

Edited by Katarzyna J. Cwiertka
and Ewa Machotka

Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan

A Transdisciplinary Perspective



Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan

Consumption and Sustainability in Asia

Asia is the primary site of production of a myriad of commodities that circulate the globe. From cars and computer chips to brand clothing, material objects manufactured across Asia have become indispensable to people's lives in most cultural contexts. This mega production generates huge amounts of waste and pollution that threaten the health and lifestyle of many Asians. Yet, Asia is not only a site of production, but also one of the most rapidly growing consumer markets.

This series focuses on consumption – the engine propelling Asia onto the world economic stage – and its implications, from practices and ideologies to environmental sustainability, both globally and on the region itself. The series explores the interplay between the state, market economy, technologies, and everyday life, all of which have become defining facets of contemporary Asian culture. Shifts in consumption that have taken place across Asia since the 1950s have had a deep impact on new and emerging informal economies of material care, revealing previously invisible sites of innovation, resistance and co-option. The series will bring together studies by historians, anthropologists, geographers, and political scientists that systematically document and conceptualize Asia's engagement with consumption and sustainability in the global environment.

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Amsterdam University Press

Cover illustration: Morimura Yasumasa, *Elder Sister*, 1991. Chromogenic print on canvas,
78 3/4 x 47 1/4 inches (200 x 120 cm)

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Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden

Typesetting: Crius Group, Hulshout

Amsterdam University Press English-language titles are distributed in the US and Canada by
the University of Chicago Press.

ISBN 978 94 6298 063 1

e-ISBN 978 90 4853 002 1 (pdf)

DOI 10.5117/9789462980631

NUR 630



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Acknowledgements

This book originated from the interdisciplinary endeavour of two scholars who decided to explore contemporary Japanese material culture from the perspective of sustainability. Our own research interests – waste (Cwiertka) and art (Machotka) – formed the point of departure for this experiment, titled ‘From Garbage to Art: Environmental Consciousness in Japan in the Post-Cold War Era’. The project received generous support from the LeidenAsiaCentre (formerly MEARC) and aimed to explore popular attitudes towards the environment, recycling, and energy conservation, combined with a study of the cultural articulation of a newly emerging consciousness in the visual arts.

In the first instance, we planned to study the eco-art movement – in particular, the process of the artistic recycling of rubbish into art as a way to challenge the existence of the intellectually and socially flat contemporary Japanese culture that has been created by the consumerist agenda. However, since its inception in 2013, the project has undergone continual transformation, largely influenced by the scholars we have met on our journey and the ideas they have shared with us. We are indebted to all of them.

During the inaugural workshop we organized at Leiden University in May 2014 we were joined by Kasuya Akiko, Isabel Hoving, Eiko Maruko Siniawer, Anne Murcott, Helen Westgeest, and Gavin Whitelaw. The second workshop, titled ‘Art with Agenda: Socially Engaged Art Practices in Post-Cold War Japan’, took place in November of the same year. This time, we benefitted from the ideas presented by Gunhild Borggreen, Adrian Favell, Hasegawa Yuko, Hayashi Michio, and Jennifer Robertson. The conference session ‘Rubbish! The Underworlds of Everyday Life’, organized by Cwiertka at the European Association of Japanese Studies (EAJS) Conference in Ljubljana in the summer of 2014, further enriched the scope and depth of our explorations. We are grateful to Sabine Frühstück, Fabio Gygi, Joseph Hankins, Eiko Maruko Siniawer, Anemone Platz, and Brigitte Steger, who participated in this conference panel.

While engaging in conversations on the topic of waste and art with our colleagues, we pursued work on the second pillar of the project – an exhibition that explored contemporary Japanese packaging conventions. Since packaging is both a major source of waste in Japan and an important genre within the domain of Japanese design, it is hardly surprising that this was an area in which our research interests intersected. The exhibition was put on display at three different locations: Japanmuseum Sieboldhuis in Leiden

(10 June 2016-28 August 2016), the Museum of Japanese Art and Technology in Cracow (9 November 2016-28 February 2017), and the Asia and Pacific Museum in Warsaw (30 May 2017-17 September 2017). Additional funding for the exhibition was provided by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO, project number 277-53-006, www.garbagemattersproject.com). The catalogue of the exhibition is available to download from <https://www.cwiertka.com/news/the-catalogue-of-the-exhibition-too-pretty-to-throw-away-packaging-design-from-japan-is-now-available-for-download/>.

