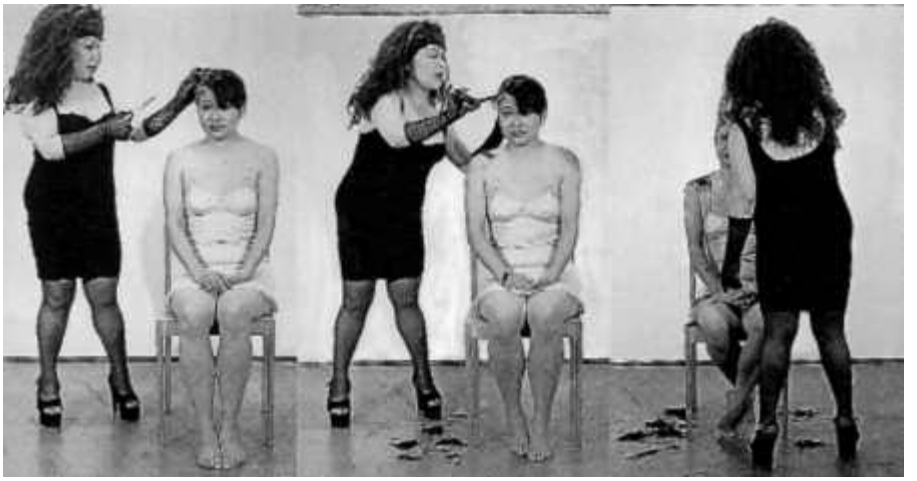
62 Yoshiko Shimada and BuBu, *Oral Lesson (Made in Occupied Japan)*, 1998, photocollage.

Japanese prostitute and a housewife living near the base. Interchanging roles and genders, they describe themselves as 'in drag' in order to point to the phallocentric power structure of Japan which operates by gender divisions. Subverting the tradition of the *onnagata*, the female impersonator of the kabuki performance, BuBu and Shimada act out both male and female roles.

By moving the spaces of the consumption of sex for sale into the post-war years, the work challenges the nationalistic myth of the pure Japanese woman. It also resurrects the key moment in recent Japanese history when prostitution supposedly became illegal under American occupation. In restaging this uncomfortable side of Japanese history, Shimada and BuBu imply that it was this post-war modernization that created present-day discrimination against sex workers. In addition, however, the video and the accompanying installation works *Dominate/Dominated* and *Oral Lesson* (illus. 62) simultaneously undercut the prevalent Western concept that contemporary Japan is the post-war child of America by humorously inverting the perceived power relationship and suggesting that such monolithic victim/aggressor constructions are always in fact more complexly situated and negotiated. Americans had to interact with the Japanese and were taught something by their 'pupils' even at the level of basic skills required for day-to-day communication and needs.

63 Yoshiko Shimada and BuBu, *Heal,* 1998, photo collage.

64 Yoshiko Shimada and BuBu, *Repair*, 1998, photo collage.



65 Yoshiko Shimada and BuBu, *Haircut (Made in Occupied Japan)*, 1998, photocollage.

All of these themes are pursued further in the photographic installation *Made in Occupied Japan*. For example, *Heal* and *Repair* (illus. 63 and 64) present sex workers as skilled practitioners who have the ability to heal the tired, old phallus or to repair the latest model through the use of technology for pleasure rather than destruction. Although humorous in presentation, the issue of professional status for sex workers who currently have no employment rights or legal protection is a serious one.[48] Equally, *Haircut* (illus. 65) draws attention to the stereotypical images of

66 BuBu and Melodias, *A Happy Traditional Love Making, 7th Position*, 1998.

the male and female by demonstrating the instability of gender and sexuality constructions. The photographs present BuBu as playing out the role of woman ('I replay woman') while she transforms Shimada from her male role in the restaging to a prostitute ('transvestite') for the American soldier.[49]

Both artists have also sought to place these issues of sexuality, power and consumption into other public arenas in order to create critical debate and recognition of the economic and social structures that regulate bodies and suppress diversity. Shimada, for example, recently curated the contentious exhibition *How to Use Women's Body* at Ota Fine Arts; this strategically showed the work of seven women and one male artist as an intervention to 'reclaim their bodies . . . and to present us in multiple forms'.[50] Interestingly, in this context, Shimada comments that the high-school girls are:

> . . . using their bodies to be something else and so they are breaking away from the very traditional representation of woman . . . what we should be doing is educating them to think more about their own bodies and their own sexuality rather than catering to other people's sex fantasies.[51]

By contrast, in 1998 BuBu helped form a performance group named The Biters for the Paris exhibition *Donai yanen*, meaning 'So What!'[52] Based on the wordplay of 'to bite' and *bite*, which in Japanese means prostitute, the group consists of individuals who are both artists and sex workers – *BuBu the Whore, Akira the Hustler and Mikado the Dominatrix* (illus. 66). The controversial and provocative performances and installations, based on their experiences in the sex industry, have subsequently been shown at Ota Fine Arts in Tokyo in 1999 and at the prestigious Watari-um as *The Biters 'le studio d'amour'* in February 2000.

I now want to turn to a younger generation of Tokyo-based artists whose artistic practice was formed during the difficult post-bubble years of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Unlike the previous artists, they are part of the post-sixties' otaku generation, whose experience of contemporary Japan has always been of one of a mixed economy of visual signs, where popular culture, media images and art coexist and are frequently interconnected and interrelated across a number of cultural sites. It is striking that, aware of this network of images and the persuasiveness of its effects, these younger artists use these interconnections to question the different ways in which the commodification of sex impacts upon the individual and the seemingly private world of sexual pleasure, relationships and the family.

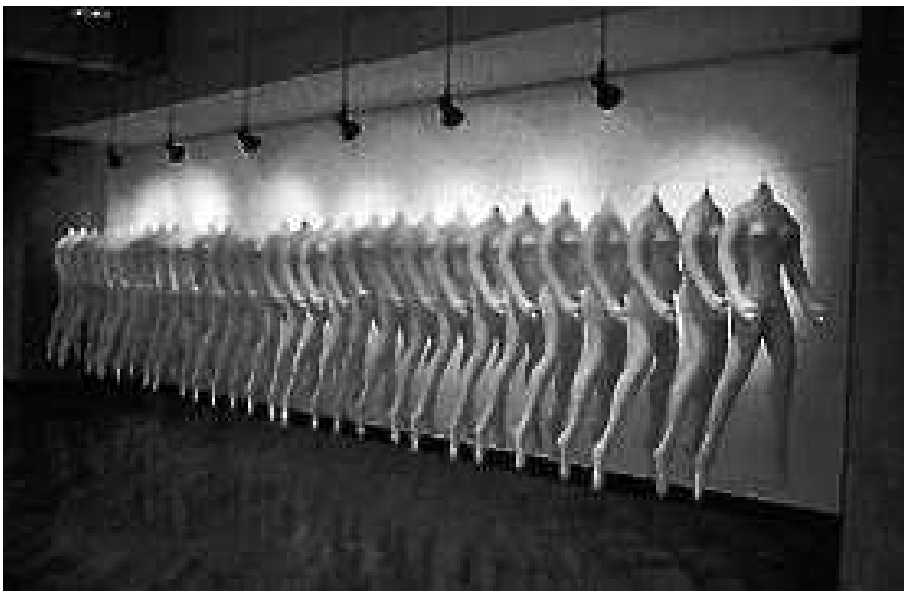
Takahiro Fujiwara (*b.* 1969), in common with the other artists that I will discuss, is part of an emerging generation of artists represented by the Mizuma Art

67 Takahiro Fujiwara, *Beans*, 1998, FRP (fibre plastic).

Gallery in Tokyo, which has sought young Japanese artists whose work engages with a wide range of critical issues, including those of consumerism and commodification. Trained at the prestigious Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, Fujiwara's work intervenes at the nexus of sex and consumerism by focusing on questions of pleasure and what is permissible or not permissible in a society which seems committed to the consumption of pleasure in all its manifold forms.

Fujiwara's first solo exhibition at Mizuma in 1998 foregrounded these issues most dramatically with the presentation of his series of large, brightly coloured vibrating beans, set upon a rug of pure white fur within an enclosed room inside the gallery space (illus. 67). They are presented as interactive art objects and the audience is invited to play with them, preferably by sitting on them and activating them via a hand-held remote control or by viewing them through eye-level slits in the wall partition. At first sight, the neo-pop vibrating beans in shocking pink, orange and blue suggest mass-produced play objects, designed purely for entertainment and fun. The irony is, of course, that they do indeed resemble the widely available vibrators which have to be mass-marketed in Japan as 'sex toys' in order to avoid contravening the Public Decency Business Act.[53]

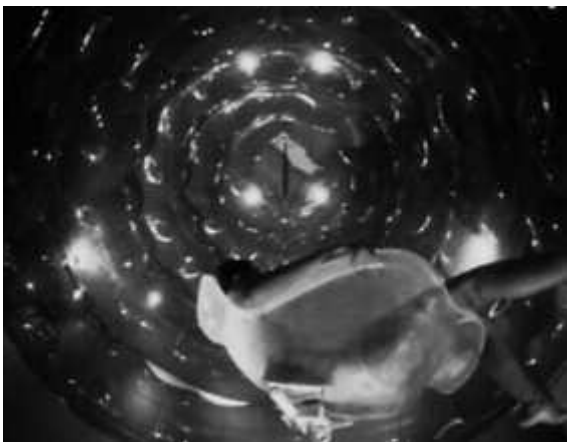
Within this context, Fujiwara's invitation to enact a public spectacle of playing with simulated giant 'sex toys' makes fun of the antiquated laws which class vibrators as 'obscene materials', but he also uses the ambivalence associated with such intimate sexual objects to present the spectator with uncomfortable choices. Do they interact with the object and potentially display publicly bodily pleasures



68 Takahiro Fujiwara, *Immunity Dolls*, 1992.

usually associated with private spaces? Or do they refuse this pleasure and prefer to observe hidden from view, and thus become a voyeur who derives pleasure from watching the pleasures of others? Either way, the focus moves from the objects to the desiring body of the spectator and suggests questions about the differing experience of pleasures associated with specific bodies within public and private spaces. On one level the work appears to be a return to a child-like, innocent world of play, where the simple pleasures of the body can be re-experienced. On another, the work enacts a simulated game which plays with the manufactured substitute phallus and issues of voyeuristic pleasure.

Fujiwara has consistently produced work which focuses on questions about what pleasure might mean in a society dedicated to the pursuit of consuming objects, but his conscious use of play as a strategy to directly engage the body of the spectator is a more recent one. In 1992 and 1993, for example, Fujiwara focused on various forms of simulated objects in his two solo exhibitions entitled *Immunity to Pleasure*.[54] In works such as *Women* or *Immunity Dolls* (illus. 68) Fujiwara forthrightly displays fetish objects such as sex dolls which derive from the objectification of the female body. The row of identical, seemingly mass-produced dolls suggests a culture of substitution where the pleasures offered by the simulated version, faceless and lacking corporeality, have replaced those of the real body. Although they obviously reference a simulated body, the viewer's own body can remain at a safe distance within the gallery, uninvolved and disembodied. What is striking about the bean works, by comparison, is that the objects still clearly focus on simulated pleasure



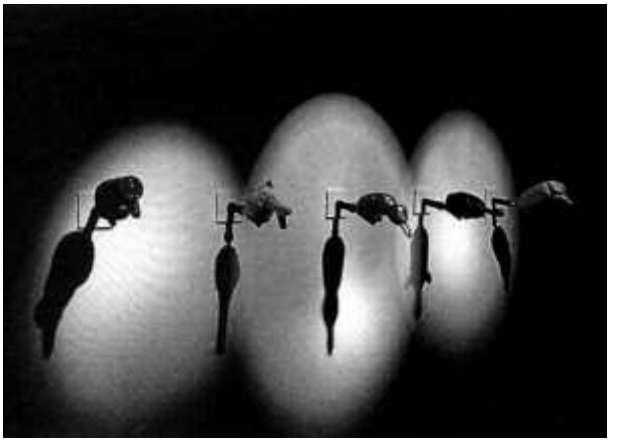
69 Takahiro Fujiwara, *Tub*, 1999, vinyl chloride, FRP, iron.

70 Takahiro Fujiwara, *Tub*, 1999, vinyl chloride, FRP, iron.

through inorganic objects which Fujiwara tellingly describes as made of 'cold, and visibly artificial materials',[55] but paradoxically, through their interactive display, the works entice the spectator into a confrontation with their own bodies and desires, whether the experience may ultimately be pleasurable or unpleasant.

Fujiwara's concern with the need for embodiment, in a culture where pleasures are frequently presented as disembodied, is particularly evident in his recent installation BAR *Epicurus* of 2000. A joint project with the Korean artist Jeong-Hwa Choi, the *Epicurus* was a temporary bar installation created for the Mitsubushi-Jisho Atrium in Fukuoka (illus. 69).[56] Presented as a pleasure world, seemingly free of external restraints, Fujiwara's contribution included the alluring erotic *Tub* (illus. 70), where the spectator can sit and look up at a slowly rotating pink balloon, provoking a feeling of being immersed in water. Interestingly, Fujiwara links this experience to that of being in the womb, which he describes as probably 'the first and best pleasure in life'.[57] Produced in 1999, *Tub* was clearly the prototype for his later work *Beans – Balloon* (illus. 71), where the spectator is literally embodied by entering the large balloon and can gaze out through the transparent skin at the outside world.[58]

If *Tub* offers a form of embodiment and pleasure associated with the pre-social and the child-like, Fujiwara's other work in the bar is linked at first sight to the pleasures of the mass-produced sex toys used as a basis for the vibrating beans. Displayed on one wall is what Fujiwara entitles his *Vibrahead-Handy: Kozurejunrei/Rourokame, Kamekameou, Koibito, Indian* (illus. 72), a row of brightly coloured animal sex toys, each individually named and lit as precious, auratic objects. They replicate the uniquely Japanese animal sex toys, but when handled in the bar space their heads or fins tremble rather than vibrate. Presented as iconic



71 Takahiro Fujiwara, *Beans – Balloon*, 1999.

72 Takahiro Fujiwara, *Vibrahead-Handy: Kozurejunrei/Rourokame, Kamekameou, Koibito, Indian*, 1997, FRP, iron, sponge.

objects of desire and sexual pleasure, the small 'vibraheads' are in fact impotent and malfunctioning. Linked visually to the mute animal signs of 'cute' culture, associated with the values of pleasure, play, consumption and a belief in an innocent, natural, happy state that is suppressed when entering an adult world of artifice, the objects are the epitome of thwarted dreams and desires.[59]

Traditionally a place of consumption, pleasure and forgetting, the bar fittingly offers the participant spectator all of these experiences through the intensely seductive and tactile objects on display. Although the works create different forms of embodiment and disembodiment and the opportunity to experience different pleasures, they are also deeply ambivalent and contradictory interventions which, in the final analysis, undercut the pleasures presented. They raise anxious questions about whether the overstimulation of commodified desire has replaced the need for physical contact with another human body. And, indeed, whether the appeal of such fetish objects is that they are like the ultimate form of safe sex, where all signs of bodily fluids, of the abject and of the other are erased and replaced by seamless, pristine, manufactured forms.

In this respect the accompanying catalogue is unusually revealing and insightful in its juxtaposition of the two artists' seemingly sensuous and, at times, cute work alongside an essay by the curator Hiromi Kitazawa. Kitazawa sets the scene of a culture dominated by the media and new technologies which can satisfy all desires without physical involvement and relates Fujiwara's work to 'the illusory dreams' of males, dashed by the collapse of the bubble economy which 'exploded their "corporate myth"' and threatened by women's increasing economic and sexual independence.[60] Made aware of prevailing social conditions where the experience of corporeal bodies and their pleasures have become difficult areas of negotiation, the

73 Takahiro Fujiwara, *Vibrahead*, 1996, FRP, iron, wood, mirrors, part of series, installation.

74 Hiroko Okada, *Kiss*, 1996, Installation at Public Baths Shimiz-yu, acrylic, colour copies, photographs on canvas.

essay is followed by 'Pleasure is As Far Off as the Setting Sun', a disillusioned narrative by a young male on the empty pleasures of experiencing the world through the consumption of objects.[61]

Located from this perspective within the broader economic and social frame of the 1980s and 1990s, Fujiwara's work can be seen as a series of critical interventions which, by focusing on the issues of pleasure and commodification, bring to the foreground almost all of the interconnected anxieties of a highly developed consumer culture undergoing substantial change. Aware that consuming bodies are frequently disembodied, Fujiwara's works attempt paradoxically to show both the effects of this disembodiment and to offer experiences of embodiment. The works display the signs of the fashionable cute, associated with the pre-social (ultimately located in the womb), with fun and narcissistic pleasure. But they also problematize these values by suggesting that, in parallel with the orifice-free animal toys that signify cute culture, the vibraheads and beans are equally impotent objects where surface contact may ironically be all that is possible in a culture of consuming desire. At the same time they directly critique a contemporary culture seemingly obsessed with the consumption of pleasures and the promotion of disembodiment by offering the spectator moments of embodiment which confront the messier and more taboo areas of sexuality, gender and power. As an image, Fujiwara's large-scale vibraheads perfectly embody the inherent paradoxes and ambivalence of Japan's consumer culture where, as part of the system, the artist's intervention can only create opportunities to mirror back the complexities of real bodies negotiating the commodification of sex and desire (*Vibrahead*, illus. 73).

Hiroko Okada, who is a year younger than Fujiwara and also based in Tokyo, shares many of the same concerns, but she explores the difficulties of social engagement in a highly commodified culture by directly imaging individual bodies marked

by gender, age and sexuality. Okada graduated in 1993 from Tama Art University, on the outskirts of Tokyo, where she studied painting, photography and collage. Combining these skills with her interest in film and her previous experience as an actress, Okada produces multimedia installations which focus on relationships between the male and the female and how these are subtly affected by the diverse images and sites of desires within the public and private spaces of contemporary Japan. Interested in the multiple ways in which the private and the public interconnect through the day-to-day experience of the body, Okada creates a series of scenarios through which to critically reflect upon the contemporary world.

Kiss, for example, is a site-specific installation set within the public baths of Shimiz-yu, Tokyo (illus. 74). Once part of a system of communal neighbourhood bath-houses or *sento*, common throughout the major cities of Japan since the late sixteenth century, they became divided spaces under the modernizing policies of the Meiji Restoration.[62] Using this highly gendered public space, Okada comments upon the segregation of the sexes by covering the glazed doors of the women's and men's locker rooms with hundreds of bright red kiss marks, which call attention to the visible division of the building that now imposes strict boundaries between the sexes. Playing upon the idea of the glass surface separating the inside from the outside, like a skin, the screens of kisses are the signs of passion imprinted upon an unyielding and unresponsive surface that has become immune to such naturalized divisions. Interestingly, audience feedback showed that the older women in particular found the installation offensive because of its insinuation of sexuality into this highly gendered space.[63]

In subsequent works Okada explores similar processes of division operating within the private realm of intimate relationships. For example, *I Cried Then, But Now I Can't Remember Why* is an installation made up of two huge panels: the left one depicts a female in underwear crying; the right one shows a male with his head buried in his hands (illus. 75). Between these two, a small panel depicts them embracing. The title suggests a narrative of young love, now finished and fading from memory. However, the tears of mosaic that run down the woman's face introduce a disturbing note that disrupts this simple narrative reading. Associated with the techniques used by the Japanese to censor explicit genitalia in porno videos, the defacing mosaic on the woman's face immediately implies a scopic system where bodies are objectified and subject to the surveillance of the gaze. By linking codified systems of the gaze with the private realm of sexual relationships, Okada's work implies that the enacted separation between the sexes may be as much about social systems which have become internalized as about the passing of love.

The concern with the invasion of the public into the private becomes more apparent when the triptych is viewed alongside other installation pieces which focus

75 Hiroko Okada, *I Cried Then, But Now I Can't Remember Why*, 1998, acrylic, colour photocopy, panel.

76 Hiroko Okada, *Chess*, 1998, detail.

on the male and female relationship as a series of moves within a game. *A Certain Couple's Game* (1998) presents the two protagonists playing out a game of chess where both bodies are simultaneously protected by a fine fencing armour or, conversely, mapped out as moving targets by advanced technologies. In others, particularly the floor-based chessboard objects (illus. 76), the game pieces are made up of cartoon-like images of a young female body in underwear that, illuminated from beneath, becomes the object of the game. Like Masuyama and Fujiwara, Okada uses these references to cute culture to signify a world of endless consumerism and play which supposedly rejects the adult world, including that of sustained relationships. Interestingly, Michiko Kasahara, curator of the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, describes Okada's works as recognizing that 'even "love", a relationship that is hard to standardize, can be reduced to "a game" in the system . . . aware of their own bodies as symbols of sex . . . they understand the short shelf life that is attributed to young women' before they become wives and mothers.[64]

The wider social implications of such prevalent attitudes are implied in *Sweet Memories – The Kite of Love's End* (illus. 77), which presents a seemingly cheerful and bright installation, originally produced for a group show at the immense Aoyama Spiral Gallery space in Tokyo.[65] Made up of streams of suspended kites carrying the faces of young couples drawn in the popular cute comic style which advertises a wide

77 Hiroko Okada, *Sweet Memories – The Kite of Love's End*, 1998, installation at Aoyama Spiral Gallery, Tokyo.

78 Hiroko Okada, *Small Pocket Money Woman,* acrylic, colour photocopies, photographs on canvas.

range of consumer goods, including sexual services, the accompanying artist's text opens the work out to other meanings. Written in a conversational style reminiscent of the intimacy of private story-telling, Okada's text relays a story once told to her about how lovers fly a kite as 'a memorial service for the love' that is lost and a 'prayer for quick extinction of the sweet memories . . . and for an encounter with a new lover for each'. Subtly playing with memories of real or mythologized traditions and rituals, the text juxtaposes a past time where 'kite flying was originally a ceremony to celebrate the growth of children' and the present where, as markers of desire, 'such kites have increased remarkably recently'.[66] However, in her most recent work, *Small Pocket Money Woman* (illus. 78), Okada also comments on the material rewards that the fast expanding sex industry can bring part-time workers.

Deceptively romantic, these multilayered works intervene to highlight the dominant signs of commodification, which include the ubiquitous cutesy images of romantic love, the scopic realities of the sex industry, and the much publicly debated anxieties and difficulties associated with sexuality and relationships in an advanced consumer society where the role of marriage and the family is undergoing radical change. Beautifully alluring, like the world of commodities she is commenting upon, Okada's work suggests a disjuncture between the past and present myths of love and the realities of the urban experience where bodies, always marked by gender and the signs of sexuality, whether in the public spaces of the city or the intimate spaces of a relationship, are regarded as commodified objects or targets. Framed and distorted by masking techniques or lacking individual facial features, Okada's figures represent disembodied objects of desire which have no agency or weight in a floating world of signs, where the increasing independence of young Japanese women has ironically resulted in their increasing sexualization by the media.[67]

79 Koji Tanada, *Pupa*, 1997, wood, FRP, luminous paint, mixed media.

80 Koji Tanada, *Three Legs*, 1997, wood, FRP, luminous paint, mixed media.

Finally, I want to consider the sculptural work of Koji Tanada, whose intensely private and disturbing work focuses exclusively on the body, particularly gendered bodies within the family. Of the same generation as Fujiwara and Okada, Tanada's work is strikingly different in that it refers back to earlier manifestations of Japanese art and culture in order to reflect critically upon present conditions. Like Fujiwara, Tanada trained at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, which has a long sculptural tradition, and was taught by Katsura Funakoshi,[68] whose roughly carved figures were beginning to be exhibited abroad in the early 1990s. Tanada, who also works predominantly in wood, graduated in 1995 and within two years had two solo exhibitions in Tokyo.

At the second of these exhibitions, curiously entitled *Leisurely Toward Affirmation*,[69] Tanada presented sculptural installations made of rough-hewn wooden figures, partially coated with plastic and painted in garish, ritualizing colours. One set of sculptures focuses on the lone male body and the others on a family unit. The wall-mounted *Pupa* (illus. 79), for example, represents the upper torso of a blindfolded male who, with face turned upward, is seemingly unaware of the extended blood-red penis which hangs downward. Lacking lower limbs and arms, the image suggests a state of blind sexual desire emerging even before the body is formed or sight can identify an object. By contrast, *Three Legs* (illus. 80) is an image

81 Koji Tanada, *Leisurely Toward Affirmation,* Installation, 1997, wood, FRP, mixed media.

of imbalanced power and entrapment where the amputated male body, fixated with the brilliant red penis, can look but not move.