Over the course of the three years (2014-2016) of our engagement with this experimental project, we came to the realization, as we explain in the Introduction, that the debate focusing on the relationships between consumption, sustainability, and art may offer a fresh view of the everyday reality in post-bubble Japan. We hope that this volume will provide a useful contribution to the literature, especially as the LeidenAsiaCentre grant has enabled us to publish this book as an Open Access publication.

The diverse intellectual backgrounds of our contributors formed the groundwork for this transdisciplinary volume. We would like to thank all of our contributors for their hard work and patience. As is often the case with edited collections, this one comes out later than originally planned. We are also indebted to the two anonymous reviewers of the manuscript, whose critical remarks were tremendously helpful in sharpening our focus. Finally, we are grateful to Klarijn Anderson-Loven for her superb editorial work. Needless to say, the responsibility for any shortcomings of this volume lies with us.

Katarzyna J. Cwiertka and Ewa Machotka
October 2017

Notes to the Reader

All Japanese words in this book have been indicated in italics, except for personal, geographical, and institutional names, or words that occur frequently in a given chapter. Words that are considered to have entered the English language, such as *manga* and *tsunami*, are also set in roman type. Diacritical marks have been omitted in the names of major Japanese cities and the four main islands, except where these names appear in the titles of Japanese publications. Titles of artworks and the like are rendered in the original language at first occurrence, after which a translation and, if necessary, a shortened title in English are given. Product and company names have been rendered in the romanized transcription preferred by the respective company; this results in the occurrence of 'Tobu' next to 'Shōji'. Japanese personal names are presented following the Japanese convention in which the family name precedes the given name, except for those Japanese authors whose works are mainly or exclusively published in English. In the 'Works cited' section at the end of each chapter, the names of Japanese authors writing in English are treated in the same way as Western names, whereby a comma is used to separate the family name from the given name. A comma is not used to separate the first and last name of Japanese authors writing in Japanese, however, as the word order in such titles already reflects the correct notation of a Japanese name. Sometimes the suffix '-san' (meaning Mr/Mrs) is attached to personal names as an expression of respect, for instance Nagatanigawa-san.

Currency amounts, when given in a currency other than the euro, have been converted into euros using the fxtop.com currency converter tool, which takes account of the historical values of various currencies (<http://fxtop.com/en/currency-converter-past.php>). Please note that before 31 December 1998 the euro exchange rates are theoretical ones. Where a certain month is specified with regard to a currency amount, calculations are based on the historical conversion rate on the 15th of that month; if only a year is specified, calculations are based on the historical conversion rate in the middle of that year (1 July). All converted amounts are approximate and for illustrative purposes only.

Introduction

Katarzyna J. Cwiertka and Ewa Machotka

Consumption

In 2011, the journal *Current Anthropology* published a provocative article by the renowned social theorist David Graeber in its 'Keywords' section. The author called for an abandonment of the discourse on consumption, warning scholars about the dangers of importing into cultural and social analysis 'the political economy habit of seeing society as divided into two spheres, one of production and one of consumption' (Graeber 2011: 501).

Certainly, since the late 1980s, the study of consumption has expanded from the domains of consumer research and marketing, successfully 'taking over the academic galaxy one discipline at a time' (Cluley and Harvie 2011: 502-3). The processes of consumption are now universally acknowledged as defining the activities of modern life, and are studied extensively by anthropologists, geographers, sociologists, and historians.¹ The purchasing of commodities and services, and the processes that precede and follow these actions, are now considered essential in shaping individual and group identities in different parts of the world. They have simultaneously merged with leisure activities, so that shopping has now become a ritual in its own right. In his article, Graeber asks the important question of how the concept of consumption has come to encompass all activities that one engages in when one is not working for wages: 'what does it mean that we now call certain kinds of behavior "consumption" rather than something else?' (Graeber 2011: 491). This question is the point of departure for this volume. We argue that, despite the economic regression that the country has experienced since the 1990s, post-bubble Japan brings to light the total victory of commodification over all spheres of life, which marks the logic of late capitalism (Jameson 1991).

Between the 1960s and the 1980s, Japan experienced uninterrupted high levels of economic growth. The foundation for this economic 'miracle' was a combination of wartime industrialization (1937-1945); reforms implemented during the Allied Occupation (1945-1952); and a strategic alliance with the United States, which was nourished by the Cold War climate (Johnson 1982;

¹ Bock 1993; Miller 1995; Aldridge 2003; Goodman and Cohen 2003; Zukin and Maguire 2004; Trentmann 2012, 2016.

Katz 1998). The most tangible evidence of successful post-war development in Japan was the dramatically rising standard of living: per-capita GDP doubled between 1960 and 1970, and then doubled again during the following two decades (Taira 1993). Economic affluence transformed the everyday practices of housework, shopping, and leisure, and the culture of scarcity and ethos of frugality – characteristic of the 1940s and 1950s – gradually gave way to the veneration of material comfort and convenience (Franks 2009; Usui 2014). During the Cold War, consumption served to legitimize capitalism in the eyes of millions of ordinary people, evolving into the central experience in the lives of First-World populations, with the Japanese leading the way as the first fully fledged consumer society in Asia.

The end of the Cold War era, coupled with the bursting of the bubble economy, shook the very foundations of the post-war economic ‘miracle’ – the promise of material affluence for all represented by the myth of Japan as a ‘middle-class’ society (Murakami 1982). Yet, it by no means stripped consumption from the pivotal position it occupied within Japanese society – quite the contrary. Building on the foundations of the 1970s and 1980s, the logic of late capitalism permeated every corner of post-bubble Japan.

The historical development of consumption in Japan since the dawn of modernization has in recent years received growing scholarly attention.² These pioneering studies cover consumer goods (clothing, household appliances, confectionery, and cosmetics) and services (lighting, trains, postal services, and mail-order retailing), conveying consumption ‘as part of the dynamic cycle of production, exchange and utilisation that characterises the everyday economic activities not just of individuals, but of all groups in a society’ (Franks and Hunter 2012: 3). The scope of *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan: A Transdisciplinary Perspective* is much broader, as we are convinced that a significant shift has taken place in the final decades of the twentieth century. Today, consumption is no longer simply a component of everyday economic activities, but rather a mirror of a society guided by the ‘logic of late capitalism’, as defined by the prominent political theorist Fredric Jameson (1991). Sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman describes the same phenomenon as a ‘society of consumers’, of which the most prominent feature is ‘the *transformation of consumers into commodities*; or rather their dissolution into the sea of commodities’ (2007: 12; italics in original). Bauman’s monograph *Consuming Life* has been an inspiration for this collection, in which we provide ethnographic evidence of how a ‘society of consumers’ operates in post-bubble Japan. As Bauman points

2 Franks 2009; Gordon 2011; Franks and Hunter 2012; Usui 2014.

out in the introduction to his book, consumerist patterns of interaction and evaluation have a growing impact on 'various apparently unconnected aspects of the social setting, such as politics and democracy, social divisions and stratification, communities and partnership, identity building, the production and use of knowledge, or value preferences' (2007: 24).

In this volume, we demonstrate this condition in Japan through a variety of case studies that apply disparate methodologies and theoretical insights. The open-ended, transdisciplinary approach that guides this project reflects the nature of the human experience of life that is the main topic of this enquiry. The case studies discussed in this book can generally be classified into two types: classic analyses of consumption, revolving around commodities and shopping, and less orthodox examples of the production and consumption of contemporary art. One chapter also touches upon the use of the consumerist approach in the construction of national identity. Most processes described in this collection are not new, and the sample presented is by no means exhaustive. However, together they shed light on the need to approach the all-encompassing nature of commodification and consumption as a 'total phenomenon', including the environmental dimension. Thus, *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan* is not an analysis of how consumers in Japan make their purchasing decisions, how they use different products, or how this behaviour has been influenced by the recession and other post-1990 events. Instead, contributors to this volume reveal how contemporary life in Japan is a 'consuming project', in which the meaning and the value of objects is insubstantial, while they 'float with equal specific gravity in the constantly moving stream of money' (Simmel 1969: 52, quoted in Bauman 2007: 12). The juxtaposition of ordinary consumer items with art in our discussion is critical to conveying this message.