Defined and restricted by gender and sex, immobilized, cut into by the chain saw, with organs painted in a ritualistic blood red, it is difficult not to see these works as a reference to a crisis of masculinity in the 1990s, associated both with a loss of economic status and the break-up of traditional gender patterns which have long sustained the male as the dominant force in Japanese culture. Certainly at the time of the exhibition they were described by the critic Yasushi Kurabayashi as referring to figures 'yoked to their "sex" or, in a wider sense, to their physical or the social restrictions'.[70] However, they can also be seen as a resurrection of an older, pre-modern conceptualization of sex linked to violence and the grotesque body. Although sculptural objects rather than live performances, Tanada's works resonate with the obsessional body associated with Tatsumi Hijikata's *ankoku butoh*, or 'dance of utter darkness',[71] where, as an impassioned reaction to the cultural dominance of the West in the late 1950s, the body was used by Hijikata to assert a primal energy linked to sex and death. Concerned with what would now be called the abject and the carnivalesque, Hijikata's performance of *The Revolt of the Flesh* (1968), for example, presents the extreme male body, with covered face and an enlargened phallus strapped to his groin, as raw unconscious energy associated with fertility and endurance.

More restrained by contrast, Tanada's installation of the family is equally disturbing (illus. 81). Set in the vast space of the gallery, the three isolated figures, representing father, mother and child, are linked solely by facing in the same direction. Headed by the outstretched flying figure of the adult male, the male child is sus-

82 Koji Tanada, *Domination and Submission,* 1999, wood, FRP, mixed media.

83 Koji Tanada, *Carrot and Stick*, 1999, wood, FRP, luminous paint, mixed media.

pended or supported by a chain while fixed to a wheel, and the female appears as if immobilized in the background. Whilst evoking the traditional nuclear family, the figures are independent of each other, fixed in roles within a gendered hierarchy where they appear more as uncommunicative players caught up in some ritualistic act rather than a family group linked by bonds of affection. If, as the title of the exhibition suggests, the work is a determined affirmation of the family unit in the face of its disintegration in Japan (as in most highly modernized countries), it also embodies the anxieties of the present where these securities have been evacuated and the values which sustained them emptied of meaning.

In subsequent installations Tanada uses the male and female figures presented in the family to explore the themes of sex, gender and power. The 1999 exhibition held at the Mizuma Art Gallery, entitled *Domination and Submission*, included a life-size representation of a female whose wooden core, visible at the bottom, is transformed or covered by white plastic paint, while her extended, sword-like hands and lower face are a shiny blood red (illus. 82). Most shocking are the pronounced nuts, bolts and rivets which, while holding the figure together, suggest – like the

wired mouth – violence and violation. Sightless and bound by her upper arms, the figure appears to be entrapped but also potentially a dangerous entrapper through her association with the blood red of death, violence and sex. Drawing upon the early Shinto myths of creation where the sun goddess Amaterasu is traditionally associated with the bloody and violent birth of the Japanese nation,[72] Tanada suggests a deep-rooted primal female sexuality which may be covered up or contained by modern society but continues to exist nevertheless. Part of a mythological and popular tradition of the carnivalesque and the grotesque in opposition to the rationalization of modernization, Tanada's female recalls Shiraga's powerful image of the Sanbaso, which drew on similar pre-modern traditions in order to subvert the dominant ideologies of post-war Japan.[73]

This conscious use of symbolic forms and ritualistic colour associated with pre-modern attitudes to the sexualized body is used in part by Tanada to refer to what he describes as 'a sex that cannot be consumed'.[74] Rejecting Tokyo's preoccupation with sex as a commodity, Tanada links sex with fertility and the physicality of birth and reproduction. This is particularly apparent in *Carrot and Stick* (illus. 83) where, again drawing upon traditional Japanese colour symbolism, the male is all white apart from the black face and hands and the huge red penis. Playing upon colloquial expressions for the male organ,[75] Tanada's title focuses on the penis as literally the carrot and the stick – both the object and the source of desire – while the texture of this ridiculously enlarged organ suggests the rawness of the corporeal body which is absent from the rest of the figure. The red, grotesquely extended organ is however recognizably part of a popular tradition of spectacle enacted in the fertility festivals which still take place at Japan's ancient fertility shrines, particularly at Tagata Jinja, where the annual celebrations centre on the huge phallic symbol, nearly three metres high and painted bright vermilion.[76]

The basis of Tanada's intervention is therefore a rejection of sex as consumption which has become divorced from fertility and reproduction, and a return to both the public spaces of Japan's history where sex was once regarded as a powerful force, worshipped and feared, and the private spaces of the family where sex is part of survival through procreation. However, Tanada's work is clearly not about a return to a comfortable mythological image of the sacred family, of security, fertility and pleasure. Quite the opposite. Bereft of comfort, the figures he presents are fixed within hierarchies, isolated, frequently blindfolded or blind, disfigured and imbued with suppressed violence and cruelty. They link with images of a collective memory of damaged or maimed bodies – whether in the aftermath of Tokyo's fire bombing or at Hiroshima – that represent another side of the Japanese experience of modernity, and they update and transpose such images into the spaces of the family in the twenty-first century, where the personal has been affected by the public, giving rise

to anxieties and fears about a culture of commodification which has ironically suppressed the corporeal potency of sex and the violence associated with domination and submission.

In conclusion, what is particularly striking about these artists is the range of references they make to the numerous past and present sites of consumption and sexuality in the city. Apart from BuBu and Shimada, they do not share a collective agenda, but each uses their work to intervene and comment upon the present. Unlike the generation of Japanese artists who became popular outside Japan in the 1980s, they have chosen subjects and issues which are currently being fiercely debated within Japan. Their work provides unusual insights into the complexities of contemporary Japan and the debates about nation, race and gender which suggest a major cultural shift is underway. Furthermore, their work is radical in a country where consensus rather than confrontation is more commonplace, suggesting a strong desire to create a new, more critically aware and inclusive Japan which acknowledges its past and its present. At once sinister and threatening, humorous and engaging, the work suggests a renewed interest in the body as both the site of sex and commerce and a metaphor for the state of the nation in an age of uncertainty and anxiety where the personal has been affected by the public, and where the loss of centrality of values associated with modernization and corporate culture has given rise to a crisis of masculinity that directly affects, albeit differently, all bodies within the nation.

‘Made in Occupied Japan’ – Performance

BUBU AND YOSHIKO SHIMADA

4

I am a prostitute.
I want to tell those who were and are prostitutes
that there is nothing wrong with you.

What one needs to live can be decided only by oneself.

Don't label us with adjectives – poor, brave, strong, miserable, weak, ignorant, innocent, cunning, kind, wise, sensitive, stupid . . .

If you have ever benefited from using us prostitutes as subjects, you must pay us back something.

I have never felt miserable since I started this job. I have never cried during my work. I have experienced a lot worse in my life before.

What is the most shameful thing?

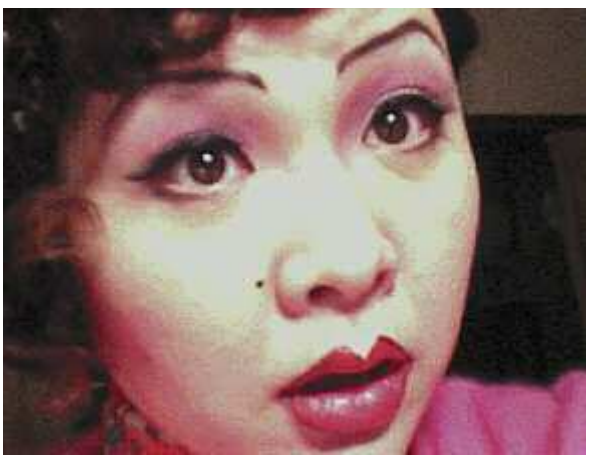
I love my clients – among them, I like some and I dislike others.

In the shop, the girl who earns most is called ‘number one’. When I was working there, other girls told me that the ‘number one’ is the owner’s girlfriend and the ‘number two’ is the manager’s. I thought, well, they sure know how to handle girls. After a while, my earnings increased (in a changing room, there is a list of each girl’s earnings that week, so you know who is earning most).

When my earnings became ‘number three’, the sub-manager approached me. Before I knew it, I became his girlfriend.

Being in a Pink Salon (massage parlour) is like being shut up in a dark games arcade. I had become mentally unstable. In such an environment, I needed someone who would support and approve me. I became increasingly dependent on his encouragement and approval.

They (the management) know very well this mental dependence. They keep the girls who earn a lot by forming a romantic relationship with them.



I think for those women who have never experienced prostitution, imagining what's happening at the actual site of prostitution tends to reflect their own sexual experiences and their perception of sex.

They imagine having sex with 'unknown' men is something horrible and degrading and think they should, as women, sympathize with those women who had suffered such a horrible fate.

If they see a 'bright, healthy, beautiful' prostitute, they might feel strong jealousy and envy. Her existence expresses that she has sexual and financial autonomy.

But in reality in prostitution, there are both moments of horror and moments of joy. Sometimes your life is at stake, and other times you can laugh with your client like friends. It is just like any other human-to-human relationship.

Sexual desire tends to relate to all other feelings.
Desires derive from sympathy, hate, sometimes from sorrow, and of course from the desire to attack and conquer.

This should have nothing to do with gender differences, but, from my own experiences, heterosexual men tend to confuse the sexual desire and the source of the desire. Having aggressive sex with someone and attacking someone are totally different things.

When their penis can't 'perform', some clients apologize to me and some get angry.

After buying sex, some thank me heartily and some throw money on my naked body as if it is something dirty.

I'm a human being too. I need to protect my feelings from being hurt. It is not as simple as being optimistic or suspicious of others.

There are various reasons for one to be reborn as a conscious human.

I'm 37 years old, born and raised in the 'economic miracle' era in Japan.

How can I form relationships with my parents' and grandparents' generations who experienced the war and the post-war era?

What do they want to tell me and what don't they want to tell me?

What I say may hurt their feelings, but I don't mean to deny their lives and the choices they made.

I don't want to force them to tell me about their past.
I only want to know why they can't.

Post-identity *Kawaii*: Commerce, Gender and Contemporary Japanese Art

5

YUKO HASEGAWA

The work *Pink* of 1989 by the *manga* artist Kyoko Okazaki (*b*. 1963) depicts the life of Yumi, who works in an office during the day but is also a *hotetorujou* (a sex worker who uses hotels to service her clients) and keeps a crocodile in her apartment (illus. 84). Yumi's income from her day job isn't enough to pay for food for her crocodile. On the way home one night after working in a hotel, Yumi buys a huge amount of food for her crocodile as well as a massive bunch of pink roses that she can barely carry. As she arranges the roses back in her apartment, Yumi comments: 'They're such a beautiful colour. I'm prepared to work as hard as it takes if money can buy me such beautiful things.'[1] In this sense, *Pink* is a story about love and capitalism. In the 1990s in Japan, all other colours were pushed aside by this almost plastic and fuzzy pink, which became the dominant colour of the decade. However, in the twenty-first century there is a shift away from pink towards white and the transparent. In this essay I propose that this shift represents a move away from the incomplete-identity *kawaii* syndrome (defined below) which dominated the 1990s towards a positive, undetermined state visible in contemporary Japanese art.

84 Kyoko Okazaki, Cover of *Pink*, Tokyo, 1989.

THE TWO AXES

Gender theory in Japan can arguably be characterized as being a construct of two axes. One axis is *youjika*, or infanticization of culture. However, infanticization not only means the postponement of maturity but also implies a potential for transformation. In other words, the word infanticization contains two meanings. One meaning is an immaturity in the sense of an incomplete identity, a hollowness or unisexuality, that is, a sexuality that is yet to be distinguished or differentiated. The other meaning can be interpreted as something that is still developing, where there is a potential for transformation, the third sex, or intentionally remaining in an unde-

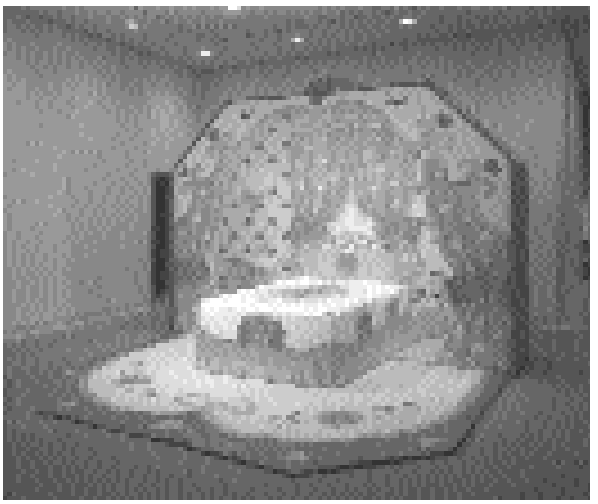
termined state. The second axis signifies the difference in the boundaries of gender from those in the West as a result of the strong femininity that resides in the Japanese male and that continues to be suppressed. This has been widely discussed and given literary expression through, for example, the twentieth-century writings of Yukio Mishima[2] and the duality that lies in *Tsurezuregusa*, the fourteenth-century story written by a man through the eyes of a woman.[3] In this context, however, I want to focus on the first axis: the infanticization of culture in relationship to contemporary Japanese art.[4]

THE POLITICS OF KAWAISA (CUTENESS)

No discussion of infanticization is complete without referring to the concept of *kawaii*, which is a dominant force in Japan today amongst both men and women from their teens to their thirties. The concept of *kawaii* includes elements such as 'cute', 'pretty' and 'lovely', but it is not restricted to these. It also implies something precious: something that we are drawn towards and which stimulates one's feeling of wanting to protect something that is pure and innocent.

There is a strong connection between the infanticization of post-war culture in Japan and the establishment of a system of patriarchal control as a result of the psychological sense of despair and loss of confidence amongst the Japanese, particularly the male population, following the country's defeat in the Second World War. An attitude of dependence on the United States was combined with the desire to maintain a sense of belonging to corporate organizations, and together these factors further delayed the establishment of a strong sense of identity for the post-war Japanese male. This in turn resulted in the establishment of immature and distorted gender relations. In other words, instead of a mature male seeking a mature female, the dependent Japanese male, needing protection, seeks a mother figure as well as a girl whose sexuality is yet to emerge and who responds passively to his overtures. In this imbalanced situation, therefore, as women become increasingly self-sufficient and economically independent, they frequently find themselves forced into performing the contradictory roles of mother and young girl in personal relationships.

Against this background, the swiftness with which the unique characterization of gender in the *kawaii* characters, originally found in *manga*, animation or toys, dominated almost every aspect of consumer culture, including the sex industry's advertising campaigns, is astounding. This phenomenon has recently become the focus of the work of a number of young Japanese female artists who use a range of media and methods to explore the cultural implications of *kawaii*. Minako Nishiyama's work, for example, highlights the conflict that lies between the 'fancy' products aimed at young girls and the parallel images that are utilized in the sex



85 Minako Nishiyama, *The Pinkú House*, 1991, acrylic on plastic cloth, urethane mat, iron, etc.

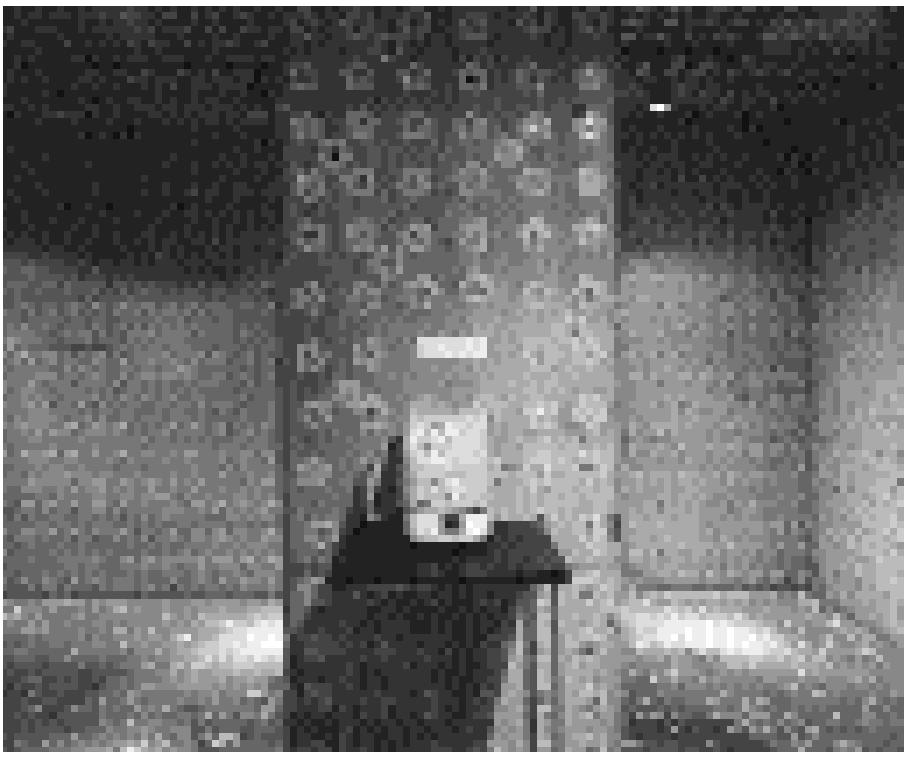
86 Minako Nishiyama, *Moshi Moshi Pink*, 1995, mixed media, telephone, SAKURA badges, same advertisements, etc.

industry's advertising strategies. Nishiyama, who creates full-sized versions of the 'fancy' Rika-chan House (*Rika-chan* refers to the Japanese version of the Barbie doll), remodels the houses by utilizing the typical colours and forms used widely in the 'pink' (sex) industry (illus. 85). The kitsch Rococo-style bed in *The Pinkú House* is also a typical example of the interior of a Love Hotel.

Nishiyama's position is most clearly expressed in the work *Moshi Moshi Pink* (illus. 86). Here Nishiyama prints pink stickers with a phone number and character images created with reference to *manga* targeted at young girls and then distributes the stickers in locations throughout the city, such as public phone booths, making them look like ads for *telekura* telephone clubs. When people start dialling the number on the stickers, a phone Nishiyama has placed inside the gallery starts to ring. In the spaces of the city the *telekura* provide an entry into the sex industry. They initially provide a service through which two people can communicate with each other, but after that it is up to the two people how far they want to take the relationship. Nishiyama tries to get visitors who happen to be in the gallery at the time to answer the phone.

This work can be interpreted in two ways — as an example of terrorism, which highlights the questionable aspects of the sex industry, or as an expression of the sense of comfort conveyed by the shape and colour of the protected, safe space of the sex booth for the consumer (illus. 87). The impact of the work resides in the ambiguousness of the artist's intention, which means that the work vacillates between these two irresoluble extremes. If one were to compare the terrorism that lies beneath the cute and sweet nature of Nishiyama's work with the work of the

87 Minako Nishiyama, *Moshi Moshi Pink*, 1995.



American artist Laurie Simmons, the difference in the nature of the two artists' work becomes clear. If Simmons' work is a depiction of the psychological unease that is found in our society through the utilization of cuteness and kitsch, then Nishiyama's work is more a pointer towards a frivolous emptiness, an absence of meaning that pervades the sense of kitsch and cuteness unique to Japan.

Perhaps the Japanese concept of cuteness is rooted in a motive and interest that is pure and innocent, something that we are drawn to even though we are not sure what it is. It could also be described as something that is 'endearing and amusing'. Like the fine lace that Nishiyama creates out of candy, reminiscent of the luxurious and ornate lace worn by a queen, her representations express a sense of hollowness or emptiness underlying the image.

FANTASY AND THE HOLLOW ICON

The silent eroticism of Miwa Yanagi's receptionist series (the elevator girls) similarly conveys a sense of emptiness, an absence of a centre (illus. 88 and 89). The physical presence of the women, who are placed, like dolls, in urban settings, is weaker even

88 Miwa Yanagi, *Receptionist Series*, 1997.

89 Miwa Yanagi, *Elevator Girl House 1F*, 1997, Directprint.

than that of clothed mannequins. The receptionist's image is a reference to the decorative women, stripped of any sense of physicality, frequently featured in advertisements. At the same time, Yanagi's series is an analytical depiction of the presence of these women who, resembling living sculptures, are placed in the consumer space of the department store without any particular roles to play. Yanagi's world appears to be a closed and decadent oriental urban labyrinth but, as in Nishiyama's work, there is a terrorist intention lurking behind the seductive scene. It is a depiction of something tangible that exists in the spaces of the city and within the emptiness of social formalities.

In Yanagi's first solo exhibition, held in a gallery in Kyoto in the early 1990s, an elevator was placed in the middle of the gallery (illus. 90) flanked on either side by two young women wearing the uniform of the elevator girls seen in Japanese department stores. The Japanese elevator girl is something quite different to those that operate the older-model elevators in the West. The exaggerated politeness and service, part and parcel of the decorative and almost ritualistic nature of the elevator girl in Japan, are unimaginable in Europe or the United States. This department-store ethos of politeness and service, an expression of middle-class status, combined

90 Miwa Yanagi, first solo exhibition, Kyoto (elevator in gallery), *Eternal City I*, 1998, Directprint.

with the custom of over-wrapping purchases, adds value to the product and has come to symbolize the typically Japanese ritual of shopping.

However, seen from another cultural perspective, these two elevator women, standing in the gallery, could also be *miko* (spiritualistic mediums) inviting us to rise up to the land of the gods. Here lies a sexual metaphor unique to Japan. Thus, by depicting the excesses of shopping rituals within the space of the gallery and linking these to much older rituals which facilitate access to higher planes, Yanagi makes the emptiness of consumerism relative by linking it to the spiritual sense of emptiness which leads beyond the material world.

Mariko Mori (*b*. 1967) is an artist who also makes the most of the iconic and symbolic nature of the oriental woman as perceived by the West. Rather than alluding to a particular location of consumerism, Mori's work focuses more on the structures that underlie Japanese culture. When Mori, wearing a silver space suit, first made her appearance in the public spaces of Tokyo, in the 'electrical market' of Akihabara (*Play with Me*, illus. 91) or in a subway carriage (*Subway*, illus. 92), there was an element of the pop icon in the sense of displacement created by this work. At the same time, the work represented an alienated view of Japanese culture as seen by a figure from another planet – literally an alien.

Although this can be perceived as a form of criticism, the effect is two-fold; it is an optimistic and cheerful criticism unique to pop art, and a fantasizing of the

91 Mariko Mori, *Play with Me*, 1994, Fuji super gloss print, wood, pewter frame. José Maria Cano Collection.

92 Mariko Mori, *Subway*, 1994, Fuji super gloss print, wood, aluminium frame. Private collection.

93 Mariko Mori, *Tea Ceremony 3*, 1994, Cibachrome print, wood, aluminium, chrome frame.

94 Mariko Mori, *Miko no Inori* (Link of the Moon), 1996, video installation (DVD, 5 screens, DVD player, etc.).

exotic landscape that is Japan. The coexistence of these two elements of criticism and fantasy is most effectively demonstrated in *Tea Ceremony 3* (illus. 93) where, wearing the uniform of an 'office lady' and a space helmet with antennas, Mori transforms herself into a woman from outer space and stands in front of an office building cheerfully serving Japanese tea. What makes this coexistence possible is Mori's smiling face, which is completely in tune with the act of serving. However, in her subsequent work the fantasy element branches off into two directions.

With silver hair and wearing pale green contact lenses, Mori appeared in Kansai International Airport as a futuristic fortune-teller or miko (*Miko no Inori, Link of the Moon*; illus. 94 and 95). The performance at the airport featured a dream-like, high-pitched hum and Mori handling a crystal ball inscribed with esoteric Buddhist text. Here Mori presents herself as an oriental woman who is not an object of physical desire but a goddess symbolizing spirituality or divinity. In the later classical version of this performance, *Nirvana* (illus. 96), Mori plays the part of a celestial nymph followed by alien musicians.