The interrogation of the relationship between art and capitalism is not a new topic for academic enquiry. Stewart (2007: 15) observes that '[a]rt's relation to commodification is an unavoidable and entrenched condition for much of the theory, history and practice of art today'. The examination starts with the classical Marxist accounts of 'commodity fetishism' and the 'culture industry' (Horkheimer and Adorno 1991 [1944]) that challenged the romantic view of art as the self-expression of an artist as a free, autonomous creator. Subsequent studies, among others by Walter Benjamin (1968), who investigated the notions of the uniqueness and authenticity of art (its 'aura'), and Pierre Bourdieu (1986), with his groundbreaking concept of cultural capital, complicated the early materialist understanding of art within the framework of the 'exchange value'. The issue of the commodification of art has also been interrogated by diverse artistic

practices, ranging from pop art to conceptual art.³ Recent decades have seen intensified critique of capitalism and the emergence of notions of socially engaged art; that is, the concept of relational art, which emphasizes the production of social relations rather than objects/artworks that are to be consumed individually (Bourriaud 2002). On the other hand, Jacques Rancière (2008: 7) argued that the ‘critique of the spectacle’ formed by repressive capitalism (Debord 1994 [1967]) cannot function as a universal solution for social problems.

Although these discussions have not resolved the question of whether art is a commodity or not, they have exposed the ambivalent relationship of art with its socio-economic status. Also, they have made it clear that the question is something of a rhetorical one. In fact, the point is not establishing what constitutes a commodity or trying to devise an (impossible) universal definition of art, but rather understanding what it does to social relations and practices and how it affects society at different places and points in history. This is precisely the objective of scholars who study ‘ordinary’ commodities as well, and due to the ambiguous and fluid status of art, its inclusion in the present discussion on consumption in post-bubble Japan is particularly valuable.

Sustainability

As we have pointed out above, consumption retained the pivotal position it occupied within Japanese society after the bursting of the economic bubble. However, a new development surfaced during the 1990s, which was to become a major transformative force affecting consumption practices in Japan: sustainability. As Barrett demonstrated in his 2005 volume *Ecological Modernization and Japan*, the first decade of the post-bubble era proved critical in bringing about the rise of progressive environmental governance. In the period between 1990 and 1999, eighteen new environmental laws were introduced in Japan (Barrett 2005: 17), and the commitment to sustainable development was symbolically sealed by the 2001 establishment of the Ministry of the Environment (Kankyōshō). At the same time, public concern about the environment moved from the Nimbyism of earlier decades to the implementation of more professional ecological processes, in which NGOs

3 Reviewing all these diverse positions is beyond the scope of the present discussion. For a detailed analysis, see Stewart 2007.

often worked together with local governments and businesses (Broadbent and Barrett 2005: 84).

Scholars agree that the shift towards ecological modernization in Japan was caused by both internal pressures – such as growing public concern over industrial pollution and overexposure to dioxin and other toxic chemicals – and the need to respond to global initiatives aimed at tackling environmental problems. For example, Peter Kirby (2011: 163-4) explains that the notion of ‘sustainable development’, first presented in 1987 by the Brundtland Commission of the UN as a viable strategy for the future, initially met with little enthusiasm from Japanese policymakers, whose attention was directed entirely towards the economic bubble. It was the international pressure that built up after the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro that provided the first impulse for the rhetoric of sustainability to gain some currency in Japan. The hosting of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Kyoto in 1997 provided an additional incentive (Kirby 2011: 178). It must be pointed out that the aura of frugality and restraint, which arose in the climate of the post-bubble hangover, had a positive impact on the rise of a sustainability consciousness among the Japanese public.

It is in these circumstances that the virtue of recycling began to be inculcated as a fundamental civic and moral duty in Japan. The promulgation in 1995 of the Containers and Packaging Recycling Law (*Yōki Hōsō Risaikuru Hō*) marked the beginning of this process (Yamamoto 2003; Mizoiri 2009). The law introduced the system of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), which holds producers responsible for recycling the packaging of their products. In practice, waste plastic, glass, paper containers, and packaging have since been collected from households by municipalities and retailers, before being delivered to the Japan Containers and Packaging Recycling Association (JCPRA, *Nihon Yōki Hōsō Risaikuru Kyōkai*) for recycling (Tanaka 1999). Depending on the municipality, there are differences in the number of recyclable materials and the method of collection, but since the initial separation of waste is performed by citizens before they put their refuse out for collection, the habit of recycling has, in the last two decades, become an integral part of everyday life.

The growing awareness among ordinary Japanese of the importance of sustainable consumption, recycling, and energy conservation was further strengthened by the aftermath of the ‘triple disaster’ of 2011. On 11 March 2011, Japan was struck by an earthquake of 9.0 magnitude and a tsunami, which resulted in damage to the nuclear reactor at the Fukushima Daiichi

Nuclear Power Plant (Fukushima Daiichi Genshiryoku Hatsudensho). The meltdown of the reactor was classified as a Level 7 nuclear accident, the highest level on the International Nuclear Event Scale. Along with damage and loss of lives, it had a lasting impact on the public perception of nuclear energy worldwide (Kim, Kim and Kim 2013; Poortinga, Aoyagi and Pidgeon 2013). In Japan, nuclear power had long been a national strategic priority, and was perceived as one of the solutions to environmental problems. For example, the 2010 Strategic Energy Plan (Enerugi Kihon Keikaku) committed to a radical reduction in greenhouse gas emissions through investments in renewable energy, the promotion of energy conservation, and an ambitious expansion of Japan's nuclear-energy-generating capacity from 26 per cent in 2010 to nearly 50 per cent in 2030 (Poortinga, Aoyagi and Pidgeon 2013: 1205).

Yet, the public reaction to the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant meltdown resulted in public opinion turning against nuclear energy. For example, a poll conducted by the *Asahi Shinbun* newspaper in 2007 showed that only 7 per cent of the population was against nuclear power plants. This number increased tenfold following the disaster (Omura 2012: 127), and was followed by hundreds of demonstrations and events held nationwide to protest the government's plans to relaunch Japan's nuclear power programme (Mie 2013). In September 2012, the Japanese government announced its intention to end the use of nuclear power by 2040. This announcement was shortly followed by the qualification that future policy was constantly under scrutiny and subject to change, thereby allowing the government the possibility of continuing to use Japan's other nuclear facilities. Despite this amendment, this commitment represented a huge departure from previous policy (Poortinga, Aoyagi and Pidgeon 2013: 1205).

In conclusion, the developments of the post-bubble decades had made it increasingly clear to the authorities, businesses, and the population at large that the persistent veneration of the material comfort and convenience pursued in the post-war period was no longer viable, as it conflicted with the goals of sustainability and energy conservation. This dilemma was not peculiar to Japan, but rather inherent to consumer capitalism itself. As has been frequently pointed out, early usage of the English word 'consumption' had exclusively negative connotations, meaning to use up, to destroy, to burn up, to devour, to exhaust, or to waste away (Williams 1976: 68-9). 'Continual growth' and 'endless production', which are the defining features of capitalism and the consumer society, are in fact 'endless cycles of destruction', as Graeber shrewdly observes. 'To make way for new products, all that old stuff must somehow be cleared away, destroyed, or at least cast aside as outmoded or irrelevant' (Graeber 2011: 492).

The post-bubble era and research on consumption

The early 1990s – the moment when the Japanese bubble economy began to show clear signs of decline – coincided with an outpouring of scholarship on Japanese consumption. A critical role in shifting consumption towards the centre of sociological and anthropological research on Japan was played by the ConsumAsiaN network, set up by Brian Moeran and Lise Skov, then affiliated with the University of Hong Kong. Although the network itself did not survive the test of time, the volumes that emerged under the inspiration of its activities confirmed the validity of consumption as a tool for understanding Japanese society.

The first book in the ConsumAsiaN book series, *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan* (Moeran and Skov 1995), remains a seminal work on the topic. The volume pinpoints the contradictory nature of the relationship between Japanese women and consumerism that had evolved by the end of the twentieth century. While consumption constitutes an important element of female agency, as women consume to construct statements of self and social position, at the same time their individual freedom is constrained by the fantasies of an ideal life that are generated through engagement with the media and consumerism. The promise of individualism projected through consumer marketing has a paradoxical connotation in a society that exerts strong pressures to conform.

This point was stressed by Merry White and John Clammer, the authors of two groundbreaking monographs on consumption in Japan published in the 1990s, who also contributed chapters to Moeran and Skov's 1995 volume. In *The Material Child* (1994), a cross-cultural study of Japanese and American teenagers, White demonstrated how strongly the demands for conformity and performance perfection in the realm of consumerism are experienced by teens in Japan. Clammer, in turn, argued in *Contemporary Urban Japan: Sociology of Consumption* (1997) that although, generally speaking, variety and originality are devalued in Japanese consumer culture relative to newness or up-to-dateness, homogeneity prevails alongside differentiations that develop between each segment of the consumer market.