In one sense this work could be described as pure pop. And if foreign spectators were taken by Mori's performance, perceiving it as something sincere and embedded in ancient Japanese traditions, it would not be surprising if Japanese spectators saw the same performance as a dubious sham. Japanese people are so

95 Mariko Mori, *Miko no Inori* (Link of the Moon), 1996, video installation.

96–97 Mariko Mori, *Nirvana*, 1996–7, 3-D Video installation (projector, DVD player, screen, 3-D glasses, etc.).

used to seeing diverse looks and fashions exhibited by many of the subcultures that exist in Japan that, regardless of whether a costume is futuristic or classical, their response, even before recognizing her performance as a fantasy, would be one of indifference. Furthermore, if they did take notice, they would regard her appearance as far too mediocre for her to be perceived as a goddess. From their point of view, the performance could not be described as a spiritual experience. In other words, as far as Japanese spectators are concerned, the more intelligently Mori builds her performance into a futuristic fantasy, the more visually entertaining it becomes. However, below the playful spectacle of the surface (illus. 97), the work proffers a prototype of a sacred and futuristic shaman who, beyond the constraints of time and space, seeks to 'transcend our national boundaries and share one consciousness as global beings and life forms'.[5]

THE YOUNG GIRL AS A REVOLUTIONARY

There are many examples of young girls as the central character or heroine in Japanese science-fiction animation and *manga*. Mori's role-playing, for example, is strongly influenced by these. Alternatively, the spectator is reminded of these images through her work. In the 1980s, in particular, there was a definite shift in

such fantasies from the male hero to the female heroine. Examples of *anime* film and *manga* featuring a heroine include, for instance, *Princess Mononoke*,[6] *Nausicaä*,[7] *Sailor Moon*,[8] *Ghost in the Shell*[9] and *Aa! Megami-sama* (Ah, My Goddess).[10]

Targeted at both female and male audiences, the features common to these works are that the heroines are all young girls, they are cute-looking, but they have a sophisticated understanding of the world and a mature sense of judgement. They also possess some kind of spiritual power. Naturally, sex does not come into the equation. There is a practice in Tibet called *kumari* that involves the worship of a virgin goddess. One young, prepubescent virgin is selected annually and worshipped as a living goddess for one year. However, the young girl or the hyper-heroine depicted in Japanese fantasies, who is in a sense reminiscent of this worship of the virgin goddess, is not someone who is selected for her superior qualities. Instead, she chooses herself and of her own volition sets about saving the world.

Although the main characters in Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* and *Aa! Megami-sama* are perhaps too mature to be described as young girls, in these and *Patlabor 2*[11] Oshii depicts a female who is a completely different type of creature from those previously represented in popular culture. She is someone who is full of life and who doesn't lose her sense of identity within the system. Furthermore, what is unique in Oshii's work is that the female character's sense of justice is self-determined and unrelated to the mores of a nation or an organization.

GHOST IN THE SHELL: AN IDENTITY MODEL

The body of the principal character in *Ghost in the Shell*, Second Lieutenant Kusanagi, is destroyed as a direct result of her independent spirit, outstanding initiative and physical prowess. In the end, Kusanagi's body or 'shell' is replaced by that of a man. When she comes to, she discovers something unfamiliar between her legs and whispers that it will take her some time to get used to it.

As such, this is not so much a story about transgenderism as one about the creation of a third identity, a 'ghost' that continuously shifts between 'shells'. In other words, it is a story about a continuously shifting and transforming identity or gender. The distinction between the ghost (the spirit) and the shell (the body) depicted in this Japanese production and the Western concept of the spirit and the body is of particular importance. Unlike in Western thought, the ghost (or soul) is always able to migrate, while two ghosts can coexist inside one shell. The shell is merely a container or receptacle that holds the ghost.

This crucial difference of conception becomes clear if we examine examples of works by Western and Asian artists who have been influenced by the *Ghost in the Shell* model. The first example is the *Annlee* series that was embarked on by the

98 Pierre Huyghe, *Annlee, Two Minutes out of Time*, 2000 Beta digital video, 4 min.

French artists Philippe Parreno and Pierre Huyghe.[12] This series is based on an *anime* character of a nondescript young girl who is good for nothing. It was originally purchased by the artists from a Japanese *anime* company for only 40,000 yen. Under normal circumstances this character, called Annlee, would be used once or twice and then discarded, but through this series each artist breathes life into the character.

In this unique collaboration, Parreno and Huyghe have allowed this character to be used gratis by their artist friends. Three artists, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster (illus. 100), Liam Gillick and Rirkrit Tiravanija, are participants in this collaboration, and it is the various artists' depiction of Annlee that is of interest in this series.[13] For example Parreno, while revealing Annlee's innocent and sweet 'self' (as depicted originally in the Japanese *anime* character), at the same time depicts the transformed Annlee, with a blank, alien-like face, speaking against an almost monotonal background of blue and purple (illus. 99): 'I belong anywhere in the world. I have no ghost [spirit]. I am simply a shell.' Parreno therefore defines Annlee's existence through this project as one of restriction and containment. Meanwhile, Huyghe's interpretation emphasizes that Annlee's life lasts for just two minutes in his pessimistic footage (illus. 98) where the character states: 'I only exist while you are watching me in the film.'

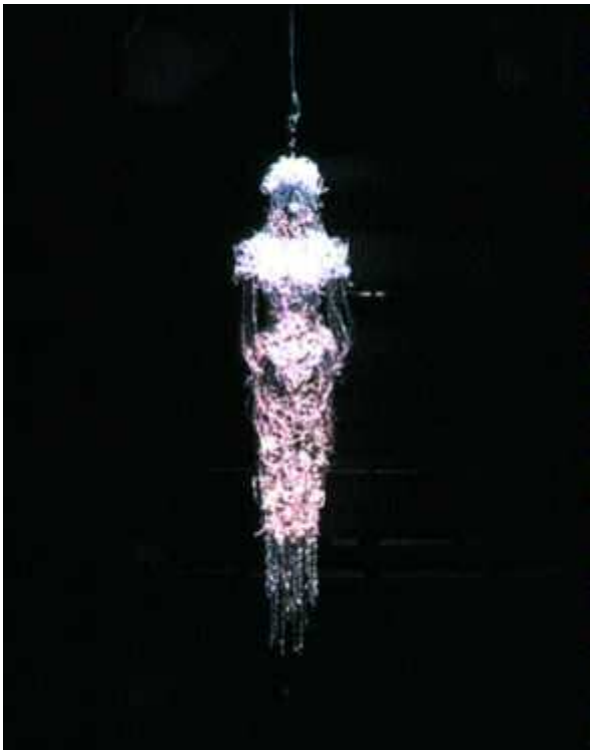
99 Philippe Parreno, *Annlee, Anywhere Out of the World*, 2000, DVD, 5 min.

100 Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, *Annlee in Anzen Zone*, 2000, DVD, 3 min. 25 secs.

In contrast to these French artists, the adaptation of *Ghost in the Shell* by the Korean artist Lee Bul is far more positive.[14] At the Istanbul Biennale of 2001, Lee Bul used a Roman underground reservoir as the venue for an installation combining several sculptures of cyborgs with images from *Ghost in the Shell* (illus. 101).

In this installation, the artist has attempted to depict the process of evolution through images of three different types of women. First, a goddess-like sculpture, entitled *Crush*, created with crystal beads, hangs from the ceiling. In the water below, projected images capture the moment of the cyborg being created and floating up from the pool as a new life form (illus. 102, 104). This transformation is visualized through four mechanical sculptures depicting typical cyborgs, each with sections of their heads and limbs missing. The installation ends with a work entitled *Apparition* (illus. 103) in which the mechanical cyborgs are dressed in elaborate garments, with monstrously wild hair. In all, the work therefore depicts the creation of life as cells come together; the new life form emitting a gentle glow; the process from the sign of life to the creation of the mechanical body and, in turn, to the blending of machine and monster with the contrasting footage of Kusanagi's head, destroyed and lying on the floor, and the head, transformed into that of a monster. In effect, Lee Bul actively utilizes the relationship between the ghost and its shell by depicting the transformation of images of Asia, woman and the thinking person into a grotesque being, a social misfit, and then into the solid presence of the object. And she presents this transformation as though this in itself is a prerequisite for existence. This is not the passive ghost spirit that resides in previous versions of Annlee, but a resolute ghost that migrates fearlessly between the shells of monsters and machines.

Ghost in the Shell has been adapted by these European and Asian artists and



101 Lee Bul, Installation, Istanbul Biennale of 2001.

102 Lee Bul, *Crush*, crystal and glass beads, nickel-chrome wire, aluminium. Istanbul Biennale of 2001.

103 Lee Bul, *Apparition*, 2001, crystal, glass, mirror, stainless steel beam, polyurethane. Istanbul Biennale of 2001.

104 Lee Bul, *Crush*, 2000, crystal and glass beads, nickel-chrome wire, aluminium. Istanbul Biennale of 2001.

interpreted differently through the depiction of the character of the young girl or young woman. However, in all the interpretations the figure of Annlee presents us with the potential that lies in the unknown and that is, at the same time, non-tyrannical. Arguably, the character of Kusanagi, who acts in response to commands, incorporates both these elements. However, within the context of this thesis, Lee Bul's interpretation is the most interesting in terms of expressing the potential for transformation and the act of remaining in an undetermined state.

Immaturity does not necessarily therefore signify innocence. In Japan, intentionally remaining in a state of *kawaisa* (cuteness), an undefined or indeterminate state in which 'determination' (maturity) is never reached, has the potential to perform a political function of undermining current ideologies of gender and power. It could also be interpreted as a deliberately oppositional image, which juxtaposes the idea of a complete identity (a Western sense of identity) with an incomplete or hollow identity, one in which hollowness or emptiness is a natural state, never to be filled.

The possibilities of a new relationship between the individual and the collec-

tive are currently under debate in Japan. If the three elements, man, money and materialism, have played key roles in the progress and development of twentieth-century civilization and simultaneously spawned considerable problems and sickness, these will eventually be replaced by new essentials. While coping with the problems inherited from the previous century, new directions will need to be sought to ensure spiritual and real-life survival in Japan and elsewhere. This quest will naturally lead to the new elements of collective consciousness, collective intelligence and coexistence. It is at this point that the word *kawaii* may, in the same way that the word *omoshiroshi* (funny, interesting) was once used, be able to take on an expanded function within the collective consciousness as a keyword that signifies all things interesting, all things that evoke a response. The excesses of consumerism and sexualized imagery, signified by the 'pink', may hopefully become the basis for a more encompassing, de-gendered and intelligent 'white'.

6 The Place of Marginal Positionality: Legacies of Japanese Anti-Modernity

MIDORI MATSUI

INTRODUCTION: ANTI-MODERNISM AND *ANGURA*

This chapter examines the significance of Japanese art's return to the indigenous structure of anti-modernity, as manifested in contemporary artistic expressions inspired by *angura*, a peculiarly domestic Japanese artistic movement that originated in the late 1960s. First, however, I must provide a context for anti-modern thinking in Japanese culture. The problematic nature of modernity has functioned as a powerful determinant in the formations of cultural movements and artistic expressions in Japan throughout the twentieth century. Since the inception of the Meiji government in 1867, modernization in Japan has unambiguously meant the acceptance and domestication of Western theories and aesthetics. While the rapid naturalization of Western technology and political systems equipped the country with the means to defend itself against military colonization in the late nineteenth century, the incomplete digestion of theories and partial preservation of pre-modern hierarchy in political, economic and pedagogical institutions produced a self-contradictory social structure in which utilitarian competition was encouraged, while the preservation of the overprotective structure of the Japanese family by public institutions prevented the development of individualism and original thinking.

The critique of such an incomplete development of modernity has always existed. In his lecture delivered in 1911, the novelist Natsume Soseki pointed out the superficial nature of Japanese modernization due to its forced nature. Commenting on the melancholic division of the mind among both intellectuals and the common people between their acceptance of Western institutions and their attachment to Japanese sentiments, Soseki interpreted the division as a tragic fate of the Japanese involved in the larger historical movement of modern Western expansionism.[1]

There also exists a more fundamentalist view of 'anti-modernity' in Japanese culture. Generally speaking, this view maintains that the indigenous Japanese sensibility rejects abstract ideas and rationalizing intellect, and achieves its fullest expression in language or aesthetic forms refined for the recapitulation of subtle emotion and sentiment. Its most typical manifestation can be seen in Yukio Mishima's *Bunsho tokuhon* (A Manual for Good Writing) of 1959. In his brief summary of Japanese literature, Mishima maintains that, since the formation of its national identity in the tenth and eleventh centuries, Japanese culture has looked to foreign philosophy for abstract ideas, conducting all public activities – whether political, socio-economic or officially educational – in an intellectual or bureaucratic language based on the translation of imported abstract ideas. Meanwhile, domestic Japanese speech, used in private life, was refined by women and popular writers to the rank of literature, as they recorded human activities from viewpoints privileging emotion, sentiment and passion.

Mishima argues that, owing to the long dependence on foreign philosophy and translation of its intellectual idioms, the Japanese language did not develop the ability to express the interiority of Japanese people in an appropriate way. Tainted by its physical or emotional associations, it remained ambiguous, unsuitable for expressing home-spun abstract ideas. Mishima argues that this division of Japanese language between the public, 'masculine' sphere informed by foreign ideas and the private, 'feminine' sphere closed in its sensuous autonomy has deeply affected modern Japanese literature.[2] The Japanese *Bildungsroman* is always incomplete because its male protagonist is divided by unreflective action and sensuality, lacking a balanced interior life. Mishima asserts that the best achievement of modern Japanese literature can be found in the works of writers who have inherited the 'feminine' characteristics of classical Japanese literature.[3]

Mishima's argument must be read against the cultural background of the 1950s, when the international appreciation of Japanese art was enhanced through the admiration of classical Japanese literature and arts. Nevertheless, even some contemporary scholars support a view that grounds a uniquely Japanese sensibility in an opposition to the 'rationalizing' principles of modern enlightenment. The Japanese literary historian Hideaki Mita, for example, maintains that, in parallel with the painful modernization of Japanese literature, a domestic spirit repeatedly reasserted itself in the works of Izumi Kyoka, Kawabata Yasunari and Tanizaki Junichiro, who sought to overcome the influence of modern Western 'patriarchal' culture by reasserting the pre-modern Japanese 'motherly' sensibility.[4] Like Mishima, Mita regards the principle of modernization as 'masculine', espousing the idea of linear history with economic and cultural progress propelled by intellect, and the

anti-modern principle as 'feminine', making little distinction between human and natural (or supernatural) realms, while embracing a multiplicity of time – a coexistence of different historical moments attaining reality through individual or collective memory.[5] In the formation of Japan as a modern nation, the 'female' principle, the body of culture, suffers a metaphorical violation. But it constitutes a deep reservoir of collective attachment that reasserts itself at the crisis of modern rationality.

The resurgence of the anti-modern spirit occurred when Japanese people cast doubt on the principle of linear progress. The defiance of rationalism, which supported public education and the middle-class work ethic, was accompanied by the evocation of the Japanese cultural past and domestic sentiment. Although this 'Japanese past' is in essence an imaginary entity reflecting a nostalgic Utopianism of the political dissenters, the revitalization of cultural memory in itself is neutral. According to each historical application, the return of the repressed Japanese 'body' can be made either regressive or liberating, reactionary or revolutionary.

The first occasion of such a return was the conversion of left-wing intellectuals in the 1930s to the reactionary ideology of Japanese imperialism. In *Nihon no shiso* (The Japanese Mind) of 1961, the philosopher Masao Maruyama ascribed this conversion to the dichotomy of the Japanese intellectual mind between an uncritical acceptance of Western influences and an emotional return to the domestic essence. The dichotomy, itself proof of the incompleteness of Japanese modernity, made intellectuals vulnerable to the sense of isolation from both Western philosophy and Japanese people at a time when Japanese imperialism clashed violently with Western policies. The tendency of Japanese pre-modern relations to dissolve difference in the 'eternal embrace' of the emotionally unified community only enhanced the intellectuals' regression to the imaginary Japanese past, pictured as an emotional and aesthetic totality.[6]

The second occasion for the 'return' in the late 1960s and the early 1970s was a more complex phenomenon. Following the failure of the political protest against the Japan–US Security Treaty in 1960 and 1970, and the repression of the students' protest against the authoritarian policies of Japanese universities from 1968 to 1972, the energy of Japanese youth ran to the production of underground dance and theatre, pornographic films and narrative comics. Reassertion of *nikutai*, or 'body', characterized each protest against rationalization. While the converted left-wing intellectuals of the 1930s embraced the mythified Japanese body politic embodied in the emperor, the forebears of underground culture in the 1960s and the 1970s cultivated the expression of the body as a fragile, existential entity susceptible to physical harm, historical pressure and emotional vicissitudes, as opposed to the well-balanced body based on the Western model, for example that of an athlete or a classical ballet dancer.

Angura, an abbreviation of 'underground', was the word attached to the artistic experiments of the 1960s which sought a palpable expression of contempory spirit in the realistic embodiment of the uniquely Japanese experience. Between 1966 and 1968, *angura* emerged and rapidly spread its influence like a contagious fever among Japanese youth.[7] In February 1966, the underground theatre Jokyo Gekijo, led by Juro Kara, which asserted theatre true to the 'privileged body' of the actor against the method acting favoured by the contemporary intellectual theatre, staged its first outdoor performance (illus. 105). In April, the *butoh* dancer and choreographer Tatsumi Hijikata, Kazuo Ono and others gave a recital in collaboration with contemporary artists including Natsuyuki Nakanishi and Genpei Akasegawa of the Hi Red Center. In November, Akasegawa was defending in court his conceptual art, reproducing a 1,000 yen banknote and sending it to his artist friends. In 1967 the playwright and poet Shuji Terayama formed his own theatre, Tenyo Sajiki; in these years the underground comic magazine *Garo* (initiated in 1964) sold a million copies.

In reaction to Japanese high culture's dependence on the translations of modernist plays and fiction, *angura* turned to domestic reality for material and inspiration. Art Theater Guild, a prestigious film society in Shinjuku which had introduced overseas avant-garde films to the Japanese audience, started the project of commissioning each Japanese director to make a film at the cost of a million yen. With emerging vanguard film theatres, memorable performances by Jokyo Gekijo and Tenjo Sajiki, and coffee shops and bars attracting young creators and critics, Shinjuku became the centre of Japanese *angura* culture. By the end of 1967, squatters called *futen* were seen living in the streets of Shinjuku and political demonstrations against the Vietnam War took place every Saturday in the piazza in front of the west exit of Shinjuku station.

In spite of its tremendous social influence and its indication of the revolutionary potential of pop or subculture, *angura* became quickly absorbed by the Japanese consumer culture of the late 1970s and the 1980s. This was partly due to the eclipse of political activism in the mid-1970s. Failing to prevent the renewal of the Japan–US Defence Treaty in 1970, left-wing students' and workers' coalitions such as the United Red Army disintegrated into endless infighting factions. The United Red Army Lynch Murder Case in 1972 embodied a catastrophic end to the new left movement. With forced political retreat, the disillusioned youth went into a process of soul-searching, which usually involved a regression to close human or sexual relations. Reflecting this milieu, the connotations of the word *angura* also changed. As independent theatres from the 1960s, Tenjo Sajiki, Jokyo Gekijo and Waseda Shogekijo, became major artistic institutions attracting audiences of thousands and touring abroad, the word *angura* was no longer applied to their work.[8] Still carrying

105 A poster for *Koshimaki-osen* (Osen of the Red Underskirt: the Forgetful Version), 1966, designed by Tadanori Yokoo.

106 Cover illustration of *Garo* magazine, no. 124 (December 1973). Seirindo, cover by Ohji Suzuki.

its countercultural connotation, the word *angura* became more strongly associated with the expressions of underground comics, singularly represented by *Garo* (illus. 106), which published the works of young cartoonists, lyrically depicting the details of their daily life with a sense of isolation and frustrated sexuality.[9] In this context, the word *angura* came to be vaguely associated with self-expression that deviated from economic and social success, asking for the approval of a limited audience.

During the 1980s, the refashioning of Tokyo as a post-modern capital of high consumerism and language games, a view boosted by advertising agencies and by such urban department stores as Parco and Isetan as purveyors of the Japanese New Wave, made *angura* unfashionable.[10] Nevertheless, underneath the intoxicated celebration of consumerism during the real-estate inflation in 1987 and 1991, alternative expressions refurbishing the *angura* spirit were slowly gaining a cult following. Surviving through the adverse years, thanks to the new editorial strategy of encouraging the 'anything goes' post-modern freedom favouring nonsense and wildly self-centred expressiveness, *Garo* was nurturing unique talents who expanded their spheres of activity in other subcultural media. Such cartoonists included Yoshikazu Ebisu, Shungiku Uchida and Takashi Nemoto, characterized by their absurd humour, unabashed exposure of the base and bestial drives in men, and drawing which appropriated the bold outlines of Japanese woodcut prints and the anarchic exuberance of street doodles (illus. 107).[11] The smart appropriation of *angura* taste

107 Takashi Nemoto, Cover of *The World According to TAKEO*, 'Monster Man Bureiko'/ Seirin Kogeisha.

was also apparent in the performing style of the techno band Denki Groove. Emerging in 1991 out of the alternative music scene, they performed Japanese rap to a computer recording of techno sound, mixing social satire with nonsensical word play, enhancing the carnivalesque milieu of their live performance with scatological jokes, sometimes even dressing up as characters from Japanese cartoons.[12]

Between 1991 and 1994, the popularity of these alternative expressions surpassed that of a small coterie. Their audience included urban college students and young businessmen, who came of age in the early 1990s when the 'bubble economy' burst. The fashionable consumption of bad taste between 1991 and 1995, characterized by an unexpected popularity of photographic books featuring dead bodies, indicated a resurgent interest in the human body in a perverse form typical of an age far estranged from nature.[13] Around 1995, an interest in the music, fashion and sexual expressions of 1970s' youth culture regained popularity among an audience in their twenties.[14] It was against this background that the new current in contemporary art, *Showa 40 nenkai*, or Group 1965, emerged.

Formed in 1995, Group 1965 is a loose group of artists born in the year 1965. In opposition to the appropriation of Japanese pop culture by the preceding artistic generation of New Pop, Group 1965 deliberately focused on the banal and temporary character of Japanese domestic life. Among its members, Makoto Aida, with his savage satire of post-war democratization, loathing of straight-laced middle-class morality, nihilistic acceptance of the absence of purpose in life and violent expressions of infantile or perverse sexuality, presents an interesting case in the genealogy of Japanese anti-modernism. While his peer Ozawa, whose referencing of objects and images such as the wooden milk box and *jizo* or Japanese road deity, indexing Japanese cityscapes that existed prior to a systematic urbanization since the 1970s, strongly refers to the activity of the Japanese avant-garde such as Hi Red Center in the 1960s and the introverted sentiment represented by *Garo* magazine, Aida shows more affinity with the anti-modern spirit governing the *angura* theatre and the cultural criticism made of Yukio Mishima in the late 1960s. His painting consciously reflects a world view and attitude similar to the one expressed by Mishima, as Aida himself frequently states in his writing.[15]

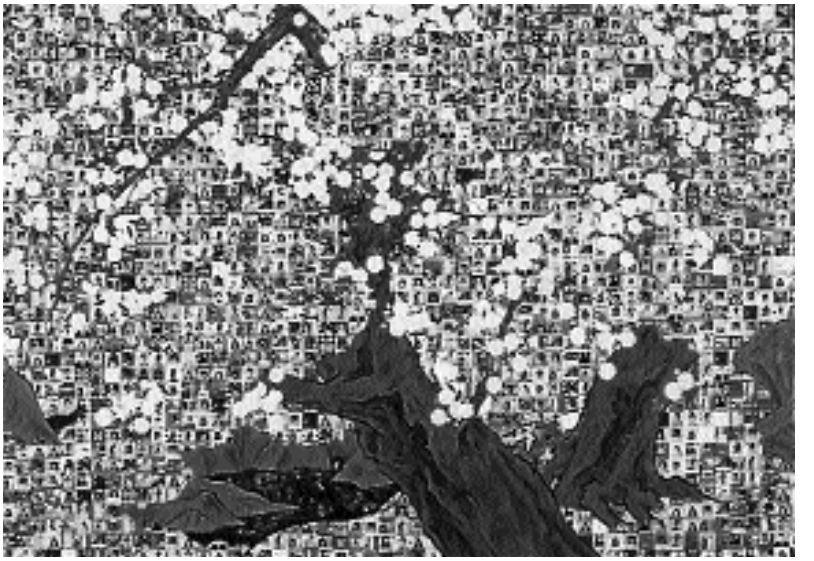
In the following sections I propose to survey the transformation of Japanese anti-modern thinking in the art of the late 1960s to the present by comparing Aida's anti-modern expressions with those of Mishima and Juro Kara. While Mishima's mythologization of Japanese imperialist spirit led to his reactionary politics and tragic death in 1970, Kara's dramatic representations of cyclically returning time, embodiment of the Japanese social structure as a suffocating 'maternal' womb, and dialectic opposition of regressivity and idealism, make his conscious return to the Japanese past an occasion for its transcendence. A comparison between Aida's

108 Makoto Aida, *The Giant Member Fuji versus King Gidra*, 1993, acetate film, acrylic, eyelets.

endorsement of the marginalized, tabooed and concealed underside of Japanese democracy and consumer culture and Kara's repeated engagement of the 'abject' memory of modern Japanese history – the sentiment of common people traumatized by their aborted expansionist hope at the end of the war – will reveal the increasing difficulty of maintaining a dissenting spirit in the 1990s. If I succeed in delineating the agony of the Japanese mind caught in the contradiction of incomplete modernity through my genealogy of *angura*, this essay will serve its modest function.