While the body of scholarship on Japanese consumption gradually expanded and matured,⁴ the subject also began to infiltrate scholarship that did not focus on consumption per se, such as Marily Ivy's *Discourses of*

4 This is clearly discernible, for example, with regard to research into food and fashion; see Ohnuki-Tierney 1993; Ashkenazi and Jacob 1998; Bestor 2004; Cwiertka 2006; Rath and Assmann 2010; Slade 2009; Steele et al. 2010; Gordon 2011; and Kawamura 2012.

the Vanishing (1995), Goldstein-Gidoni's *Packaged Japaneseness* (1997), and McVeigh's *Wearing Ideology* (2000). While this was clearly a reflection of how consumerist patterns of interaction and evaluation have successively colonized every aspect of contemporary living in Japan, there were other forces at work as well. One of them was an increased awareness of the multifaceted relationships between people and objects in processes of social interaction.

The first signs of this changing attitude could be observed among social scientists in the late 1980s. An important role in placing objects at the centre of intellectual debate about late-capitalist societies was played by an interdisciplinary field of enquiry generally referred to as 'material culture studies', which quickly extended its influence across the social sciences (Hicks and Beaudry 2010; Tilley et al. 2013). While anthropology, archaeology, folklore studies, cultural geography, and sociology were particularly influential in the construction of this new trans-discipline, the art history perspective – which could be described as the study of objects par excellence – was largely absent from the discourse. Three main reasons were responsible for this status quo (Yonan 2011). To begin with, the very definition of 'material culture', employed by art historians primarily to denote a category of objects traditionally understood as 'less intrinsically meaningful' (Yonan 2011: 235), led to the downplaying of materiality within the discipline. The second predicament that prevented art history from fully engaging with socio-anthropological approaches to material culture was the focus on objects as part of particular collections, rather than in their original use. Finally, as Michael Yonan observes, privileging the visual aspects of art as represented in much art-historical writing has tricked art history 'into believing that it is a discipline of images, when really it has always been a discipline of objects' (2011: 240).

While *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan* builds on the legacy of the scholarship on consumption, the message we seek to convey lies beyond the domain of marketing behaviour. Through the diverse disciplinary perspectives of the case studies presented in this collection, we aim to identify the pervasive links between materialism as the realm of consumption and materiality as the domain of the object. We argue that the methodological and theoretical insights developed as part of an art-historical enquiry into an art object can enrich the study of consumption, and elevates its significance for the understanding of social life.

Konbini, landscape, and sustainable art

The first five chapters of the collection focus on classic cases of commodities and their relationships with consumers. The volume opens with a study of one of the most notorious symbols of Japanese consumption – the department store. As Hendrik Meyer-Ohle argues in the first chapter, the deteriorating sales, mergers, and bankruptcies of many department stores since the 1990s are not necessarily related to economic factors alone, but are a result of changing consumer needs, largely motivated by the social and technological transformations that have taken place in the post-bubble era. He observes that the success of Japanese department stores in the pre-bubble era relied on their social function as an educator, instructing the Japanese masses on how to dress and behave, following middle-class models. That the material objects required for these purposes were available for purchase at the department stores seemed to be a matter of little consequence. As Meyer-Ohle demonstrates in his chapter, the (largely unsuccessful) attempts of Japanese department stores to recover their sales in recent years have been primarily targeted at regaining their authoritarian presence as the dictator of good taste. The author suggests that a more substantial transformation is needed to ensure the survival of Japanese department stores. An important point that this first chapter underlines is the fact that it is not the negation of consumption on the part of Japanese shoppers as such that has been responsible for the post-bubble troubles that the department stores in Japan have found themselves in, but rather the inability of the department stores and other shops to catch up with the shifting social reality.

The subsequent chapter provides the flip-side of this story, exploring the successful growth of ‘fast fashion’, provided by brands such as UNIQLO and MUJI. Stephanie Assmann attributes the growing popularity of these stores in the post-bubble era to two factors: first, the growth of unstable working conditions, which led to a decline in disposable incomes, and second, a change in attitudes towards consumption, which began to serve as a means of individual self-expression, rather than of conspicuous consumption. Another factor Assmann mentions is the increasing concern with sustainability and ethical consumption among Japanese consumers, which has pushed ‘fast fashion’ to implement recycling programmes and charitable initiatives. This sustainable consumption is part of a major societal change that has gradually taken place since the bursting of the bubble.

Chapter 3 tests this assertion through a focus on *konbini* (Japanese convenience stores), which are unlikely to qualify to enter the ranks of sustainable retailers. As Gavin Whitelaw reveals, the popularity of *konbini*

has grown continuously since the 1990s, despite repeated public criticism of the poor quality of the food on offer and the excessive production of waste, among other issues. The author pursues the factors responsible for the *konbini*'s success and stresses that convenience is not the main issue. Instead, he highlights the process of 'structured differentiation' as a key feature that has turned *konbini* into important sites of human interaction in Japan. The distribution of the stores across the country is adjusted to meet local demand, as are the services and products offered in specific locations. *Konbini* fulfil the important social role of the 'third place'. Unlike the 'first place' (the home) and the 'second place' (the workplace), *konbini* provide a more neutral ground, fostering communication. Thus, the spectacular growth of *konbini* since the 1990s reflects societal, demographic, technological, and political changes, rather than economic shifts.

While not addressing the issue specifically, the first three chapters of the volume relate to the issue of branding. Whether this concerns the declining brands of department stores or the successful brands of MUJI, UNIQLO, 7-Eleven, Lawson, FamilyMart, and Ministop, branding is taken for granted in Japan, and since the 1990s has rapidly expanded beyond the landscape of Japanese retailing (Rausch 2009; Porcu 2014). In Chapter 4, Katarzyna Cwiertka presents the case of *washoku* (lit. 'Japanese food' or 'Japanese cuisine'), which demonstrates the use of branding on the national level. She argues that the branding of *washoku* serves the socio-political agenda of the government, which is responding to the declining competitiveness of Japan in the global marketplace, the low esteem of the Japanese population about the achievements of their country, and the country's low food self-sufficiency ratio. Cwiertka's account not only makes it clear that the principles of the marketplace have infiltrated the domains of intangible heritage, but also highlights the ambiguity of the process of its consumption.

The ideological authority of the state also features in Chapter 5, this time in relation to gender. Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni demonstrates the diversification of the models of domestic femininity during the post-bubble era, introducing the new ideals of *karisuma shufu* (charisma housewife) or 'hot mama', which have featured widely in the popular media. The author points out that these models are a response to the conservative socio-political climate in post-bubble Japan. However, in contrast to previous generations of Japanese women, these women do not sacrifice themselves on the altar of domesticity, but rather are committed to enjoying it – through consumption.

Yet, as the following chapter reveals, the domestic arena can also facilitate subversive, anti-consumption reactions. Fabio Gygi charts these phenomena through the study of *gomi yashiki*, or 'rubbish houses', in the

contemporary context of sustainable consumption. Gygi argues that hoarding reveals human anxieties about consumption, ownership, and the value of things. *Gomi yashiki* interrupt and reverse the trajectory of objects' social lives, exposing transformative and unpredictable relationships between meaning and matter. In the pre-bubble era, this trajectory was imagined as a linear development from product to waste, while in the post-bubble era the notion of a circular path implying recycling and reuse has been introduced. However, Gygi problematizes the issue by showcasing *gomi yashiki* as representing a refusal to participate in the processes of consumption and of assigning value altogether.

The issue of negotiating the value and meaning of used and unwanted objects is explored further in Chapter 7. Jennifer Robertson discusses the recently emerged practice of funeral rites for robots and electronic devices, a type of commodity that is characterized by a very short consumption cycle. Instead of entering the state of waste with its related annihilation of value (even if followed by recycling), these objects are reborn through funeral rituals, with a different status and value. This rebirth is in an ontologically different category from recycling, as it assumes a continuation of the 'spirit' beyond the death of the 'body', as well as implying personal growth and improvement (of the object, in this case). Buddhist rites such as these can lessen the human anxiety related to guilt about the overconsumption of objects for which novelty is the major appeal, and ease the emotional stress related to discarding items of profound personal significance. All this points to changes in the consumption of new technologies, a pivotal development in the context of the Japanese state, which has embarked on the process of robotization in response to its demographic problems related to the ageing and shrinking population. It is intended that humanoid robots will replace humans in providing various services, mainly nursing and caring for the elderly. On the one hand, the introduction of funeral rites for electronic devices offers an opportunity to ease the personal trauma related to the discarding of objects, but on the other hand, it also disturbs the standard trajectory of the social life of things and invites consideration of the fluidity of the value of objects in general. This crucial issue is also the main focus of the subsequent chapters, which focus on art.