SAVING CULTURAL TRASH: THE SATIRICAL VIOLENCE OF MAKOTO AIDA

Since his official artistic debut in 1993, Makoto Aida has impressed his audience with his violent attacks on bourgeois decorum. This installation centred on *The Giant Member Fuji versus King Gidra*, a gigantic painting of a woman in uniform being violated by a many-headed space dragon (illus. 108). The painting was a parody of a popular children's sci-fi flick, *Ultraman*, and Katsushika Hokusai's erotic *ukiyo-e* print. Mixing contemporary Japanese popular icons with the conventions of traditional Japanese paintings, Aida presented a similar strategy to that cultivated by Takashi Murakami in his 'super flat' aesthetic.[16] But while Murakami's mixture of classical decorative design and eccentric drawing of Japanese animation emphasizes the con-



109 Takashi Murakami, *SMP2Ko², Second Mission Project Ko² mega-mix (human type)*, 1999, oil, acrylic, fibreglass and iron. Installation view at Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh. © 2002 Takashi Murakami/Kaikai Kiki. All Rights Reserved.

110 Makoto Aida, *Uguisudani-zu* (Picture of Uguisudani), 1990, panel, sex phone call cards, Japanese mineral pigment, acrylic.

tinuity of the anti-mimetic orientation typified by playful distortion of nature in the pre-modern and post-modern Japanese pictorial expressions, Aida uses the classical design and framework in order to comment on the unchanging popular interest in pornography. Compared with Murakami's appreciation of stylistic analogy maintained beyond time, Aida's flaunting of the abject and the sexually subversive subject matter indicates his iconoclasm and attraction to such elements of human life ostracized from the spheres of respectable artistic activity.

Murakami's simulation of the erotic drawing of an *anime* enthusiast, or *otaku*, in his own painting and sculpture, most typically *SMP2Ko²*, attempts to sublimate the raw projection of *otaku*'s infantile sexuality into an aesthetic form (illus. 109). In other words, the pornographic image is treated by Murakami as a material for cultural analysis and decorative transformation into fine art. Such a rational treatment of the irrational product of the libidinal drive is precisely the one that Aida rejects. For example, in his early piece *Uguisudani-zu*, a parody of an ornamental folding screen showing cherry blossoms painted on a layer of gold leaf, Aida replaced the gold leaf with prostitution adverts collected from telephone booths in Uguisudani, a downtown section in Tokyo (illus. 110). The juxtaposition of vulgar adverts and beautiful cherry blossoms ironically reflected the degeneration of the once elegant site, adored by the Tokugawa shogun for its extravagant cherry blossoms and the exquisite song of nightingales, into a run-down quarter dominated by the Japanese mafia. At the same time, the sheer quantity of prostitution ads dazzles the eye, just as they do filling the telephone boxes like latter-day cherry blossoms, communicat-

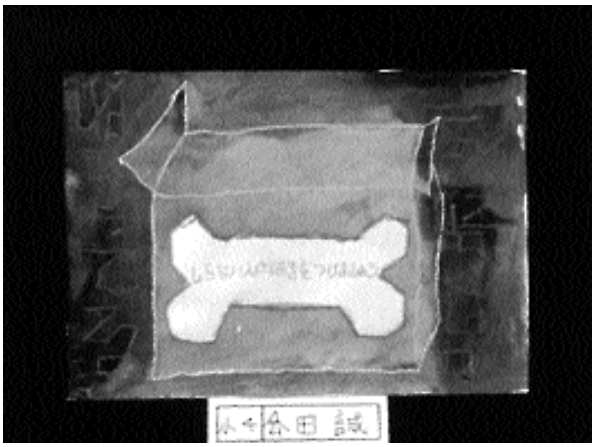
ing the raw energy of unrefined sex and the vitality of the people who live there.[17]

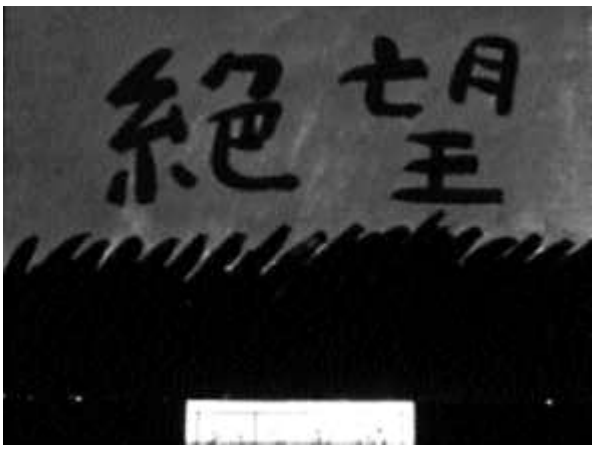
The discursive articulation practised by New Pop made the domestic representation open to international art criticism. Conversely, it is their insistence on the untranslatable Japanese domesticity that made Group 1965 acceptable to those unable to relate to the smart strategy of New Pop. Group 1965's general lack of irony in documenting the regressive or infantile aspect of domestic entertainment, such as karaoke, made their work comforting to young adults who came of age during the period of economic recession. This audience, growing up with the promise of unfailing economic prosperity, saturated in TV culture, confronted the bust of the economy in 1991 as a betrayal of history. Their disillusionment with Japanese socio-economic systems also made them sceptical of urbane snobbism and unctuous cultural analyses.

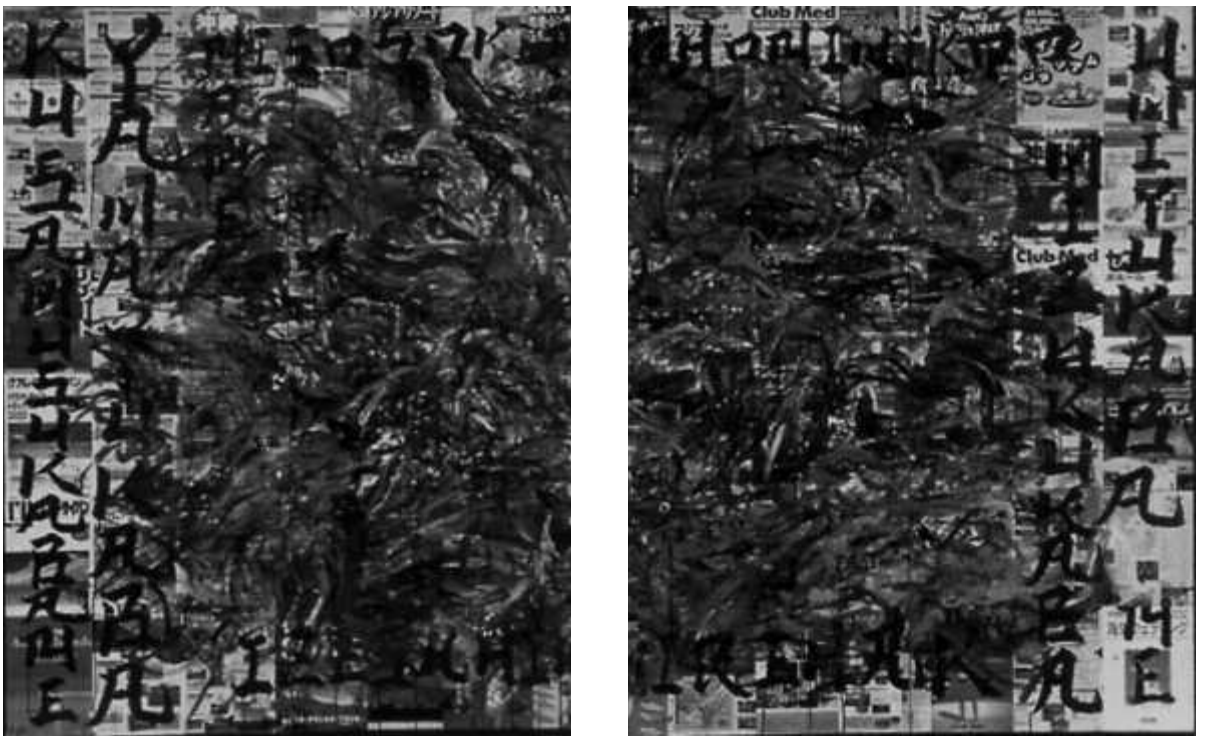
Characterized by a relentless satire on the hypocrisy of moral hygiene, Aida's early works demonstrate anger, nihilism and sardonic humour. *Posters: a Series of 18 Works*, which parodies the public posters with didactic statements that children are made to create at elementary school and junior high schools, demonstrates a poisonous humour, insinuating how they are programmed into cheap idealism and self-righteousness through their indifferent use of big words and parochial messages. Aida's mean and exaggerated use of stereotypes in depicting 'outsiders' reveals how easily children's sensibilities can be tainted by the adult bias (illus. 111–113). References to the actual case of serial murder of little girls by an *anime* enthusiast, discrimination against foreign workers and bullying reveal the illness, unease and neurosis of a time in which the enormities produced by social and historical contradictions cannot be appeased by feel-good humanism.

The series of paintings entitled *Sensoga Returns* (*War Picture Returns*) of 1995–6 present, in the most accomplished form, Aida's critique of Japanese modernity. By borrowing the style of the war paintings that eulogized Japanese imperialism during the Second World War and for that reason were erased from post-war Japanese art history, Aida attempts to reflect on the grotesque complacency and hedonism in contemporary Japanese culture. The purpose of this juxtaposition of the past and the present, as he states in his description of the series, was to set the origin of the 'degenerate culture in which we grew up', at the end of the Second World War.[18] While their subject matter is based on episodes from the Second World War, the styles of *Sensoga Returns* vary from the representational style reminiscent of Tsuguji Fujita's meticulous depiction of the large-scale massacre (*Beautiful Flag*) to an eclectic incorporation of compositional patterns from three different classical Japanese paintings which present an old Kyoto cityscape, a great fire consuming a city, and a thousand cranes flying in the air (*Picture of an Air Raid on New York*). The anachronistic format of folding screens slyly indicates the complicity between

111–113 Makoto Aida, three of the *Posters: a Series of 18 Works*, 1994, drawing papers, gouache, pencil, crayon, oil marker etc.
The 4th grade: 'Mr. Miyazki is aiming at you.'
The 5th grade: 'Keep the town clean.'
The 9th grade: 'Despair.'



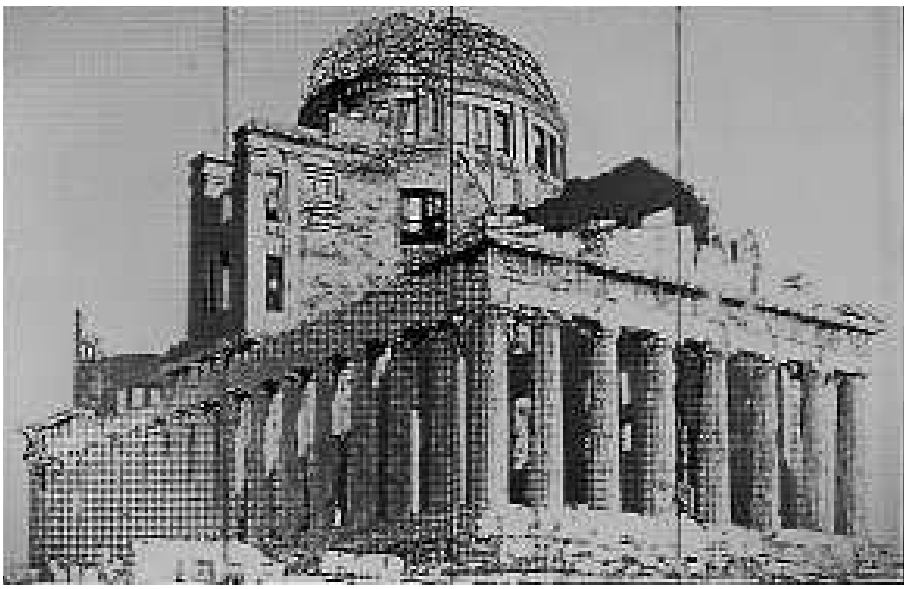




114 Makoto Aida, *Ohkimi no henikoso siname* (Let's Die at the Emperor's Feet) (War Picture Returns), 1996, four-panel sliding screens, hinges, vacation pamphlets for Pacific islands, including Okinawa, excluding Hawaii, oil, watercolour, sumi.

Japanese imperialism and *nihonga* – the Japanese-style painting invented in the late nineteenth century as a means of modernizing in a synthetic form pre-modern schools of classical Japanese painting.

Every painting in the series ironically contrasts the ravages of war and the lukewarm humanitarian attitude of the present day, similar to the 'post-war democratic spirit' through which Japanese people have absolved themselves from the evil, violence and romanticism of the war. *Do One Good Thing a Day!* presents Emperor Heisei's 1992 visit to China in a style which parodies that of the popular *nihonga* painter Ikuo Hirayama, famous for his 'Silk Road' paintings. The title refers to the slogan of the Japanese motorboat race organization run by the ex-merchant of the imperial war. *Ohkimi no henikoso siname* (*Let's Die at the Emperor's Feet*) juxtaposes dead dolphins and bodies of Japanese soldiers who died in the southwestern islands of Guam, Saipan and Okinawa (illus. 114). They are violently painted on travel-agency ads, accompanied by the lyrics of a popular song broadcast during the war to encourage dying for the emperor. The dolphins refer to the contemporary incident of their mass suicide on Kyushu beach and the hysterical attack of international ecologists on the local fishermen eating them. *No One Knows* (illus. 115) superimposes the image of the Atomic Bomb Memorial Dome in Hiroshima, the only authentic Western-style



115 Makoto Aida, *No One Knows the Title* (War Picture Returns), 1996, four-panel sliding screens, hinges, vinyl tablecloth, enamel. Private collection (Tatsuo Nishi).

architecture in the district, and the Parthenon, revealing the irony of Japanese modernization culminating in atomic bombing and the destruction of its monuments.

In these paintings, the separate moments in history are connected by one image which exposes the gap between the past and the present. The banality and populism of the present scene enhance all the more the nihilism evoked by the ironic outcome of Japanese participation in large-scale modern warfare, as an ultimate consequence of its forced modernization. The most problematic picture of the series, *Picture of an Air Raid on New York*, shows the city of New York ablaze, above which Zero planes fly, drawing an infinity sign (illus. 116). Its superfluous decorativeness reveals the combination of violence and erotic passion to be the driving force of the imperialist war.

Sensoga Returns was not made with the purpose of inciting nationalism. Aida's purpose was to use the negative outcome of Japanese modernization as an occasion for criticizing the hypocrisy of post-war democracy, and the tainting effects of its uncritical continuation of 'incomplete modernity' on the present Japanese consciousness. Absorbed in economic reconstruction, post-war Japanese society has neglected to reappraise the meaning of the Japanese participation and defeat in the war, evading the debate about whether it is inevitable to shape Japanese society according to Western models. As Aida remarks on the irony of post-war transformations – most shockingly exemplified by the 'drastic refashioning of Nihonga, created as an aesthetic alibi of modern Japanese imperialism, into a vehicle of humanism cor-

116 Makoto Aida, *Picture of an Air Raid on New York* (War Picture Returns) 1996, six-panel sliding screens, hinges, Nihon Keizai Shinbun, black and white photocopy on hologram paper, charcoal pencil, watercolour, acrylic, oil marker, correction fluid, pencil etc., (CG work by Mutsuo Matsuhashi).

responding to the postwar democratizations of the Japanese imperial family' – he recapitulates Mishima's views expressed in his later writing. In fact, Aida's feeling of 'vertigo' at the transformation of the southern islands, the site of massacre, into tropical resorts attracting Japanese tourists, as expressed in *Ohkimi no henikoso shiname*, resonates with the conclusion of Mishima's last novel, *Tennin gosui* (The Decay of the Angel): 'A gigantic Coca Cola signboard appears toward the end of the novel; it makes me cry to think that this is the way that the grand four-part narrative that started with a beautiful love story set in the early 20th century has to end.'[19]

Aida's attitude expressed in *Sensoga Returns* recaptures the spirit of Mishima's cultural criticism expressed in his 1969 essay 'Bunka boei ron' (A Defence of Culture), published a year prior to his quixotic and abortive attempt at a military coup d'état and death by *harakiri*. In it, Mishima denounces the 'false prosperity of contemporary Japanese urban culture called *Showa genroku*', which 'lacks great authors comparable to the real *genroku* – the 18th century masters like Basho or Chikamatsu – overrun by flashy pop culture and consumerism, while fine sentiment and powerful realism decline'.[20] Mishima blames this sterility on the Japanese government's cultural policy, which he calls *bunka shugi*, or the programme of reifying culture. Mishima describes *bunka shugi* as:

> . . . the tendency to separate culture from the vitality of the bloody womb and sexual intercourse which gave it life, in order to evaluate culture according to humanitarian and humanistic achievements. In this context, culture is made into something harmless and pretty, a common property of humankind – like a fountain in a public plaza.[21]

Mishima traces the origin of this attitude to the cultural policy of the Occupational Government and its continuation by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Education, which separated Japanese cultural expression from the spirit or sentiment that infused it (for fear of its association with pre-war imperialism), privileging separate cultural products and such harmless activities as flower arrangement and tea ceremony. Mishima finds that policy fundamentally utilitarian, like the builder of a dam that traps water in a narrow confine to prevent its overflow and uses its small portions for practical purposes, as well as consumerist. In fact, he sees complicity between 'the dead museum culture' that preserves cultural products, separate from its cultural spirit, as a 'common property of humankind' and 'the dead consumer culture', both promoting the outlook of a 'rational and peaceful' civil life.[22]

For Mishima, Japanese culture is fluid. Rather than adhering to a lasting object, it favours the transmitting of its spirit through performance and style of action, constant renewal or replacement of its vehicle, as symbolized by the rebuilding of the Ise shrine every twenty years. For this reason, Mishima says, Japanese culture does not favour the original over the copy, since a copy becomes an authentic vessel for the spirit; this attitude is manifest in the poetic convention of *honkadori*, the appropriation of an idea or rhetoric of a past poem by a present one, adopted in the Japanese poetic form called *waka*. Because there is always a subversive element in this attitude that equates culture with action, he states, the spirit of Japanese culture is repressed by the project of modernity, which he regards as a sterile aesthetic fixated on the idea of the individual fulfilment, 'rejecting the fluid idea of culture that subsumes individual identity under the continuity of a collective cultural spirit'.[23]

Although hardly embracing Mishima's imperialist assertion, Aida receives Mishima's influence in his thinking and his artistic application of *honkadori*. His parodic reference to a past style transforms the original by bringing a contemporary perspective to it. The distortion brought to the original by Aida's present perspective precisely reflects the relation between the past and the present. Written for the educational magazine *Vinta*, a series of Aida's essays entitled 'Let's Think Negatively' also reinforce his affinity with Mishima's thinking. In each essay Aida criticizes conformity to bourgeois moral codes, the nominal privilege of higher education and the obsessive democratic process of providing mediocre 'wealth' and 'happiness' to everyone (forcing everyone to achieve the same kind of happiness).[24]

The marriage of Aida's critique of Japanese modernity and the return to an *angura* spirit occurs most conspicuously in his self-published comic *Mutant Hanako* (1997). Created as an extension of *Sensoga Returns*, it presents a fantasy about the Japanese triumph over America in the Pacific War achieved by a teenage Japanese girl, who is violated but transformed, in atomic radiation, into a superhuman

117 Makoto Aida, cover for the *Mutant Hanako* comic book, 1997.

warrior, saving Japan from its enemies in exchange for her life.[25] The comic, drawn in a rough, doodling style reminiscent of Takashi Nemoto's 'vulgar comic', blending pornography, violence and absurdity, amalgamates space opera and anti-American fantasy (illus. 117). Aida's uninhibited depiction of raw sexuality and aggression embraces a viewpoint similar to that presented by Nemoto that 'human desire and instinct are irrational and base, but baseness provides man his power to live'.[26] Nevertheless, *Mutant Hanako* is not entirely free of right-wing ideology. In spite of its deliberate infantilism, it conveys Aida's nostalgia for the romanticism attached to the eternal Japanese female and his desire to intervene in the course of Japanese history dominated by American production and consumer principles. This mixture of an oppositional critique of social conformity and a right-wing fantasy is a unique property of Japanese anti-modern imagination. The dramaturgy of Juro Kara provides a powerful example of the *angura* return to domestic reality for the search of the Japanese body, and its sublimation by his critical engagement of post-war Japanese history.

JURO KARA: A DIALECTIC REINSTATEMENT OF JAPANESE *KAWARA*

A founder of Jyokyo Gekijo, one of the earliest and the most successful underground theatres of the 1960s, Juro Kara has produced an impressive body of plays, essays and novels which demonstrate his revisionistic philosophy and world view as well as his dynamic theatrical methodology. Jyokyo Gekijo, or Crimson Tent, the first theatre to perform plays outdoors, in a crimson tent pitched in such diverse venues as the garden of the Hanazono shrine in Shinjuku, the plaza in front of the west exit of Shinjuku station, by the side of Shinobazu Pond in Ueno, and the *Yume no shima* (Dream Island), the site irrigated for the dumping of Tokyo's garbage, had a tremendous impact on the young urban audience while posing a threat to the municipal government and the police (illus. 118). Collaborating with the painter Tadanori Yokoo and the film-maker Nagisa Oshima between 1966 and 1969, Kara became one of the most radical initiators of the Shinjuku *angura* culture; his theatrical activities in the 1970s extended to a tour of the Japanese islands, to Okinawa, Korea, India, Palestine and Brazil.[27] By the mid-1970s he was recognized as the most influential contemporary dramatist, with his theatre becoming a cultural establishment of its own. There is insufficient space here to give justice to Kara's complex and prolific achievements. I will limit my discussion to the explanation of fundamental ideas of his theatrical production, including his idea of *kawara*, or riverbed; his theory of the privileged body; his engagement of the memory of Tokyo's vacant lots and seedy alleys as a contemporary *kawara* to evoke the landscape immediately after the Pacific War; and his dialectical juxtaposition of the defeated idealism of Japanese expansionism and the domestic Japanese reality, fleshed out in his plays in the 1960s and the early 1970s.

The *angura* theatre movement in the 1960s was formed as an attack on the 'sanitized humanism and the communist self-righteousness' of the pre-existing intellectual theatre that repressed 'base' human instincts.[28] For its own practice, *angura* aimed at reintroducing an active human body and language true to contemporary domestic reality. Learning *butoh* dance from Tatsumi Hijikata, Kara nurtured a specific theory of performance based on the 'privileged body'. The 'privileged body' was primarily based on the eccentricity of the actor's body with its peculiar history that gave a role its inevitable and irreplaceable character.[29] Kara frequently shaped his dramatic roles according to the eccentricities – 'privileges' – of his actors and actresses, who repeatedly played variations of the same prototypes.

Kara's plays in the 1960s expressed a mythical world view through an allegorical narrative structure, supported by two opposing principles, which alternately dominated two cycles of plays. One cycle developed around the character Long John Silver, based on the attractive villain of R. L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island*.

118 Poster for Juro Kara's Crimson Tent, *Nito Monogatari* (The Tales of Two Cities), designed by Katsuhiko Oyobe, 1973.

Representing the 'masculine' principle of adventure and idealism, Silver is a Godot-like figure whose return or second coming is passionately awaited by the common people. The second circle centres on the woman named Sen (the Chinese character for her name meaning 'shamanistic power'), who comes to destroy people's illusion about Silver. Appearing first as a beautiful girl or boy, and transforming herself into a bare-breasted seductress clad in a crimson loincloth, Sen embodies the 'female' principle that binds people to their instinct and reality, her strength deriving from the primary water of the maternal womb.[30] In spite of the heavy symbolism, the ideological functions of Sen and Silver ambiguously intermingle and change places. While Silver, a symbol of outward expansion and individualism, endlessly withholds people in their limbo-like state divided by a wish for transcendence and a frustrated attachment to petty life, Sen's destruction of illusion enables them to live their life as a conscious choice.

The dialectic intertwining of two principles in Kara's plays reflects his idea of the opposition between modern civilization and pre-modern (anti-modern) existence. It is in the latter that Kara sees the origin of the performing arts. In his essay on the essence of performing arts, Kara argues that while civilization is propelled by the desire to build high towers – 'to build a phallus-like tower penetrating the sky in order to dominate the space' – popular performing arts tend to go down to the 'lower

place'.[31] He argues that the 'lower place' signifies a topos of collective Japanese memory, 'a place or a thing we have forgotten in the irreversible process of historical progress'. Kara claims that performing art is driven by the desire to revisit this 'lower place', which he calls *kawara*, the riverbed, where Japanese kabuki actually originated.[32] Kara explains that, *kawara*, from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, was a place where social outcasts and the disinherited went down to throw themselves into the river; instead, they turned around at the riverbed, assuming a new identity as performers. In short, *kawara* was the place of rebirth; as its topological deviation from the civilized place made *kawara* the 'outside' of socio-economic rules, people could shake off their learned restraint to live with physical immediacy.

In Kara's mythical topology, *kawara* is related to the female principle represented by Sen, simultaneously an emanation of the violated Japanese soil (maternal body) and a goddess inspiring imagination. This double function of the 'female' in Kara's play reflects his typically anti-modern view of Japanese culture. In his essay entitled 'What Cities Have Forgotten: Sewer Water Runs Beneath Culture', Kara observes that the modernization of Japanese urban space is conducted through the burying of rivers and canals; soaring skyscrapers conceal water. Water is a regressive image symbolizing suicide and amniotic fluid, related to the memory of pre-modern Japanese existence. Kara asserts that Japanese culture rediscovers its strength in this marginalized place of regressiveness. While building high towers merely follows the principle of progress defined by Western modernity, the proximity to the ground and water provides Japanese with a 'dandyism of descent'.[33] 'Descent' here means a deviation from the values of modern, enlightening civilization, recovering one's contact with contemporary domestic reality and reviving the memory of the past as a prototypical model through which to reflect critically on the present. While founding his dramaturgy firmly in the 'body' of Japanese pre-modernity, Kara does not idealize the pre-modern experience. Rather he consciously uses the physical immediacy of the 'premodern' female principle in order to cure the lack of self confidence in Japanese intellectual culture. Thus he maintains that an aesthetic true to Japanese reality will be forged only through confronting the horror, or 'idiocy', of the Japanese collective unconscious.[34]

Kara's world view and aesthetic are fully embodied in his performing style: staging his mythically structured plays in the womb-like interior of the crimson tent. His theatrical time juxtaposes the years during the Second World War and moments in the 1960s, indicating the eternal return of time and the present moment's containment in the unresolved frustration and hope of the Japanese people participating in the War. Kara makes repeated references to Manchuria, the phantasmal kingdom built in the northeastern wilderness of China by the Japanese military government, and Korea, which embodies Asia violated by Japanese expansionism, regarded by Kara as a twin sister to the maternal body of Japanese culture. The ghosts from the imperialist past,

reappearing in the marginal corners of Tokyo in the 1960s, such as in a public toilet, break open the scars of failed Japanese modernity. Kara's allegorical method and ideological message dynamically transform the imperialist views presented by Mishima into an ambivalent drama. Kara's purpose, again, is not to defend Japanese nationalism. Rather, his relentless portrayal of the aborted romanticism of Japanese expansionism during the War, recapitulates its grotesque parodies in the desperate activities of post-War characters, recapitulates the frustration of the common people; consoling those who naïvely embraced the Utopian illusion of the Japanese expansionism and were most bruised by it.

The ambiguous nature of Japanese expansionism is dynamically portrayed in such masterpieces of his early period as *Ai no kojiki* (Beggar for Love) of 1970, *Kyuketsuki* (Princess Dracula) of 1971, *Nito Monogatari* (The Tales of Two Cities) of 1972 and *Umi no Kiba* (The Fang of the Sea) of 1973. In these plays alluding to the tortuous relation between Japan and Manchuria, or Japan and Korea, the heroine – always played by the actress Li Reisen – amalgamates the multiple roles of a victim of the masculine expansionist will, the complicitous partner of its idealism, and a trans-historical personality who redeems the sins of Japanese modernity. She is a shaman who connects separate historical moments, a ghost whose appearance brings back the nightmare of the imperialist years, causing wonder and catastrophe in the present.

In *The Tales of Two Cities*, for example, a Japanese girl from the Korean colony arrives in Tokyo in 1972. In search of a reincarnation of her Korean stepbrother, killed by a Japanese soldier in 1942, she confronts the middle-aged children of the soldier she killed in retaliation, the ghosts returning from Korea in search of their lost national identity. The first stage appearance of these men emerging from the muddy water of the Shinobazu Pond in Ueno, by which Kara pitched his tent, reflects Kara's vision that Japan and Korea are connected, not separated, by the water of the Genkai Sea in the north of Kyushu Island (illus. 119).[35] In the theme and the physical structure of these plays, Japan and Korea interpenetrate and mirror each other: blood relatives bound by the inextricably mingled forces of love and hate.[36]

CONCLUSION: FRAGMENTATION OF VISION AS A SIGN OF TIME

Kara's dynamic representation of modern Japanese contradictions is a product of his genius and his compassion toward the Japanese body. At the same time, his artistic feat is propelled by his historical advantage of creating in a period of great cultural ferment. Sharing Kara's and Mishima's critique of modernity and their allegorical method of reflecting on the present through evocation of the past, Aida cannot provide an equally powerful vision that replaces the stagnant institutional and consumer culture. If his artistic output and social impact are considerably diminished

119 *Nito Monogatari* (The Tales of Two Cities), April – August 1972. Minakami Ongakudo, etc. Juro Kara, Crimson Tent, outdoor performance at Shinobazu pond in Ueno.

from those of his predecessors, this is partly due to the cultural condition of Japan in the 1990s. His age, driven by the rapid consumption of every artistic style, including that of counterculture, makes Aida refrain from making any consistent prediction for the future. The present revival of the *angura* taste itself is tainted by ambiguity. While its evocation of the Japanese 1960s and '70s reflects the desire of the youth of the 1990s to regain contact with nature (body) beyond their artificial environment, the uncritical consumption of the styles of past youth culture, whose immaturity was not corrected but merely repressed by the consumer culture of the 1980s, makes the audience susceptible to the negative return of the repressed. As the journalist Koichi Yamazaki has pointed out, the arrogant assumption of the contemporary public that they could skim a temporary pleasure off the deadly sincerity of 1970s' subcultural expressions without considering the negative outcome of its idealism or regressive introversion, triggered the widespread popularity of New Age religious cults, including Aum, which caused the poison gas incident in the Tokyo subway in 1995.[37]

In his statement for a group exhibition at Mizuma Art Gallery in 1999, which reflected on the activities and meaning of the alternative magazine published by himself and his art-school peers, *Shiro kuro* (Black and White), Aida defends his iconoclastic standpoint:

> Privileging of the rationalistic attitude that strictly distinguishes between black and white only enhances dogmaticism and discursive

120 Makoto Aida, *Utsukushii hata* (Beautiful Flag) (War Picture Returns), 1995, pair of two-panel sliding screens, hinges, charcoal, self-made paint with a medium made from Japanese glue and acrylic, (part of the idea owing to Hiroyuki Matsukage)

> closure. In order to maintain culture in a healthy balance, occasional breach of this rule should be tolerated. In the present time in which fine art seems to be lost in a dead end, adopting various methods of self-expression, unconstrained by theories, may be liberating.

This relativism reflects the self-consuming effect of Aida's 'nihilist' position that 'indicates its philosophy in the negation of philosophical articulation', itself a response to his perception of 'the futility of modern civilization based on the enhancement of a humanistic vision', which he claims he learned from the writing of Mishima.[38] Aida's elaborate descriptions of the motives behind the creation of *Sensoga Returns* betray his sinister sympathy with the essentially anarchistic nature of the Japanese involvement in an anti-modern discourse. Japanese imperialism and its defeat fascinate Aida because its madness and futility capture the fundamental human passion that 'disrupts the balance of one's reasonable perception of the world'. Aida calls that passion 'love' or 'beauty'.[39] In his description of *Utsukushii hata* (Beautiful Flag; illus. 120), the original piece that inspired the entire series of *Sensoga Returns*, painted on a folding screen where – facing each other – the panels present a Japanese and a Korean girl in their national school uniforms and holding their respective national flags (uncannily reminiscent of Kara's representation of Japan and Korea mirroring each other), Aida states:

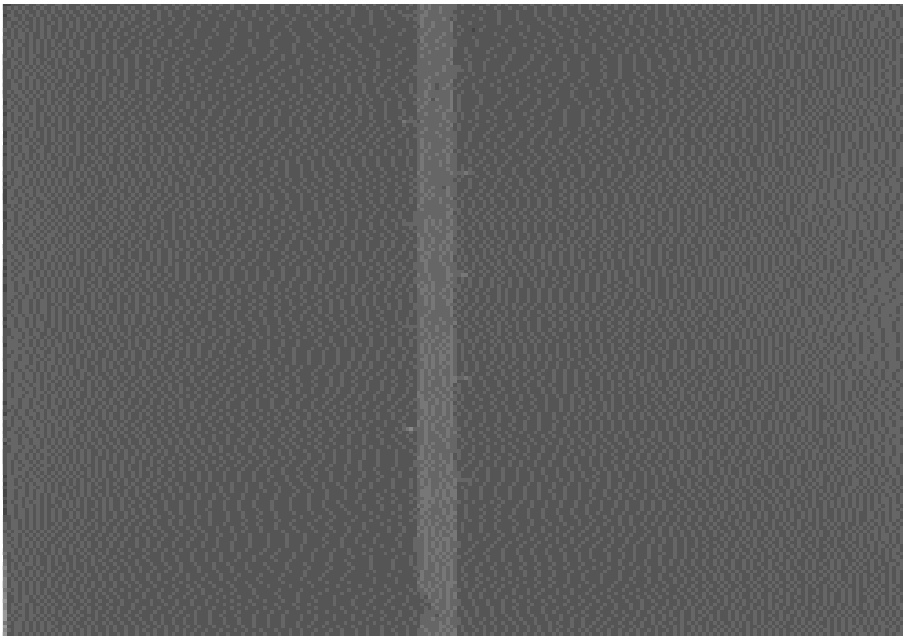
> I maintain that human egotism breeds itself where there is beauty; I also believe that human beings cannot live in the world without beauty.

121 Makoto Aida, *Aida Line*, window display at Takashimaya department Store, Shinjuku, Tokyo, 1997, rented mannequins, old-fashioned pink bicycle for housewives, cloth (Soviet flag), school uniform, jersey, helmet, sneakers, swimwear for school girls, T-shirt with unfashionable design, glycerin, three pieces from the artist's 'Poster' series, etc.

> 'Beauty' here also means 'Eros'. In this broad interpretation of human desire, I acknowledge the inevitability of war, discrimination, and bullying because they are caused by this erotic drive. Without recognizing this, there's no coming up with an effective way to prevent them. I think that the hysterical idealism enforcing the slogan of 'love and peace' merely confuses the situation.[40]

Such an argument, astute in its recognition of the inherent aggressiveness of the erotic drive, is untenable in the field of high culture still dominated by humanistic morals; the increasing globalization of economies enhances a standardizing view of human nature, relegating its vicissitudes to the marginalized domain of the underground. Lacking a larger socio-political field in which his idea of beauty as violence can attain an effective expression, Aida's art turns regressive. In his recent art projects, Aida makes his lame resistance to global consumerism by pointing out the outmoded and abject aspects of contemporary life, as in his 1997 window display for Takashimaya department store, which juxtaposed the Soviet flag with a figure of a girl clad in an unhip school uniform (illus. 121). The mild sense of discomfort incited by the work fails to carry its satirical poison beyond the cynicism of an isolated dissenting subject.

In his willed marginality, Aida's work embraces the spirit of *angura*, the Japanese countercultural turn to domesticity, in a quite different way from Kara's. Nevertheless, his *angura* application is not merely nostalgic. His is a self-limiting nationalist position that knows the impossibility of pushing its cultural critique toward the essentialist position taken by Mishima, it also lacks Kara's dynamic imagination, which creates a poetic vision of the past harrowing to the present



122 Makoto Aida, *Untitled*, 1990, acrylic on panel.

consciousness . Expressing its nationalistic conscience in his refusal to conform to the intelligible logic of contemporary art, Aida's art is imbued with the sadness of a latter-day counterculture that cannot express its commitment except through the gestures of refusal. Still, it maintains its positionality as a testimony to the dilemma of Japanese modernization. It is sustained by the will 'to reveal the meaning of the behaviors and phenomena the institutional art had deliberately ignored'.[41]

This marginalized element is no other than the 'unique Japanese interiority', which cannot be expressed in an official 'masculine' language based on the translation of foreign abstract ideas. For Aida, this sense of interiority is deeply connected with his unique definition of 'Nihonga'. Far from the degenerate convention which he rejects, Aida's *nihonga* is 'a way to live, a world view, a fragile entity, almost an illusion, that exists only in a personal experience of being moved by something'.[42] Aida once confessed that he had realized his idea of *nihonga* in an untitled painting in which his meticulous technique was superfluously applied to the depiction of a cicada on an electricity pylon (illus. 122); choosing the most banal and insignificant of the materials, in a manner in which virtuosity is suppressed in favour of modesty, Aida succeeds in projecting his idea of immanence.[43] After making his confrontation with the problem of Japanese modernity in *Sensoga Returns*, Aida continues to search for a new vehicle for immanence. In this, he plays his function of a contemporary chronicler of Japan's incomplete modernity, holding the regressive sensibility of his time at a dangerous proximity.

7 Tokyo's Urban and Sexual Transformations: Performance Art and Digital Cultures

STEPHEN BARBER

The explorations of performance-art media in Japan over the past 40 years have pursued combative strategies towards their two principal preoccupations in consumption and sexuality, each located within an urban context of rapid transformation. Many of the cross-media approaches in the work of individual performance artists or groups of artists in contemporary Tokyo draw upon the durable influence of the cultural situation in the city at the end of the 1950s, in which art works were often assembled for one performance only, as ephemeral amalgams of photography, film, choreography and improvised music. Each performance was inflected both by the riotous situation of the surrounding city, as immense demonstrations amassed in order to protest against the renewal of the US–Japan Security Treaty (perceived by its opponents as subjugating Japan to the cultural, social – and sexual – imperatives of the United States, as well as to its military objectives), and by the dynamic sexual flux of the city, as entire districts of Tokyo experienced an intensive sexual upheaval, with the construction in areas such as Shinjuku of multi-storey concrete blocks filled with clubs and bars devoted to every nuance of sexual experiment. Performance art at the turn of the 1950s and into the 1960s took place in a context of escalating sexual furore, within an encompassing urban culture where the close rapport between sexuality and commerce had always possessed a strong – though often spatially peripheral – presence. The performance art of the period, though transient in form and not intended to prolong itself beyond the moment of its own event, existed within a more durable framework of sexual and commercial interaction.

In a number of ways, contemporary Tokyo carries the residue of that volatile mixing of multiple cultures of sexuality, protest, art, commerce and urban change, though the exterior forms of the city which held that mix have been long supplanted and the raw creative energy (which many of the participants of the performance-art cultures of the late 1950s and 1960s perceived as potentially revolutionary

and certainly unprecedented) has entirely disappeared. On the surfaces of contemporary Tokyo, the rituals and visual screens of consumption seem at first sight to have definitively taken the upper hand in the intervening decades and to have relegated sexual culture to rigidly segmented and repetitive systems of human behaviour and perception, within which any notion of aberrance is already permissible, nullified and so rendered obsolete. Much of the performance art undertaken in contemporary Tokyo reflects the city's imageries of codified or pure repetition in which sex and consumption are magnetically paired together, in visually spectacular and lavish – but concurrently void – forms and acts.

However, Tokyo carries a scattering of cracks in the apparently invulnerable digital code that transmits its urban consumer culture, in which pervasive images of sex function as a kind of perpetual neural overload – which the city exists to incite and then to immediately defuse. Any journey outwards from the areas of concentrated consumption that form an intractable barrier or carapace around the western approaches to central Tokyo – in the forms of the districts of Shinjuku, Harajuku, Shibuya and Ebisu – brings the eye up against the suburban expanses of the city, which extend out seamlessly for many miles on end in the form of commuter dormitory settlements, comprising dense conglomerations of near-identical apartment blocks, punctuated only by tracts of over-illuminated convenience stores: Lawson, Seven-Eleven, Sunkus and Family Mart. Whereas the central districts of the city convey a powerful visual texture of intense sensory attractions, the visually drained suburbs (populated briefly in the mornings and evenings by commuter workers heading for or returning from each district's railway station and otherwise almost deserted, surrendered largely to the aged inhabitants of the suburbs) intimate only brief apparitions of unhurried action, framed at each side of the day by great rushes of exhausted human figures. The sexual imagery which the centre of the city projects relentlessly is almost entirely absent in the intricate alleyway forms of the suburbs, and the empty spaces instead articulate the underlying human tensions and corporeal implications of the commuter lifestyle, with its frenzied and endlessly repeated transits through clogged urban space, eased only by the reading of erotic *manga* comics.

To the east of the central districts of Tokyo there appear urban landscapes that are entirely divergent from the suburban homogeneity of the western dormitory areas; the saturation of sexual images within the media thrall of the city's centre is utterly alien in the destitute peripheries of eastern Tokyo. Along the walkways of the River Sumida, long swathes of blue plastic tents accommodate human figures lost through the economic fissures of contemporary Japan. In the adjoining district of San'ya, home to innumerable cheap hostels for impoverished day workers, even the basic level of advertising imagery and the usually ever-present convenience

stores lose their grip on the surface of the city, which can erupt in San'ya into an uncontrolled riot of vocal languages and disruptive acts otherwise extinct in contemporary Tokyo. The homogeneously Japanese population of the city also splinters to some degree in such areas of the city, with populations of Iranian and Indian menial workers existing alongside other tenuous inhabitants of the city from Korea and the Philippines. To the north of Shinjuku, in the district of Shin-Okubo, the centre of international prostitution for the city brings rapidly replaced populations to the streets, with transient women and men transported from Eastern European and South American countries, the pimps constantly adapting to the changing caprices of their clientele. And even within Shinjuku itself – the lurid heart of Tokyo's consumer culture – networks of cardboard cities proliferate among the subterranean underpasses of the district's vast railway station (the miniature houses are often painted on their exterior surfaces with meticulous representations of the houses' inhabitants, their figures standing against urban backdrops of the Shinjuku corporate towers and the district's 47-storey government building). Beneath its initially visible surface skin Tokyo forms a more shattered arrangement, whose intricate systems of power, sexuality and inclusion – together with the anomalous absence of those systems – all contribute to the visual and sensory arrangement of the city.

The peripheral zones of Tokyo form the particular axis of the work of the Kaitaisha performance-art group, which also resonates with equally peripheral imageries of European urban and sexual cultures, and with those cultures' rapport of opposition or oblivion towards corporate and consumer media.

The link between the contemporary moment and the past is essential but elusively multiplicitous in Tokyo. In particular, the connections between the city's contemporary performance-art culture and that of the end of the 1950s and the 1960s carry that multiple and often intangible history. In some respects, contemporary performance-art practitioners in Tokyo are deeply aware of the collaborative, cross-media experiments of the late 1950s and 1960s which prefigured a number of the vital concerns of contemporary work, particularly in its adoption of a three-way confrontation between digital imagery, the human body and the urban arena. But the material traces and evidence of that prior performance-art culture are often sparse and dispersed, not least because of their in-built combustibility and of the derision of that culture for ideas of repetition or permanence. It is a culture that is transmitted to the contemporary world through fragments of images, rather than through a complete documentation. Whereas the work of parallel European performance-art movements of the 1960s such as the Vienna Action Group – seen as highly provocative, obscene and illicit in its time – has been the subject of extensive catalogues, retrospective exhibitions and government honours, Japanese performance art of

the period has not received the same degree of exhaustive documentation or valorization.

One of the numerous cross-media collectives or groupings of artists which began organizing performances in Tokyo at the end of the 1950s, the '650 Experience', staged their intermittent events in hired clubs and other improvised spaces, for small audiences. The participants of the flexible group included several who would become seminal figures in the experimental culture of the following decade, notably the choreographer and artist Tatsumi Hijikata (1928–1986), the poet and film-maker Shuji Terayama (1935–1983) and the American expatriate writer and film-maker Donald Richie (*b*. 1924). Each participant contributed work in many media, and the identification of the artists through one primary activity was momentarily rendered unnecessary. The events possessed an explicit hostility towards processes of representation, and many of the performances have survived only in the form of tattered handouts or posters. Hijikata – still perceived in Japanese performance media as crucial for his extraordinary capacity to organize innovative collaborations between writers, film-makers, artists, photographers and musicians – pursued a preoccupation with corporeal upheaval that gave a particular focus to the experiments. The late 1950s and early 1960s were a period at which aspects of European culture formed a strong inspiration within Tokyo's own creative cultures, especially through the theories of the French writer and film-maker Antonin Artaud (1896–1948) and the work of the novelist and film-maker Jean Genet (1910–1986). Genet was notorious for his imprisonments and Artaud for his asylum incarceration, and these influences imbued the '650 Experience' performances with a self-projected aura of social resistance, sexual experimentation and criminality (illus. 123). The participants would also leave Tokyo and stage performance events on the beaches to the east of the city, at Ohara and Kujukurihama.

In the face of such artistic strategies – incorporating elements of opposition and negation, and the exploration of an imagery of the human body through a kind of intensive cross-media furore – the contemporary cultural memory of Tokyo's performance art of the 1950s and '60s is necessarily fragile and multiplicitous. In the autumn of 1997, the Japanese art museum in the city of Mito staged an exhibition around visual arts in Tokyo of the period 1960–64, with an emphasis on performance-art cultures.[1] The poster for the exhibition showed an aerial photograph taken of the Japanese National Diet Building (or parliament) in Tokyo on the day of the most prominent demonstration against the renewal of the US–Japan Security Treaty, in May 1960 (illus. 124). In the photograph, the entrance to the pyramid-topped parliament building is barricaded by a double row of lorries, while many thousands of demonstrators converge on the building from every direction. The roads in front of the parliament building run at right angles to one another but at

123 *Tatsumi Hijikata with Riot Police*, Tokyo, 1969, performance.

124 Poster for exhibition, *Japanese Summer: I Don't Give a Damn Anymore!*, Mito Art Tower, 28 August – 28 September 1997.

oblique angles to the front of the building itself. As a result, the mass of converging bodies forms an immense and distinctive 'X' shape, with its centre located precisely at the gates to the parliament building, as though in the act of inflicting its own mark of summary negation upon the political power of the country.

The empty first room of the Mito exhibition also evoked the performance-art culture of 1960s' Tokyo through visual images of its counterpart in urban unrest, with film loops projected on the bare walls, showing the streets of the city burning and coursed with rampaging human figures. The second room was filled with video monitors in which contemporary interviews with the participants of art movements of the era were simultaneously transmitted, in a kind of sonic babel of memory, into the museum space. Since many seminal figures of the time such as Hijikata and Terayama had succumbed to liver disease (the great occupational hazard of the alcohol-fuelled Japanese avant-garde) in the intervening decades, the ranks of potential interviewees had been severely depleted. In subsequent rooms, reconstructions of art works of the period (the originals having often been destroyed by the artists shortly after their construction or been composed of materials which had rapidly degraded) were assembled in an attempt to gather some tangible residue of a performance-art culture which had almost entirely evanesced.

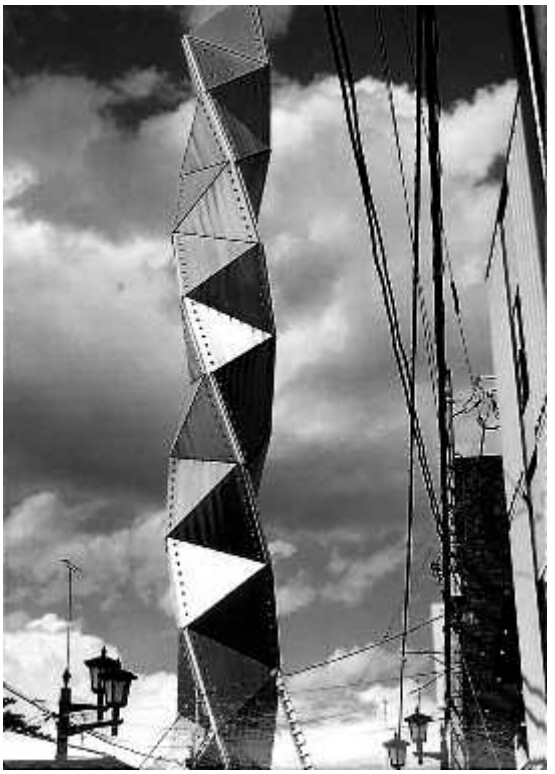
The performance-art culture of 1950s' and '60s' Tokyo possesses both an inbuilt uncollectability and a relatively peripheral or opaque status in Japanese museology. As a result, imageries of the time that carry into the city's contemporary performance-art culture tend to be isolated works able to seize the creative exhilaration of the era in short bursts or through idiosyncratic strategies of documentation. Examples of such works are the short Super-8 films – employing multiple superimpositions, rapid camera movement, scratched celluloid and a jagged editing style – which the young film-maker Takahiko Iimura made of performance events in Tokyo in the early 1960s. In the area of photography, the documents which perhaps best convey the immediacy and sexual imperatives of the performance-art cultures of the time are those images in which naked or cross-dressed human bodies career through the city streets, as in the photographs which the American photographer William Klein included in his 1964 large-format city-book *Tokyo*, and in the work of the photographer Eikoh Hosoe, who has been the most persistent and sensitized recorder of Tokyo's performance-art cultures from the late 1950s through to the present day.

The space of performance art in contemporary Tokyo forms a determining element, especially given the ways in which the city, its memory, history and media all intractably accent every art event. The innovative strategies adopted by a group of artists such as those associated around 1960 with the '650 Experience' still survive in a modified form, since contemporary art performance in Tokyo comprises an

often rigorously commodified and delineated entity, with performances staged in venues attached to large department store corporations or in sanitized museums. The imperative to create oppositional or distanced spaces continues to incite a degree of improvisation and flux in the way in which artists collaborate across media – and especially extend performance art into the field of digital media – in order to generate fragmented imageries of the corporeal, psychic and sexual tensions that run through Japan's incessantly transforming urban arenas.

The era of financial ascendancy in Japan in the late 1980s led to the building of a proliferation of contemporary art museums across the country. The prestige that a city could gain from the presence of a prominent art museum and the way in which that prestige could then enhance the city's corporate culture were primary factors in the suddenness with which contemporary art venues saturated the urban landscape of Japan at that time. (The swift financial upswing on which this wave of constructions rested proved to be precarious: a number of contemporary art museums closed down during 1997–8, the most catastrophic years of corporate instability and financial uncertainty in Japan's recent history.) The art museums were often owned by – and named after – vast business conglomerates whose other holdings, such as commuter railway networks and department stores, accumulated in the same areas as the museum spaces. Notoriously, considerations of what materials the museums could actually collect and display manifested themselves only after the buildings' completion.

The design and novelty of the museum buildings also proved crucial to the ways in which urban centres or business complexes could attract attention to their often out-of-the-way location. For example, the Mito Art Tower, where the exhibition surveying performance art in Tokyo from 1960–64 was held, is situated in a small and otherwise undistinguished city – arranged largely along one long main street, with its axis in a node of multi-storey department stores – in Ibaraki prefecture, to the north of Tokyo (illus. 125). The art centre was designed by the architect Arata Isozaki, best known outside Japan for his 'Team Disney Building' in Florida and his Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, as well as for the outrage generated by his plans for the reconstruction of the area around St Paul's Cathedral in London. Isozaki witnessed the wartime devastation of the Japanese cities in his early teens and participated in the intensive cross-media creative furore of late 1950s' and early 1960s' Tokyo. His design for the Mito arts complex centred upon an elongated metal tower (equipped with a lift and an observation point at its summit) whose striking form is visible throughout the city; the luxuriant galleries of the museum are supplemented by a wood-panelled concert hall and other lavish performance spaces. The entire complex emanates a fluid meshing of visual arts culture with corporate culture and urban prestige.



125 Mito Art Tower, Mito, September 1997, designed by architect Arata Isozaki.

In Tokyo itself, the close contact between the spheres of visual arts and of business conglomerates, and the implications of that rapport for performance-art culture, can sometimes appear less seamless and more raw. However, the rapport between art and corporate culture is rarely seen in contemporary Japan as one of direct contradiction. Very different imperatives and perceptions are at stake in Japan as opposed to, for example, Germany, where an artist with strong countercultural or anti-institutional preoccupations might hesitate to accept a corporate honour such as the I. G. Metall art prize. Even the Japanese *zaibatsu* (family-owned conglomerates operating simultaneously in many different spheres of business) which, in previous incarnations, supported the militarist build-up and colonial expansion of 1930s' Japan, carry little or none of the enduring stigma attached to those German corporations which participated in the slave and death camps of Nazi Germany. In the Tokyo district of Ikebukuro, to the north of Shinjuku, the east and west sides of the area's main railway station are owned by rival corporations, each of which controls vast multi-storeyed department stores for young consumers – Seibu and Tobu – together with commuter train networks (whose termini are located adjacent to or directly beneath the department stores) and art spaces. Kaitaisha's 1997 perfor-

mance *Zero Category* took place in a small venue designed for experimental performance events in the basement of the spectacular Tokyo Metropolitan Art Space edifice, part of the Tobu corporation complex, which also incorporates a large concert venue and areas for the display of two-dimensional art works (illus. 126 and 127).

To some degree, the strategies and concerns prevalent in the performance culture of Tokyo in the late 1950s and in the 1960s have mutated into a contemporary situation whereby far vaster audiences are now receptive to the preoccupations of such works, but in which the cross-media flexibility that characterized that earlier period has largely dissolved; each component (performance, music, film) has become filtered out and assigned to a different space within the encompassing structure of a vast corporate arts complex. Performance-art events need to take place within such prominent venues as the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Space in order to achieve a certain degree of media visibility (contemporary Tokyo is as competitively saturated with artists as it is with image screens); and a performance event which confronts the financial and sexual power of consumer cultures necessarily finds its imageries accentuated by its actually taking place within the domain of a particular corporate complex – which itself habitually benefits from the exchange by charging high rental fees for the use of its art venue and, in any case, remains blissfully oblivious to any challenge carried by the event.

Nevertheless, alternative spaces for performance art exist in Tokyo, often in the peripheral areas far beyond the consumer heartlands of Shibuya, Shinjuku and Ikebukuro. As at the turn of the 1950s, such spaces are ephemeral venues – more habitually used as factories or nightclubs – in which performance art exists alongside and often entangled within the parameters of music, choreography, experimental theatre and cinema. Within these spaces, the direct connection with the cross-media explorations of 1960s' Tokyo has endured to some degree, since a number of the entrepreneurs or producers who coordinated arts events at that time still operate in contemporary Tokyo. The entrepreneur Hironobu Oikawa, for example, began organizing collaborations between performance artists, musicians and film-makers at the beginning of the 1960s, as part of the Japanese response to such movements in Europe and the United States as Fluxus (the early 1960s were a period of intensive international movement and conceptual cross-fertilization between Tokyo and New York, Paris and West Berlin, with many Japanese artists and film-makers, such as Yoko Ono and Takahiko Iimura, operating principally between Japan and the United States).

Under the aegis of his cross-media organization in Tokyo, the 'Scorpio Project', Oikawa continues to curate one-off collaborative events – structured around an often caustic preoccupation with Japan's consumer, sex and media cultures – between young performance artists such as Mari Tanigawa (illus. 128), artists

126–127 Kaitaisha, *Zero Category*, 1997, performance, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Space.

128 Mari Tanigawa, untitled performance, June 1998, Terpsichore Art Space, Tokyo.

working in digital media such as Masahiko Kurashima, and noise-musicians such as Keiji Haino. Mari Tanigawa performs in shredded, layered remnants of Tokyo's instantly obsolete fashions, obsessively manoeuvring an expansive debris of consumer products which envelops the floor of the performance space; that excessive mass of objects evokes both the slowly accumulated possessions of the Tokyo homeless and the rapidly discarded possessions of the city's near-professional young consumers. The 'Scorpio Project' events form potentially volatile, multiple and certainly irreplicable works. However, this direct historical continuum in Tokyo's performance-art culture is nearing its point of extinguishment, since the surviving producers or entrepreneurs able to sustain the concerns and cross-media forms developed at the beginning of the 1960s and adapt them to the world of contemporary Tokyo are now rare. Such events and spaces are aberrant presences in the vastly homogenized city, simultaneously deeply archaic and vital.

Kaitaisha possess a degree of notoriety in the Tokyo art world, where their projects (incorporating elements of performance art, digital media art, Artaud-inspired experimental theatre, choreography, cinema and social manifesto) have been viewed as exceptionally difficult to categorize or define, even within a city whose post-war cultural history has been distinguished by a high level of volatility and transmutation in the visual arts. The emphasis in their work on an imagery of incessant corporeal struggle – always placed in intimate juxtaposition with images resonant of urban media power and its implications for the human body, for sexu-

ality, and for the spectator of the performance – also opens up a distance from the more insular, self-absorbed preoccupations that are more habitual in performance art in Tokyo. On the other hand, the participants of the Kaitaisha project – ten or twelve young performers, centred on one 'creative director' – form part of a more familiar framework of culture in Tokyo, where cross-media groups of artists almost invariably collect around one, usually male, dominant figure (as, for example, was the case with the '650 Experience'). The dynamics of the power system within which such artistic groupings in Japan operate are often as opaque as the social power structures that the groups seek to probe or challenge.

Kaitaisha's performances take place two or three times each year in Japan (almost always in Tokyo itself), with occasional appearances at arts festivals in other East Asian countries and in Europe. Their project is an ongoing one, with each performance forming a tangential continuation of the previous one. As with many other Japanese performance art groups of the past 40 years, their work presents itself as utterly unprecedented and unlinked to any other artistic project, while at the same time attempting to form a kind of combative and acerbic mirror to the sexual, media and corporate cultures of urban Japan and beyond.

The intended internationality of the Kaitaisha project itself reflects the way in which Japanese performance art (and Japanese culture in general) seeks to position its explorations outside of a limited frame of reference. The verve with which Japanese visual culture spills out into the international arena forms a provocative and productively unsettling force, with particular implications for the ways in which contemporary art is perceived in Europe and the United States. (In Japan, perhaps because of the riotous intensity of 1960s' visual arts culture or the sheer disrecognition of disciplinary boundaries, the preoccupation with the idea of international avant-garde or innovative cultures remains a vital and compelling concern in a way that is unknown anywhere else in the world.)

The creative flux between Japan and Europe certainly transmits sensorial insights in both directions and sends inflexible preconceptions and apparent contradictions into liberating freefall.[2] The proximity of art, sexual and consumer cultures in Tokyo generates an intimately entangled mass of images within which even those art projects with an explicitly oppositional rapport to corporate culture find the traces of that culture deeply embedded in their work. The titles or subtitles of Kaitaisha performances (rendered prominently in English on their advertising posters and other promotional materials) – such as *The Season of New Abjection* and *Into the Century of Degeneration* – themselves carry reverberations of the Tokyo consumer culture in which department-store carry-bags are imprinted with intricate but maladroit philosophical statements in a capricious mixture of English and French (illus. 129). In particular, the impact of twentieth-century French philosophy

129 Kaitaisha performance flyer for *Zero Category*, 20–26 October 1997, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Space.

on Japanese culture has been considerable, extending flexibly and unexpectedly through every domain. For example, the 'abject' corporeal matter probed in Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* is transposed entirely in Kaitaisha's work into the field of undifferentiated consumer matter. And the rigid stratification of relative values which is applied to intellectual and consumer cultures in a country such as France becomes utterly levelled in Japan: when Jean Baudrillard lectures in Tokyo, the event takes place in the Parco multi-storey department store in Shibuya.[3]

However, Kaitaisha's work also sets out independently to examine more precarious areas of urban life to which corporate cultures are hostile presences; the peripheral spaces of Tokyo – as surely as parallel spaces in European cities – carry zones of exclusion for poor, alien or inassimilable populations. For a period in the early to mid-1990s, the group worked on performances based around the idea of a 'Tokyo ghetto', dismantling the conception of the then economically vibrant and confident Japan as being inhabited purely by an ethnically homogeneous – and homogeneously wealthy – population. The group's 'creative director' Shinjin Shimizu summarized their preoccupations: 'Our creativity is based on an acute criticism of society, which can sometimes translate to social issues including racism,

identity in the refugee context, political pretension and hypocrisy.'[4] Most of Kaitaisha's early performance events had been presented in small venues or improvised outdoor locations such as ruined factories, as though the participants had themselves been excluded from inhabiting a visible space in the cultural arena of the city. Images for performances were gathered on the participants' journeys on foot around the edges of Tokyo, through districts in which the habitual visual system of the city's consumer centres had been suspended. Such exposure to a more corrosive, hazardous system of compulsive staring and enforced invisibility had served to determine the ways in which performers and spectators would evade or engage with one another. Shimizu described these origins of the *Tokyo Ghetto* performances:

> Two years ago, I found myself lost in a certain district of the city. There, people were skinning the animals . . . I felt countless eyes staring at me, through the opening in the surrounding wooden fence. I was not able to stare back.[5]

The group's projects also probed the corporate and political power of Japan and its sexual consequences, developing a repertoire of corporeal gestures indicative of power struggles (for example, human bodies incessantly thrown from one anonymous figure to another or beating one another to the point of exhaustion) which were subtracted from a specific social and historical context, and presented in their raw state – as movements intended simultaneously to incorporate the gestures of consumption, of sexual acts and of political control. In the performance space, the participants' hooded faces and otherwise near-naked bodies carried a dense content of power, as well as evoking the performance experiments which the artist and choreographer Tatsumi Hijikata had undertaken in the early 1960s with similarly black-hooded figures (the celebrated photographs taken by William Klein of Hijikata's street performances had rendered that iconography a familiar reference point for Tokyo's performance art). However, the danger of such stripped-down work lay in projecting potentially incoherent imageries of violence or subjugation to its spectators.

Later in the 1990s, Kaitaisha began to use layers of pre-existing visual imagery – archival film and digital images – in their performance work in order to give a more explicit dimension to their representation of power. Archival film of such events as the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and the American occupation of Japan and of more recent conflicts in East Asia all worked directly to infuse historical imageries of inflicted power into the performance, while digital images of contemporary cityscapes in Eastern Europe and Japan served to exacerbate the tension between physical or sexual acts and corporate or media imageries. The eventual

130 Kaitaisha, *Zero Category II: The Season of New Abjection*, August 1998, performance, Art Sphere, Tokyo.

development of Kaitaisha performances in large art venues at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s brought these imageries to the forefront, in the forms of multiple video monitors in the performance space and film-image projections over the performers' bodies.

The most recent performances by Kaitaisha in Tokyo have taken place in such venues as the Art Sphere, a newly constructed venue intended for performance works incorporating a high degree of interaction between digital media and human movement (illus. 130). The Art Sphere is located on Tennoz Island, one of a number of islands along the sides of Tokyo Bay which mostly came into existence through sustained programmes of land reclamation. The most spectacular of these artificial islands is Daiba Island, a huge space alongside the Rainbow Suspension Bridge at the north end of Tokyo Bay, where a monorail originating in one of the city's central business districts links a succession of extravagant corporate complexes, multi-storey hotels and department stores, arranged around an artificial beach; the Fuji Television Centre (the headquarters of a private television channel), in particular, possesses a large art museum on the top storey of its extraordinary metal-fronted building, in which contemporary artworks generated by digital technologies are placed alongside collections of works from European modernist art movements such as Surrealism.

Such art and performance venues as the Tennoz Island Art Sphere indicate the future direction of art exhibition in Japan, as well as its potential fragility. The

immense costs incurred in the construction of such privately owned venues require the sustaining of a lucrative art market and of a performance culture able permanently to generate compelling new work, as well as the continual existence of an engaged (and usually very young) audience eager to attend such art events. In such a situation, financially induced artistic innovation is an imperative demand placed on Japanese contemporary visual culture with an urgency perhaps unparalleled since the European Renaissance.

Kaitaisha's performance at Art Sphere explored the contradictions of creating cross-media performance art within a context in which such English-language vocabulary elements as 'degeneration' and 'abjection', together with oppositional imageries depicting corrupt political systems, sexual subjugation and the exclusion of vulnerable communities, all form part of an enveloping and uniquely powerful consumer culture.[6] But contradiction forms a thriving and vital principle in Japanese visual culture, and the necessity of locating flaws within the apparently seamless media screen of Tokyo remains a crucial project for contemporary art in the city. The Kaitaisha performance took the form of movements of figures across the performance space, interspersed with the projection of historically resonant film and of images of concrete-block suburbs and corporate towers. The confrontations between the figures in the performance space comprised sequences of relentlessly repeated, violent embraces (resonant of those designed by the choreographer Bernardo Montet for Claire Denis's 1999 film about foreign legionnaires in the deserts of Djibouti, *Beau Travail*). The human figures were surrounded by a detritus of images and objects from a moribund consumer society; they performed gestures of power from which any specific association had been drained and to which any content could be reattached. The sexual acts presented in the performance oscillated between those suggestive of the acts undertaken in Tokyo's subterranean sex club culture – accompanied by a sonic cacophony – and a more tense, corporeally demanding sexuality, unresolved and poised in silence between extinguishment and fury. Finally, the very performance extinguished itself in exhaustion.

The future of performance art in Tokyo hinges upon the contrast between the contemporary moment densely occupied by the event and the survival of the traces – objects and images and memories – left by the performance. In the case of the performance-art culture of late 1950s' and early 1960s' Tokyo, the dearth of surviving material or documentation is in itself an articulate witness to the irreplicable vibrancy of the events within their moment. Exhibitions tracing that period, such as the exhibition at the Mito Art Tower and another at the Ikeda Museum of Twentieth Century Art in Ito,[7] presented little tangible trace of the events: torn posters and Super-8 film fragments. The major exhibition *Out of Actions: Between Performance*

and the Object, staged at the Isozaki-designed Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles in 1998, indicated the crucial position that film had played in the international performance art of the 1960s (this was particularly the situation in the work of the Vienna Action Group, where artists such as Otto Muehl produced film documents of many performances, including those with a strong sexual content which were staged in private or for invited audiences). Contemporary artists such as Shinjin Shimizu point to filmic documents as their primary source of engagement with the performance culture of 1960s' Tokyo, but also to the creatively inciting, even elating, void or absence left by such a lack of evidence of the events.

The filmic documentation of 1960s' performance art was rarely undertaken for explicitly promotional or commercial purposes, either in Japan or in Europe: celluloid copies of the films of Otto Muehl, for example, were acquired by independent film cooperatives (such as the London Filmmakers' Cooperative in Britain) and very occasionally projected for members over the subsequent decades, while films of 1960s' Japanese performance art possessed a similarly fragile status within the country's experimental film culture. Film works were often conceived as forming part of the performance event itself, reflecting its impact on the spectators' perception and their sensorial capacity to view and experience all or only part of the event. Such documents have only achieved a new degree of prominence with the attention directed on the period by art museums from the mid-1990s.

The documentation of contemporary Japanese performance art possesses a completely different form and dissemination. Every performance is rigorously and completely documented in the medium of digital video (a notable feature of Tokyo performance events is that there are often more people filming the event than watching it), and the resulting documents form an essential part of the way in which the work is presented to the international performance-art system, via internet transmissions or promotional packages disseminated by galleries or producers. In terms of the cultural history of Tokyo's performance art, the film-maker Takahiko Iimura now possesses a unique if peripheral status, since his body of work extends from Super-8 film documentation of the performance-art culture of early 1960s' Tokyo (intermittently subjected to censorship in the intervening decades because of the films' record of sexual acts), through to contemporary digital image installations based around the corporeal and facial manipulations induced by digital technology, and their implications for the rapport between image and language in performance. Retrospectives of Iimura's work tellingly demonstrate the acute variance in the media used for representing performance art in Japan over a period of 40 years.[8]

In Tokyo, digital culture possesses its own contemporary museology; the present moment immediately acquires its own intricate cultural history of preservation, collection and dissemination. This simultaneity of event and representation has its

most evident form at the NTT InterCommunication Center, a private museum devoted entirely to digital media as an art form, in Western Shinjuku. The luxuriant museum – originally housed within several storeys of a massive corporate tower which also encompasses an opera venue – is owned by the NTT telecommunications conglomerate but is curated as though it were a contemporary art centre devoted to intensively probing the parameters of human perception. The space of the museum forms a sequence of installations for spectators (comprising such spaces as an anechoic room and a number of virtual environments), with the emphasis on the multiple ways in which digital media impact upon perception. The visitor to the museum participates in the installations in both corporeal and sensorial dimensions – and a total engagement of the spectator moving through every installation would induce such contrary responses as disorientation, fascination, vertigo, nausea, compulsion and exasperation. A sustained preoccupation throughout the installation works, by such artists as Seiko Mikami, is that of the cancelled or erased human figure, and in every installation space bodies persist as ghost images, lost traces or signalled absences; the spectator necessarily reconstructs a tangible human aura within the digital installations from fragments, voids and annulations of the body. The NTT InterCommunication Center differs from parallel museums in Europe in that its works pivot centrally upon the relationship between the digital image and the occluded human body. Equivalent European media art centres or museums – V2 in Rotterdam, CYPRES in Marseilles, ZKM in Karlsruhe and Ars Electronica in Linz – each possess far wider concerns with such issues as political and ethical cultures, and with the 'creative benefits' of technological mishap or malfunction (by contrast, there exists absolutely no potential for malfunction at the NTT museum). By so markedly subtracting or deflecting the human body, the NTT museum's digital installations serve to reinforce it as an overriding concern, so that the succession of installation rooms function as a kind of demanding performance-art space in which the spectator combats sensory disorientation in order to visualize or experience corporeal presence.

The relationship between media culture and the human body in Tokyo intractably includes an exploration of sexuality and of the ways in which it transmutates within the urban environment. In every worldwide urban centre with advanced media systems, the visual forms of sexual culture may evolve unrecognizably from one decade to another and, to some degree, those transitions of sexuality in Tokyo constitute only an exacerbated or accelerated variant of a process which operates pervasively and homogeneously in every wealthy contemporary city. But sex and media are integrally linked in Tokyo's visual cultures through the forms of art and performance as well as via the more familiar forms of fashion, advertising and momentary consumer furores. Sex is perpetually re-imagined in contemporary

Tokyo in both corporate cultures and in visual art and performance. In the 1960s, the artists, performers and film-makers who worked in Shinjuku drew directly from the proximity of their studios or spaces of exhibition to the concentrated sex-club cultures of Shinjuku's Kabuki-cho area, as well as from the riots and violent protests which intermittently traversed the avenues of the district during that period. In the intervening decades, although the volatile mix of media and sex in Tokyo's visual culture has permeated art to a greater degree, it has also generated a more elusive character in the visualization of sex. The human body possesses a precarious and even negated status within the domain of Japanese digital art culture, while the representation of sexual acts has taken overloaded, wayward forms in print-media, internet and film cultures – channelled into mass-market erotic *manga* comics and into a vast industry of internet and video pornography around schoolgirl figures. Sexuality is left as a residue with a drained, exhausted character in urban life itself. This elusive but crucially determining nature of sexuality in Tokyo generates a vast area of exploration for visual and performance art, whether it intends to celebrate, ironize, oppose or place itself in an oblivious rapport with Tokyo's sexual culture. All such rapports are intimate ones.

In the French artist Chris Marker's seminal film *Sunless* (1982), which presciently anticipated the subsequent twenty years of visual transformation and digital culture in Tokyo, the city is one stop on a long journey of memory which also encompasses the volcanic terrain of Iceland, the revolution-torn jungles of Guinea-Bissau and the far calmer landscapes of the Île de France; but it is Tokyo which gives the film its resolute structure, as one formed of unexpected cuts, aberrant preoccupations and visual compulsions. Apart from a few moments in the film such as Marker's visit to the outlying Gotokuji temple, dedicated to the city's cats, Tokyo – twenty years on – is superficially almost unrecognizable from the city which he filmed then (illus. 131). But the city retains its visual provocations and its upheavals in perception as strongly as ever. To a large extent, the essential inspiration for European performance art – and for European culture in general – of Tokyo's experiments in the visual image and the human figure is that they overturn preconceptions, evanesce contradictions and dismantle formulaic reflections.

However, Japan also counterpoints Europe in its growing dilemmas over social exclusion and racism, with poverty and alienation, as well as with the environmental consequences of its rapid ascent into economic prominence in the 1960s and '70s. And the interrogation in Tokyo's performance art of corporate culture and its powerful relationship with the human body and with sexuality possesses a harsh dimension which may increasingly provide a revealing indicator for explorations into Europe's own cracked media screens.

131 *Gotokuji, Tokyo*, 1997.

This essay is based primarily on discussions in Tokyo with Shinjin Shimizu, Junko Shimada, Takahiko Iimura, Eikoh Hosoe, Donald Richie, Keiji Nakamura (former chief curator of the NTT InterCommunication Center), Kuniichi Uno, Tatsuro Ishii and Hironobu Oikawa.

Afterword: Japanese Pop Culture and the Eradication of History

YOSHIKO SHIMADA

In 2000, I participated in a theatre production entitled *The Spirits Play* in Singapore which dealt with Japanese war crimes committed during the occupation of Singapore in the Second World War.[1] Based on a play by the well-known Singaporean playwright Kuo Pao Kun in which the spirits of five dead Japanese speak of their wartime experience, the production also included personal accounts drawn from the Singapore National Oral Archive. I was one of four artists from Japan collaborating with Theatre Works, the Singaporean theatre group (illus. 132).[2] Most of the other Japanese artists had very little knowledge of the Japanese atrocities in Singapore, primarily because of the lack of an adequate modern history education in Japan. This was highlighted recently, for example, with the controversy surrounding a Japanese history textbook which glorifies pre-war Japan and denies atrocities such as the Nanjing Massacre or the 'comfort women' (Japanese military sex slaves).[3]

But, in fact, it matters little what kind of textbooks we use. We don't learn much about recent history in junior and senior high schools in Japan anyway. Also, it may not be just a matter of education, but of our perception and attitude towards history.

This became clear during the production of *The Spirits Play*, when some of the Japanese performance group members (aged about 25 and male) said that they were not even interested in knowing about this colonial history because they could not feel any 'reality' in the past. Instead, they did their pop-techno spectacle independent of the content of the play. In part, this reflected the intention of the director Ong Keng Sen, who wished to have them exemplify the current youth culture of Japan. The reaction of the Singaporean audience to their performance was divided. While some thought their disregard for the past disturbing, some, especially the younger ones, enjoyed it immensely because it represented contemporary Japanese



132–134 *The Spirits Play*, by Theatre Works at Victoria Theatre and The Battle Box, Singapore, August 2000, directed by Ong Keng Sen.

pop culture (illus. 133 and 134). Japanese pop culture, in the form of *manga* (comic strips), *anime* (animation TV programmes and films), computer games and fashion, is extremely popular among Asian youth. One of the Singaporean audience, for example, commented that although he learned about history in school, it had nothing to do with his daily life. Instead, as he observed, he liked everything about Japanese popular culture because it is cute and cool.

Thus it appears that, with or without proper education and knowledge, history and its remembrance seem to be losing any validity and reality for the young. Does this now mean that all is well in Asia and that we can forget about the past and look to the future together? Is it a 'happy ending' for history?

Certainly, ideas of fashionable 'cool' dominate the Japanese mass media, where Asian youth – particularly Koreans and Chinese – is represented as enamoured with the heavily exported forms of Japanese popular culture. Japanese magazines regularly carry articles on these new markets and there appears to be an escalating number of this kind of 'Asia Loves Japanese Pop' articles in newspapers as well. In a recent article entitled 'Crazy about Japan', for example, young Asians were depicted chasing Japanese boy singers and collecting millions of *Hello Kitty* stuffed toys.[4] However, such articles all conclude with sentences like 'This ends our unfortunate memory of our recent past history', or 'Now we can move forward.'

Curiously, the magazine which carried 'Crazy about Japan' is published by Fuso-Sha, the imprint that coincidentally is the publisher of the revisionist history textbook as well as other right-wing propaganda books. Is it too paranoid to think there is an alignment of Japanese economic and political interests which wish to obtain cultural hegemony in Asia while also wishing to eradicate its own colonial history? Clearly, stories of the popularity of Japanese pop culture are not fabricated. These products do dominate Asia. What I am more concerned about is the manipu-

lation and appropriation of these products by high culture and how the cultural/political institutions within Japan use the popularity of these products to suit their own cultural/political agendas.

Here perspectives on the broader cultural and philosophical changes within highly developed technological societies in the late twentieth century are helpful. Guy Debord, for example, has argued that the role of spectacle in such societies aims to eradicate history, especially information with regard to recent history.[5] In such a society there is nothing with which to judge the 'here and now', and the 'new' becomes the only value. It suits the ruling power and capitalism. In a similar way, in 1989, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the American-based historian Francis Fukuyama argued that the only force that could change the world now is a global economy.[6] With Communism vanquished, Fukuyama proposed that liberal democracies based on capitalism were the ultimate point of the evolution of human politics and that it would be market forces which would overcome past and present conflicts. Political or historical events were no longer important in a world dominated by capitalism. Meanwhile, the Japanese sociologist Miyadai Shinji has also posited that we live in an 'endless everyday', in which no big historical events will happen, nothing will change and we will just have to face the same boring everyday life forever.[7]

Such attitudes, fortified by Western post-modern theories of Japanese society, do appear to dominate contemporary debates about Japanese visual culture. Recently, for example, the Tokyo-born artist Takashi Murakami came up with his 'Superflat' manifesto, in which he proposed that everything exists on a flat two-dimensional plane situated somewhere between traditional Japanese painting and modern *anime*.[8] His theory is devoid of perspective and devoid of hierarchy, where all exists equally and simultaneously. Everything is relative and differences are eradicated. Some Western art critics and curators seem to think that this 'superflat' represents the ultimate form of the post-modern consumerist culture. They see Japanese pop culture and its eradication of history and meaning as radical, futuristic and uniquely Japanese. This uniqueness is reinforced both by Murakami himself and by Western critics and curators, through an insistence on the influence of well-known Japanese traditional cultural productions such as *ukiyo-e* prints on Murakami's works. Thus, when Murakami appropriates historical elements, it is always this Western-approved, stereotypical cliché of Japanese culture.

One cannot help feeling this as a renewed, collaborative Orientalism. 'Superflat' gives Western art audiences a kind of futuristic Oriental spectacle that they can enjoy without feeling any sense of relationship to it, and likewise its approval by the West gives the Japanese a sense of self-importance and pride of being 'uniquely Japanese'. The dangers of the rhetoric of the 'uniquely

Japanese' are evident in Japan's recent colonial past and in the still current mythology of 'one family'.

However, this rhetoric is also becoming more audible in the contemporary political arena where, for example, the ultra-nationalist Tokyo governor, Ishihara Shintaro, stated in *Katsu Nihon* (Japan that Wins) that the unique and superior Japanese standard must prevail in the world market.[9] This may seem a strange pronouncement, given the seemingly endless recession besetting the Japanese economy, but it is precisely because of this recession that such nationalist demagogues as Ishihara are gaining popularity in Japan and the success of Japanese pop culture is heralded as proof of the superiority of the Japanese.

But is this 'uniquely Japanese' culture a model of post-modern society? Has history really ended? Do we really live in a flat world where everything is relative?

In this respect I concur with the writer and critic Akira Asada, who states in *Rekishi no owari wo koete* (Over the End of History):

> They say we are in post-modern times, after the end of history, but we have always been in history and that is where we are now. They talk about the post-modern paradise of Japanese homogeneous space. But it is merely a concept of a Hegelian linear view of history and a product of renewed Orientalism. In reality, there are struggles of individuals and differences in our society.[10]

Maybe for the West it is more interesting and convenient to consider Japan as a homogeneous and Oriental 'other', but we live in reality and not in the virtual world of computer games. Japanese culture cannot be defined by one stereotype, nor by the one 'standard' which nationalists appear to want to export to the world.

What can artists do in this situation if they wish to engage critically with issues of difference, relevance and history? After all, the demands of the marketplace – as an art critic recently advised me – would be better met if I focused on current and future developments within Japan rather than dwelling on the past. Audiences, he continued, want more visually sophisticated and ironic representations. I think that more 'ironic' or cynical representations are done by those who can afford to be cynical about reality and who ignore the complexities of contemporary Japan.

I feel I'd rather have more immediate agency, but I am aware that the language used in the past by activists and feminists is not effective in moving younger audiences anymore. A dualistic rhetoric tends to paint everything as black and white, right and wrong, and divide individuals or groups into the oppressors or the victims. Instead, it seems to me, we need to develop a new way

135 Pachinko, family photograph (detail), 2002, mixed media.

of thinking about social and political issues which is aware of the complex nuances of difference through positioning by gender, race, class and sexuality.

One of the realities of contemporary Japan is that it is not homogenous and harmonious. Different voices within Japan and undesirable areas of Japanese history have been eradicated systematically from cultural expression. Currently, for example, I am working on a new project in collaboration with second and third-generation Korean women living in Japan which focuses on the representation of identity through family photographs (illus. 135). The personal history of Koreans in Japan, particularly that of women, has been carefully hidden. Although systematic discrimination has been corrected in recent years, the relationship between colonialists and colonized is still very sensitive: 90 per cent of Koreans still use Japanese names and try to hide their identity.

In this context, the observations of the fifteen-year-old daughter of one of the women were revealing. As a fourth-generation Korean, she noted that she is proud of this cultural heritage and would like to talk about her history, but at the same time she wondered why it is always she who had to 'come out' and talk about an identity that was publicly ignored. Consequently, she felt if she talked about her Korean history she would be perceived as rigidly bound to a single identity while, like most Koreans in Japan, she experienced a more fluid or hybrid identity which reflects aspects of both Korea and Japan (illus. 136). The Japanese tend to think of themselves as having one uniform national identity. Historically this has never

136 *Fambo Kanja.*

been so, and this collaborative project is an attempt to give visibility to this hybridity which is part of Japanese culture.

In conclusion, in a climate where the signs of the reassertion of nationalism are evident both within Japan's borders and beyond through its aggressive marketing of Japan's cultural products within Asia, I think one of the effective ways to counter this is by making the non-Japanese culture within Japan more visible and by remembering the results of Japan's colonial Asian past. The popularity of Japanese youth culture and spectacles such as football's FIFA World Cup (which Japan co-hosted in June 2002) are currently being used to promote the bright future of Japan and Asia and to imply that the globalization of Japanese popular culture has made the world borderless. But, as we all know, a global economy or global popular culture does not eradicate nations or conflicts among nations. Rather, globalization makes certain nations powerful and breeds neo-nationalism in others. Behind the rosy, futuristic picture of Japan-Asia, where history is eradicated and consumerism rules, there may be a darker side where Japan's strategy to obtain cultural hegemony in Asia makes any kind of questioning and resistance invalid.

BuBu's Diary

MS HARLOT'S HOLIDAY / MLLE HARLOT EN VACANCES

A day off is a chance to catch up on one's beauty sleep
A day off is an opportunity for a late breakfast with your lover
A day off is a chance to do the wash
A day off is a time to talk with friends
A day off is a time to reminisce about friends who've passed away
A day off is a time to read Marguerite Duras' *L'Amant*
A day off is a time to write a letter to the folks back home
A day off is a time to think about the people at work and maybe even give them a call

PRESENTS I'VE RECEIVED FROM MY CUSTOMERS

My customers often give me tokens of their affection
Chou à la crême pastries
Stockings
Prepaid telephone cards
Lottery tickets
A handmade book of pressed flowers
A bear keyholder
Poetic works
A warning alarm to protect me from rapists
Bamboo-shoots
Flower bouquets
Potatoes

Onions
A vibrator
Sushi
Panties . . .

MY CUSTOMERS

He's an instructor for how to use office equipment
He was always trying to remove his condom without my noticing
I always quietly put it back on him
The other day, he told me that his foreskin was too sensitive and that condoms hurt him
'Maybe the condoms we've been using are too small. We could use a larger condom, and then if we put some lubricant inside, it wouldn't hurt anymore. See, it doesn't hurt anymore, does it?' 'Nope.'

He's worked at a cooking oil factory for 30 years
He is so short that when we fuck, he can only reach far enough up to kiss my neck
But after he's come, he reaches up and gives me the sweetest kisses on my chin

I've never known what he does for a living
He has the hands of a craftsman
Sometimes I get packages of beautiful potatoes from the country. Twenty to a box
I eat them in the morning in my *miso* soup
They're steamy in my mouth, delicious

He works at a travel agency
He's been a regular for over three years now
He's got a wife
At first I thought nothing of it
Neither am I in any position to think anything of it

But the longer we know each other, the more I feel that his wife is someone that I'm implicated with, and her feelings cross my mind. It becomes increasingly difficult to greet him as I used to

He runs a pub
He always brings me panties
The other day they had purple butterflies on them
His underpants were black bikinis with gold scorpions
They looked beautiful on him

'GRAMPS'

He's got to be at least 80 years old
His gestures are slow. He likes to do one thing at a time
First he concentrates on getting undressed
He slowly removes his glasses. He looks at my face
Next, he'll caress my breasts
He looks at my sex
He slowly puts a condom over his index and middle fingers, and gently fondles me
He slowly reclines
I stimulate the base of his penis with a vibrator
His eyes are fixed on the ceiling. He's concentrating
He ejaculates
I clean him with a warm towel
He gets dressed
A full hour has passed at this point
Sometimes, he likes to come while caressing my breasts. 'Breasts?' I remind him, and he replies 'Oh!!', as though he'd forgotten something monumental, and hurries to touch them
If I don't vocalize properly when he's fondling me it affects everything thereafter, so I really have to concentrate
I can't murmur gently, because he won't be able to hear it. I need to respirate slowly, firmly and loudly
After he gets dressed, he sometimes tells me about the war
He was sent into the Pacific as a communications officer
He went with a garrison of two thousand men. He was one of four that returned
He lost so many friends
When he tells me about it, tears always swell up in his wrinkled eyes
I ask him about sex with his wife
He says that she's not interested any more
His underwear is always spotless

UNDER THE LIGHTS OF THE LOVE HOTEL REFRIGERATOR

In the dark Love Hotel room, rich with the mildew of the air conditioner and dank carpet
The surface of my body is as covered in a gentle mist, having just had pleasant sex. I lie between the one sanitary thing in this room, the sheets. I feel good
On the edge of the bed is a snoring client, his back turned to me
I can hear a motorcycle in the distance
The only light in the room comes through the glass door of the refrigerator
It reflects vaguely on the dusty chandelier above me
Its reflection is somehow nostalgic
I don't know how many tens, how many hundreds, of times I've watched this scene
Each time, I've lived through this darkness
And each time, I'm amazed at how I'm really not saddened by it all. I recognize how objective I am about it all
This light reminds me of all darkness
Today I lost someone truly special
I really thought that I couldn't take it anymore
But this light reminds me of all darkness and gives me strength again
I've made it this far, somehow. And I can go on

THE FIRST SEX IN THREE YEARS

His shirt and metal-framed glasses make him look like a factory supervisor. His eyes seem slightly crossed. He has a nervous air
As he gets undressed and lies down he says 'My heart is racing. You want to hear?'
Noticing that he has a hairy chest, I place my ear gently to his chest and listen. It's pounding
'How come?' I ask. 'Because I haven't had sex in three years', he answers
I thought he was joking
But just in case, I didn't want to overstimulate his body, so I began, ever so gently, to caress and lick him
When my tongue reached his sex, he groaned
Carefully proceeding, he continued to call out. 'That feels so good! Oh my god that feels good!!'
Still holding his sex in my mouth, I raised my eyes to look at him. 'Really?' I smiled and asked
I put a condom on him. 'Would you like me on top, or underneath?' 'On top', he

replied. I slowly lowered myself onto him, looking down at him, showing him my relish
Without his glasses he had a kinder face than I had thought. He flushed and closed his eyes
I gently began moving my body
As I watched, his expression became positively exalted. It was so sincere. I, filled with happiness, carefully watched over him
He opened his eyes with a look of astonishment. 'Does sex really feel this good?' he kept uttering, like one delirious
'Yes. It feels so good, doesn't it?' I said, filled with feelings of affection, laying on top of him and embracing his head
He didn't even try to touch me anywhere
In the end, with an almost tragic cry, he came, and finally embraced my shoulders
'Has it really been three years?' I asked. 'Yeah. My divorce was three years ago. It's the first time since then', he replied
'Is that so?' I calmly replied

NIGHTMARE

I saw a terrifying dream
It is midnight, in an area filled with office buildings. The emergency exit is a spiral staircase on the outside of the building
I'm on top of the building. I want to get down. The spiral staircase is packed with men of all styles, shapes and sizes
I notice that I'm scared and think it deplorable of me
I'm a prostitute. I've come all this way, to become a prostitute, but I still haven't shaken my fear of men
I'm trying to negotiate with a man who's clenching my arm from behind. What do you want?
I resolve myself, calculating how many fucks and sucks I'll need to perform to make it down to the bottom and spare myself
I wake up, and realize that this was a pretty cheap way to negotiate my passage. I feel remorseful
The best answer might have been to be firm with the man holding me, telling him that I'd 'fuck him and him only if he got me down to safety'. Even then, I wouldn't know if I'd actually make it
Maybe I became a prostitute as a kind of training, to strengthen myself for such an eventuality

Do unto others before they do unto you
It's the only way to turn something unpleasant into something that feels good
The only way to convert a source of despair into a source of pleasure . . . or is it?

THE NINE STEPS TO CONTACT

I love my customers. I love loving my customers
My customers love me. I love my customers loving me

I look at my customers. I look at myself looking at my customers
My customers look at me. I look at my customers looking at me

I look over my customers. I look over myself looking over my customers
My customers look me over. I look over my customers looking me over

I refuse my customers. I refuse the fact of refusing customers
The customers refuse me. I refuse the customers' refusal of me

I betray customers. I betray my betrayal of customers
Customers betray me. I betray the customers' betrayal of me

I violate customers. I violate my violations of customers
Customers violate me. I violate customers' violations of me

I support customers. I support my support of customers
Customers support me. I support the customers' support of me

I despise customers. I despise the fact that I despise customers
The customers despise me. I despise the fact that they despise me

I touch customers. I touch the me that touches customers
The customers touch me. I touch the fact of their touching me

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INTRODUCTION: CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

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3 See Christopher Wood, *The Bubble Economy: The Japanese Economic Collapse* (London, 1992).

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6 See Yayori Matsui, 'Japan in the Context of the Militarisation of Asia', *Women in a Changing World*, 24 (1987), pp. 7–8. For a detailed discussion of military-related prostitution, including Japan's institutionalized system and its effects, see Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers, The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2000).

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8 See Chris Ryan and C. Michael Hall, eds, *Sex Tourism, Marginal People and Liminalities* (London and New York, 2001), pp. 138–44.

9 *Ibid*., pp. 120–24. See also Regan E. Ralph, 'Oppose the Trafficking of Women and Children', testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs by Regan E. Ralph, Executive Director Women's Rights Division, Human Right Watch, International of Trafficking of Women and Children, 22 February 2000,

http://secretary.state.gov/www/picw/trafficking/tralph.html.

10 See Ryan and Hall, *Sex Tourism*, pp. 120–21; see also Ralph, 'Oppose Trafficking'.

11 Japanese traffickers and employers are rarely arrested. If they are, they face fines for minor offences for violations of immigration, prostitution or entertainment business regulations while the women are detained and deported, with a five-year ban on re-entering Japan. See Ryan and Hall, *Sex Tourism*, p. 123, and Ralph, 'Oppose Trafficking'.

12 Ryan and Hall (*Sex Tourism*, p. 123) argue that, faced with a potential loss of demand, the Thai sex industry responded by exporting women to meet demand in the demand-generating country, Japan.

13 *Ibid.*, Chapter Six, 'Sexual Slavery, Trafficking Sex', pp. 117–35.

14 Yayori Matsui, *Women in the New Asia* (London, 1999), p. 19. Dorothy Robins-Mowry maintains that prostitution was accorded significance in Japan's male-dominated culture to the extent that following both the 1911 and 1923 earthquakes the reconstruction of licensed prostitution quarters took priority over the rebuilding of schools: see D. Robins-Mowry, *The Hidden Sun: Women of Modern Japan* (Boulder, CO, 1983), p. 248.

15 As Richie notes, market research has shown that women generally choose which Love Hotel to visit and this has led to name changes from the masculine 'Empire' or 'Rex' to those such as 'Once More' or 'Chez Nous': see Donald Richie, *Tokyo* (London, 1999), p. 99.

16 For further discussion of these issues see the introduction to Lise Skov and Brian Moeran, eds, *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan* (London, 1995).

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20 Midori Matsui, 'Murakami Takashi: Nihilist Agonistes', in *Takashi Murakami 'Which is Tomorrow? Fall in Love'*, exh. cat., SCAI The Bathhouse, Tokyo (Tokyo, 1994), p. 39.

21 Kunio Yaguchi, 'Inaugural Exhibition "Art in Japan Today" (1985–1995), The State of Japanese Art at the Opening of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo', in *Art in Japan Today, 1985–1995*, exh. cat., Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (Tokyo, 1995), p. 13.

22 Monty DiPietro, 'An Essay on Entering the Japanese Art Scene', http://www.assemblylanguage.com/index/html.

23 See Lisa Bloom, 'Gender, Race and Nation in Japanese Contemporary Art and Criticism', *N. paradoxa*, V (2000), pp. 35–43.

24 *The Colour Red,* p. 21.

25 As against a figure of 15 per cent in the United Kingdom, 17 per cent of Japan's population is over 65, while the birth rate is continuing to drop. The average household in late 2000 consisted of 3.46 members.

26 With reference to refugees, who form one substantial group of immigrants, in 2000, for example, Britain took in 10,185 refugees, America 24,000, while Japan admitted 22.

1 SEX AND CONSUMERISM IN EDO JAPAN

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1986), p. 40.

2 Kimuro Bōun (Nikyōtei Hanzan), *Mita kyō monogatari,* in *Nihon zuihitsu taikei* (Tokyo, 1976), series 3, vol. IV, pp. 565–81.

3 *Ibid.*

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5 Yuasa Genzō, *Kokui-ron,* in *Nihon keizai daiten* (Tokyo, 1927), vol. XXII, p. 7.

6 *Ibid.*

7 Sugita Genpaku, *Nochimigusa*, in *Nihon shomin seikatsu shiryō shûsei* (Tokyo, 1976), vol. VII, p. 81.

8 Ota Nanpo, *Ichiwa ichigon*, in *Nihon zuihitsu taikei* (Tokyo, 1978), supp. vol. IV, p. 197.

9 *Ibid.*

10 Yoshida Shigefusa, *Tenmei kibun kansei kibun*, in *Mikan zuihitsu hyakushu* (Tokyo, 1976), vol. IV, pp. 193–5.

2 SEX AND CONSUMERISM: THE JAPANESE STATE OF THE ARTS

1 See Alexander Munroe, 'Revolt of the Flesh: Ankoku Butoh and Obsessional Art', in Alexandra Munroe, ed., *Japanese Art after 1945: Scream Against the Sky* (New York, 1994), pp. 189–225.

2 In the Dumb Type performance *S/N*, BuBu shocked the audience by pulling a string of the flags of the world from her vagina.

3 Howard Hibbett, *The Floating World in Japanese Fiction* (London, 1959), quoted from the Charles Tuttle Company edition (Rutland, VT, and Tokyo, 1975) p. 69.

4 Andrew Watt, *The Truth About Japan* (Tokyo, 1988), p. 96. The unnamed senator in question was probably Ulysses S. Grant.

5 Fujiwara interview with Kengo Nakamura, NMP International website (www.dnp.co.jp/museum/nmp), Tokyo, 1997.

6 *Ibid*.

7 See Barbara London, 'Experimental Film and Video', in Munro, ed., *Japanese Art after 1945*, pp. 285–97.

8 Nagisa Oshima, *Ecrits* (Paris, 1980), as quoted in Nicholas Bornoff, *Pink Samurai* (London, 1991), pp. 590–91.

9 *Ibid*.

10 'Jerry Saltz, 'Murakami', *The Village Voice* (25–31 August 1999).

3 STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS IN CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE ART

1 The work of these artists was exhibited in Britain in 2001–2002. See Fran Lloyd and Melanie Roberts, eds, *Sex and Consumerism: Contemporary Art in Japan*, exh. cat., University of Brighton; Aberystwyth Art Centre; Picker Gallery, Kingston University; Hot Bath Gallery, Bath (Brighton, 2001).

2 Following his debut at the 43rd Venice Biennale, *Aperto '88*, Morimura's work has been shown in several major international exhibitions, including: *Against Nature: Japanese Art in the Eighties*, exh. cat., New York University, MIT Boston and ICA, London (New York, 1989); *Culture and Commodity: An Eighties Perspective*, exh. cat., Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution (Washington, DC, 1990); *A Cabinet of Signs, Contemporary Art from Post-modern Japan*, exh. cat., Tate Gallery, Liverpool; Whitechapel Art Gallery, London;

Konsthall, Malmö (London, 1991); and *Art in Japan Today, 1985–1995*, exh. cat., Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (1995).

3 See *Picturesque, Miran Fukuda 1992–1998*, exh. cat., Ashahi Art Collection, Tokyo (1998), and *Art in Japan Today, 1985–1995*. For Masato Nakamura, see the 2001 Venice Biennale catalogue.

4 For Nobuyoshi Araki, see *Araki, Unconscious Tokyo: Tokyo Cube,* exh. cat., White Cube, London (1994); *Art in Japan Today, 1985–1995*; and *Erotos, The Works of Nobuyoshi Araki, Araki–16, Tokyo* (1997). For Yoshiko Kamikura see *Love's Body, Rethinking Naked and Nude in Photography*, exh. cat., Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo (1999). For Hiromix, *Japanese Beauty: Hiromix* (Tokyo, 1997).

5 Murakami's Hiropon Factory is based in New York and Tokyo. Hiropon work was recently (10 May–8 July 2001) exhibited at *JAM: Tokyo–London*, exh. cat., Barbican Art Gallery, London (2001). See also *Ero Pop Tokyo*, exh. cat., George's Gallery, Los Angeles (1998); and *Tokyo Pop*, exh. cat., The Hiratsuna Museum of Art, Kanagawa (1996).

6 Midori Matsui, 'Murakami Takashi: Nihilist Agonistes', in *Takashi Murakami 'Which is Tomorrow? Fall in Love'*, exh. cat., SCAI The Bathhouse, Tokyo (Tokyo, 1994), p. 34.

7 Takashi Murakami, 'A Theory of Super Flat Japanese Art', in *Super Flat* (Tokyo, 2000).

8 Alexandra Munroe, ed., *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky* (New York, 1994), p. 343.

9 Venice Biennale, 2001, and *Tokyo Life*, Selfridges, London, May 2001. For recent public-art invention in Tokyo see Masato Nakamura, 'Changing Channels: "Akihabara TV"', *Look Japan* (August 1999), pp. 26–8, and *Akihabara TV 2* (Tokyo, 2000).

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12 Donald Richie, *Tokyo* (London, 1999), p. 99.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 101.

14 Kara Beshler, 'Designed for Your New Consumer Life', *Japan Times*, 17 October 1999, p. 13.

15 Hiroshi Masuyama interview by Tim Large, 'The Best Years of Their Lives?', *The Daily Yomiuri*, 10 July 1999, p. 7.

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21 Hiroshi Masuyama, *090* (March 2000), no. 01.

22 Nicholas Bornoff, *Pink Samurai – The Pursuit and Politics of Sex in Japan* (London, 1991), pp. 78–9.

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24 Sharon Kinsella, 'Cuties in Japan', in Skov and Moeran, *Women, Media and Consumption in*

Japan, p. 244.

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26 Skov and Moeran, 'Introduction: Hiding in the Light', p. 58.

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28 Bornoff, *Pink Samurai*, pp. 78–80.

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31 For a full discussion of Shimada's work see Hagiwara Hiroko, 'Comfort Women, Women of Conformity: the Work of Shimada Yoshiko', in Griselda Pollock, ed., *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings* (London and New York, 1996), pp. 253–65. See also George Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Japan's Brutal Regime of Enforced Prostitution in the Second World War* (New York, 1994).

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38 *Ibid*., p. 12.

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55 Takahiro Fujiwara, in Lloyd and Roberts, eds, *Sex and Consumerism*, p. 105.

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64 Michiko Kasahara, 'Love's Body, Rethinking Naked and Nude in Photography', in *Love's Body*, p. 187.

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71 See Alexandra Munroe, 'Revolt of the Flesh: Ankoku Butoh and Obsessional Art', in Munroe, *Japanese Art After 1945*, pp. 189–213.

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73 See Shinuchiro Osaki, 'Body and Place: Action in Postwar Art in Japan', in Paul Schimmel, ed., *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object*, exh. cat., Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (1998), pp. 121–57.

74 Koji Tanada, in Lloyd and Roberts, eds, *Sex and Consumerism*, p. 109.

75 See Bornoff, *Pink Samurai*, p. 76.

76 *Ibid.*

5 POST-IDENTITY *KAWAII*: COMMERCE, GENDER AND CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE ART

1 Kyoko Okazaki, *Pink* (Tokyo, 1987), p. 249. The Tokyo-born Okazaki is one of the leading female *manga* artists focusing on life in the capital from the 1980s and '90s from a female perspective. Her first book, *Virgin* (1985), was followed by *Pink*, which established her reputation. Published works include *Tokyo Girls Bravo*, in *Cutie*, a monthly fashion magazine aimed at teen girls, and *Shotgun from the Lips*, in the women's comic magazine *Me-twin* from 1987. See *Manga, Short Comics from Modern Japan*, exh. cat., The Japan Foundation (London, 2001).

2 The novelist Yukio Mishima (1925–1970) was part of Tokyo's avant-garde grouping which included the *angura* playwrights Juro Kara and Shuji Terayama. In 1949 he published *Confessions of a Mask*, which established his position as a radical anti-authoritarian novelist. On 25 November 1970, just after completing the final draft of *The Decay of the Angel*, he committed suicide by *seppuku (harikari)*.

3 *Tsurezuregusa* (1310–31), by Kenkou-Housi (1282–1350).

4 See *De-genderism – détruire dit-elle/il,* exh. cat., Setagaya Art Museum (Tokyo, 1997).

5 Mariko Mori, cited in Hou Hanru and Hans Ulrich Obrist, eds, *Cities on the Move*, exh. cat., Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux (1997), p. 48.

6 *Princess Mononoke*, 1999, by Hayao Miyazaki (*b*. 1941), released worldwide through Miramix/Dimension, achieved unprecedented financial success and has contributed to the current *anime* boom in Japan and America. For further details on *anime* see Carl Gustav Horn, 'Anime', in Annette Roman, ed., *Japan Edge, The Insider's Guide to Japanese Pop Subculture* (San Francisco, CA, 1999).

7 *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, 1984, again by Miyazaki, was the first *anime* film ever to make the top ten in Japan's prestigious journal of film, *Kinema Jumpo,* in 1984. It was based on his *manga* of the same name produced in 1982, where the princess heroine rejects the offer of a scientific means to perfect humanity and society.

8 Created by the female *manga* artist Naoko Takeuchi, *Sailor Moon*, first serialized in various girls' magazines, has since 1992 spawned a number of multimedia products, including a weekly TV *anime* show (now exported to over eighteen countries worldwide), videos, computer and video games, toys and a range of logo products aimed at a predominantly girl teen market. See Anne Allison, 'Sailor Moon, Japanese Superheroes for Global Girls', in T. J. Craig, ed., *Japan Now, Inside the World of Japanese Popular Culture* (London and New York, 2000), pp. 259–78.

9 The *anime* film version of *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), directed by Mamoru Oshii and based on Masamune Shirow's *manga* of the same name, was intended from the beginning for a worldwide audience: *Ghost in the Shell*, 123 mins; produced by Kodansha in association with Bandai Visual and Manga Entertainment.

10 *Aa! Megami-sama* (Ah, My Goddess), first appeared in Kodansha magazine *Afternoon* in November 1988. It is now a popular television *anime* series.

11 *Patlabor 2* (Manga Entertainment, 1993), an *anime* techno-thriller directed by Oshii, focuses on the contradictions of post-war Japan and US military relations.

12 For the work of Philippe Parreno and Pierre Huyghe, see 'Anywhere Out of the World', *artpress* (January 2001), pp. 22–8, and the forthcoming *No Ghost, Just a Shell: The Annlee Project* at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

13 For Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, see 'Annlee in Anzen Zone', *artpress* (April 2001), pp. 29–33. Liam Gillick exhibited the work *Liam Gillick: Annlee You Proposes* at Tate Britain, London, from 7 September 2001 to April 2002. Rirkrit Tiravanija's work on this series is still in process.

14 For Lee Bul, see *Seventh International Istanbul Biennial*, exh. cat., Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (2001).

6 THE PLACE OF MARGINAL POSITIONALITY: LEGACIES OF JAPANESE ANTI-MODERNITY

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3 *Ibid*., p. 16.

4 Hideaki Mita, *Hankindai no bungaku* (Literature of Anti-modernity) (Tokyo, 1999), pp. 19–20.

5 *Ibid*., pp. 11–14.

6 See Masao Maruyama, *Nihon no shiso* (The Japanese Mind) (Tokyo, 1961), p. 14.

7 See Kohshi Ueno, 'Sengo saiko' (Rethinking the Post-war Period), *Asahi graph*, 2 December 1994, pp. 78–9. My description of the Shinjuku *angura* culture is greatly indebted to Professor Ueno's account.

8 See Akihiko Senda, 'Junen me no *angura*' (*Angura* Theatre after Ten Years), *Soh* (February 1978), pp. 250–53. The term *angura* is no longer used among those engaged in experimental theatre, who instead use the word *shogekijo* (small theatre, alternative theatre) to refer to themselves; this is partly because Kara and others are no longer marginal presences. Senda observes a diminishing of a countercultural spirit in the second generation of *shogekijo*.

9 See Kohshi Ueno, 'Seinen manga reimeiki kara hatten no jidai e' (From the Emergence of Youth Comic to the Period of Its Expansion), in *Garo mandara*, ed. The Compilation Committee for the History of Garo (Tokyo, 1991), p. 77; see also Saburo Kawamoto, 'Katasumi no jojyo' (Lyricism of a Marginal Corner), in *Garo mandara*, p. 80. Ueno observes that such young cartoonists as Oji Suzuki and Seiichi Hayashi, who represented *Garo* in the 1970s, narrated the 'small drama' of young people turning their back on the larger currents of history. Kawamoto argues that, even from the 1960s, the lonely lyricism of those who sought a shady corner in retreat from the bright outside of Tokyo as a modern capital was exemplified by the comic works of Yoshiharu Tsuge.

10 In the late 1970s and in the 1980s, the centre of youth culture shifted from Shinjuku to Shibuya. *Bikkuri House*, a magazine mainly consisting of parodies and word plays sent in by readers, was first published in 1975 by Parco, the department store that dictated the youth fashion of the period. Cutting off *angura*'s countercultural commitment to ideas, promoting a light, humorous and refined talk exchanged in an urban coterie, it played – together with the magazine *Takarajima* – a leading role in the development of the new youth culture until its demise in 1985; see 'Takarajima and Bikkuri House: the Bibles of the 1970s' Subculture', *Amuse*, 26 July 2000, pp. 124–5. Cf. Sakumi Hagiwara, ed., *Bikkuri House: Bikkuri Taizen* (Bikkuri House – All You Wanted to Know About Bikkuri House) (Tokyo, 1994).

11 See Tomohiko Murakami, 'Garo tekinaru mono o megutte – '80s and '90s' (Transmutation of the Garo Spirit in the 1980s and '90s), in *Garo mandara*, pp. 130–35.

12 See Katsuya Tarumi, 'Ima Denki Groove ga omoshiroi' (Denki Groove is the Coolest Band

Today), *Shukan jiji*, 16 March 1991, p. 91; also Hideki Taya, 'Denki Groove: nihon tekuno kai no saikoho' (Denki Groove – the Best in the Japanese Techno World), *Scola*, 26 January 1995, pp. 174–6.

13 See Hideto Fuse, 'Kowai kedo mitai – shitai ni muragaru shojo tachi' (Scared but Curious: Young Women Flock to See Bodies), *Spa!*, 5 October 1994, pp. 38–45. The cultural critic Hideto Fuse, who has published several books on the human body, points out (pp. 44–5) that, due to the extreme artificiality of urban life and the increasing virtuality of life and death in the media, readers in the 1990s tried to regain their contact with nature through the reality exhumed by a dead body.

14 See '70nendai boomu kara miete kuru 90nendai no jitsuzo' (The Real Picture of the 1990s Seen through the Recent Revival of 1970s' Culture), *Spa!*, 26 April 1995.

15 Aida often acknowledges his debt to the work of Mishima, most notably in his statement for his solo exhibition *No Future* at Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo, in 1996.

16 For Murakami's formation of his 'Super Flat' theory connecting traditional Japanese art and contemporary Japanese animation, see 'A Theory of Super Flat Japanese Art', in *Super Flat* (Tokyo, 2000), pp. 8–25. Cf. Midori Matsui, 'Towards a Definition of Tokyo Pop: The Classical Transgressions of Takashi Murakami', in *Takashi Murakami: The Meaning of the Nonsense of the Meaning*, exh. cat., Bard College, New York (New York, 1999), pp. 20–29.

17 Makoto Aida, 'Seishun to hentai' ni tsuite' (About My Novel Youth and Perversion), *Bungakukai* (February 1997), p. 251.

18 Makoto Aida, 'Close Up: Makoto Aida', *Design Plex*, 17 (September 1998), p. 14: 'I wanted to paint the most recent, but the biggest cause of the cultural degeneration today. That cause was the Pacific War. The true theme of this series, therefore, is not the past that was the War, but the present age in which I live.'

19 Aida's accounts of *Sensoga Returns* appear in various media and differ slightly from one another. The most honest and detailed accounts are found in his interview in *Design Plex* and in an independent magazine called *Danvo*; see 'Ohkimino he nikoso shiname' (Let's Die at the Feet of the Emperor), *Danvo*, 2 (September, 1996). For his description of his response to Mishima's novel, see Makoto Aida, 'Oi naru irasuto' (The Great Illustration), *Art Top* (July 1998), p. 34.

20 Yukio Mishima, 'Bunka boei ron' (A Defence of Culture), in *Bunka boei ron* (Tokyo, 1969), p. 27.

21 *Ibid*., p. 28.

22 *Ibid*., p. 29.

23 *Ibid*., pp. 37, 41.

24 Makoto Aida, 'About Passion', *Vinta*, 3 (December 1999), p. 124; 'Don't Go to College', *Vinta,* 4 (February 2000), p. 82; 'They Can Hate Me', *Vinta*, 5 (May 2000), p. 94; 'Is It So Great to be International?', *Vinta*, 6 (July 2000), p. 90.

25 Makoto Aida, *Mutant Hanako* (Tokyo, 2000). The comic was originally drawn, photocopied and bound into a booklet by Aida himself; 400 copies were circulated. The story and part of the drawing can be seen in Makoto Aida, *Lonely Planet* (Tokyo, 1999), p. 33. For a favourable review of this comic as 'erotic, absurd, but powerful and moving', see Yukihiro Abe, 'Ushirokara Comic no. 3', *Hatoyo* (January 2000), p. 111.

26 See Takashi Nemoto, 'Gehin powa no ketsuraku wa seimeiryoku no gentai de aru' (The Absence of Vulgar Drives Reduces the Basic Human Power to Live), *Spa!*, 30 November 1994, p. 44.

27 See Juro Kara, *Kara Juro keppuroku* (The Wild Chronicle of Juro Kara) (Tokyo, 1983).

28 Ken-ichiro Shirahama, 'Nikutai zuita shingekikai no koeihei' (The Red Guard of the

Contemporary Theatre Asserts Its Body), *Nijusseiki* (December 1967), p. 152.

29 Juro Kara, *Tokkenteki nikutai ron* (The Theory of Privileged Body) (Tokyo, 1997), pp. 13–17.

30 Although all Kara's plays develop the dialectic between these two poles, the characters Silver and Sen appear in his early plays performed between 1965 and 1971; see Juro Kara, *Kara Juro zensakuhinshu* (Collected Works of Juro Kara) (Tokyo, 1982), vols I and II.

31 Juro Kara, 'Geino no honshitsu – Kawara no shiso' (The Essence of Art: the Idea of Kawara), in *Hyo no me* (The Eye of a Jaguar) (Tokyo, 1980), pp. 142–3.

32 *Ibid*., pp. 144–5.

33 'What cities have forgotten: sewer water runs beneath culture', *Hyo no me,* p. 112.

34 *Ibid*., p. 135.

35 Kara came up with the idea of Japan and Korea being connected through water from his visit to the Korean relatives of his wife, the actress Li Reisen. Moved by the warmth and vitality of the family who lived by the river, selling water to the rich, Kara could not shake off his vision of the family slumbering at the bottom of the water reaching the Genkai Sea; see Kara, 'Geino no hon shitsu – *Kawara* no shiso', pp. 146–7.

36 See Kara, *Kara Juro zensakuhinshu*, vol. II. In *The Fang of the Sea*, the Japanese prostitute Sera Sarako (Sheherazade) finds herself transformed into a Korean woman as she puts on a wig made of the hair of Korean women which is given to her by a Korean mother. Alternating her identity through the mirror, the Japanese Sarako becomes a substitute mother to the half-Korean, half-Japanese boy Nawa Shiro; as a Korean woman, she is violated by Shiro, who is also transformed through the mirror into a chauvinistic Japanese student. Shiro's name is taken from a poem by the Japanese poet and ethnologist Shinobu Origuchi, 'Tsukishiro no hata' (The Flag in the Moonlight, 1938). In an uncanny coincidence, Aida refers to the death of Origuchi's son, Shunyo, in one of the southern islands of massacre in his description in 'Okimino he nikoso shi name' (*Danvo*, 2).

37 Koichi Yamazaki, '90neidai wa 70nendai 80nendai no tsuke no jidai' (The 1990s Pay the Debts of the 1970s and the 1980s), *Spa!*, 26 April 1995, p. 55.

38 Makoto Aida in his statement for the exhibition *Makoto Aida: No Future* at Mizuma Gallery, Tokyo, in 1996.

39 Aida, *Lonely Planet*, p. 11.

40 Makoto Aida, 'Sensoga Returns', *Danvo*, 2 (September 1996), n.p.

41 Makoto Aida, again in his statement for the group exhibition he curated, *Kyu shiro kuro no gen zai* (The Present Activities of the Former Members of Black and White), at Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo, in 1999.

42 Aida, 'Oi naru irasuto', p. 34.

43 *Ibid*. Aida says that *Untitled* is the only work of his that he can be proud of as 'a contemporary Nihonga painting'.

7 TOKYO'S URBAN AND SEXUAL TRANSFORMATIONS: PERFORMANCE ART AND DIGITAL CULTURES

1 The title of the Mito Art Tower exhibition was *Japanese Summer: I Don't Give A Damn Anymore!*

2 For international influence between Tokyo and other art centres see Alexandra Monroe, ed., *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky* (New York, 1994); see also Paul Schimmel, ed., *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object,* exh. cat., Museum of Contemporary Art,

Los Angeles (1998).

3 Jean Baudrillard, lecture on his photographic work in the Parco department store, Tokyo, November 1997.

4 Shinjin Shimizu, 'Statement', in the Kaitaisha performance documents *Gekidan Kaitaisha* (Tokyo, 1998), p. 9.

5 Shinjin Shimizu, 'Memorandum for *Tokyo Ghetto*' (November 1996), in *Gekidan Kaitaisha*, p. 6.

6 *The Season of New Abjection*, Art Sphere (Tennoz Island), Tokyo, August 1998.

7 *Tatsumi Hijikata: Art and Butoh*, February 1998, Ikeda Museum of Twentieth Century Art, Ito (Ito is a town around 80 km from Tokyo).

8 Takahiko Iimura, retrospective exhibition, Hillside Plaza, Tokyo, February 1998.

AFTERWORD: JAPANESE POP CULTURE AND THE ERADICATION OF HISTORY

1 *The Spirits Play*, Theatre Works at Victoria Theatre and The Battle Box, Singapore, August 2000.

2 The other artists were BuBu, Atsushi Nishijima and Grinderman.

3 The *New Junior High School History Textbook* by Atarashii Kyokasho o Tsukurukai (Tokyo, 2000).

4 'Ha-rees in Taiwan', *Spa!*, 25 April 2000.

5 Guy Debord, *Commentaires sur la Société du Spectacle* (Paris, 1988).

6 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, 1991).

7 Miyadai Shinji (Associate Professor at Tokyo Metropolitan University), *Owarinaki Nichijoo wo Ikiro* (Live in an Endless Everyday) (Tokyo, 1995).

8 Takashi Murakami, *Superflat Manifesto*, published to coincide with an exhibition on the 'superflat' at Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, 2001. Murakami's inclusivity presents Japanese wrestling, video games, and commercial animators and *manga* designers alongside the 'superflat' artists Hiromix, Aya Takano and MR, among others.

9 Ishihara Shintaro, *Katsu Nihon* (Japan that Wins) (Tokyo, 2000).

10 Akira Asada (Associate Professor at Kyoto University), *Rekishi no owari wo koete* (Over the End of History) (Tokyo, 1998), p. 15.

Glossary of Japanese Terms

Compiled by Midori Matsui

ANGURA A Japanese abbreviation of 'underground'. The word is mainly attached to the artistic experiments of the 1960s that sought a palpable expression of contemporaneity in the reality of Japanese experience and body (*nikutai*). Its most powerful expressions were achieved by the new independent theatre movement. Reacting against the established modern theatre's dependence on translations of modernist plays (Brecht, Beckett, Ionesco), representatives of *angura* theatre such as Juro Kara's Jyokyo Gekijo (established in 1963), Shuji Terayama's Tenjo Sajiki (established in 1966) and Tadashi Suzuki's Waseda Shogekijo (established in 1967) insisted on an original method of training, based on the specificity of each actor's and actress's body, and on original scripts, performed by the members of their own company. Their drama revealed deep emotions and the historical contradictions of contemporary Japanese life, uncontainable in rationalistic thinking or abstract language based on the translation of foreign philosophy. Powerfully reflecting the political milieu of the Japanese 1960s, in which young people fought against the powers that be, rejecting the Japan–US Security Treaty, *angura* theatre's subversive content and performing style (it was frequently performed outdoors or in a tent) conveyed an undeniable revolutionary spirit. By the mid-1970s, as the original *angura* theatre companies gained public recognition and commercial success, the word *angura* ceased to be applied to them. However, it continued to be used in order to suggest a theatrical style influenced by them or an attitude dissenting from bourgeois decorum and work ethic.

BUTOH OR ANKOKU BUTOH A completely original, domestic style of dancing started in 1961 by Tatsumi Hijikata (1928–1986). Against the modern rationalism underlying modern dance, Hijikata asserted the singularity of a body born of the Japanese soil whose irregular and eccentric movements were forced out in reaction to a specific

historical condition or the physical pressures of hard labour. In accordance with Hijikata's attempt to create a dance aesthetic consisting of apparently negative physical movements, including shaking, stumbling and a bow-legged walk, *butoh* dancers frequently appeared with a shaved head and a face painted white. Imbued with the same revolutionary spirit as *angura* theatre, winning the sympathy of those who were against the facile acceptance of American-style democracy, including Yukio Mishima, *butoh* superseded Japanese modern dance in popularity and influence.

NIHONGA A style of painting, initiated in the 1880s and established in the 1890s, synthesizing diverse schools of traditional Japanese painting while incorporating influences from contemporary Western painting, such as Post-Impressionism, that were congenial to the Japanese aesthetic sensibility. Invented in rivalry with *yōga*, or Western-style painting, *nihonga* was closely associated with the redefinition of the Japanese identity accompanying Japan's reconstruction as a modern nation. Ironically, its institutionalization was achieved by the art historian and philosopher Tenshin Okakura (1862–1913) and the university professor Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1913), who invigorated the old vehicle of Japanese-style painting with ideas imported from the West, including artistic creativity, or originality, and autonomy of painting. Tenshin's pan-Asian ideology gave *nihonga* its nationalistic character. It remains the most popular genre of visual art in Japan today.

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