The questions of value and aesthetic judgement are some of the most notorious and persistent issues in the art world and the art market. Although the romantic notion of 'art for art's sake' produced by high modernism has already lost currency, in academia the distinction between 'pure art' and commercial objects persists as the guiding principle in the social and economic process of assigning a value to objects. The problem is largely a methodological one: how to study objects simultaneously as art and as a

commodity? Gunhild Borggreen proposes an appropriate methodology in Chapter 8 of this collection. She approaches art as an ethnographic endeavour in which artists operate as ethnographers involved in the study of social issues. She argues that this outlook provides an excellent opportunity to create an ideological distance between the domain of art and life, and art and the material object. Following this premise, Borggreen charts the diverse artistic engagements with consumption in post-bubble Japan, ranging from critical commentaries on consumption and the blurring of the distinction between art and commodity, to the shift from producing objects to artistic recycling prompted by the growing social and environmental consciousness. Although this shift may indicate that consumerism has been replaced by social engagement, Borggreen argues that it is by no means a new phenomenon, nor has it replaced other approaches to objects and their consumption.

In the following chapter, Hayashi Michio discusses the power of consumption to create uniformity through his analysis of the impact of economic growth on the pictorial imagination of the landscape. He investigates the 'death of landscape', a cultural phenomenon originating in the 1970s that continues until the present day. This phenomenon implies the homogenization of the provincial landscape across Japan – its 'Tokyo-ization' – which transforms diverse places into copies of the national capital, resulting in 'mini-Tokyos'. Hayashi discusses the artistic practices of the 1970s that pursued an immediacy and authenticity of experience that counterbalanced this destructive tendency. Paradoxically, these newly developed ways of artistic expression, which emerged to express the authenticity of the experience of reality, quickly came to be co-opted by consumer culture, namely, by advertising. Hayashi argues that the impact of economic growth resulted in a process in which the landscape as a certain artistic genre started to exist as a symbol of itself, a simulacrum, onto which the viewer projects her/his nostalgic yearning for 'the real'.

The processes that began in the 1970s continued beyond the bursting of the bubble, as Ewa Machotka testifies in the next chapter. Recent years have seen a rise in art initiatives that are trying to recover the diversity and authenticity of Japanese landscapes. One such initiative is the Echigo-Tsumari Art Field (Daichi no Geijutsusai no Sato), established in 2011 in a depopulated area of Niigata Prefecture. Guided by the romantic vision of *satoyama*, or 'village mountain', the project refashions the local, social, and physical landscape into an ideal of harmonious interaction between humans and the environment that challenges consumption and emphasizes social relations. Machotka reveals that the project is based on a solid material

foundation that contributes to the economic and social revitalization of the area, and argues that it serves diverse economic, social, and political agendas. However, rather than providing evidence of the corrupting power of commercialization, Machotka suggests that this phenomenon points to the performative properties of art objects themselves and the ambiguous relationships between art and commodity, which are perceived not as fixed but as temporary.

These fluid characteristics of an object that, in the course of its social life, can move between being a commodity, waste, and art (not necessarily in this order) are also discussed by Kasuya Akiko in the final chapter of this volume. Adopting a curator's perspective, Kasuya focuses on several art events, including the yearly art festival Tatsuno Art Project: Arts and Memories (Tatsuno Āto Purojekuto: Toki no Kioku), organized in a town in Hyōgo Prefecture. She investigates the work of contemporary artists invited to exhibit at Tatsuno and that of a group of young graduates from the Kyoto City University of the Arts (Kyōto Shiritsu Geijutsu Daigaku) who are interested in (re)using mundane, everyday objects in their artistic practices. In these processes, the artists change the linear trajectory of consumption. Through artistic recycling they give objects completely new meanings, status, and value. Kasuya suggests that these practices can be linked to the bursting of the bubble, which forced people to re-examine their lives and attitudes to objects, and to rediscover the recycling of the mundane as an artistic practice.

Collectively, the chapters in this volume remind us that the bursting of the asset bubble in the early 1990s did not halt consumption. On the contrary, in the context of late capitalism, 'consuming' has become the central experience in human life. While the last quarter of a century shows a clear downward trend in terms of the performance of the Japanese economy, this cannot be said about consumption as such, which, as pointed out by Graeber, now encompasses practically every activity that one engages in when one is not working for wages.

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Post-Bubble Japanese Department Stores

The Need to Search for New Paradigms

Hendrik Meyer-Ohle

Cwiertka, Katarzyna J. & Ewa Machotka (eds), *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan: A Transdisciplinary Perspective*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018

DOI: 10.5117/9789462980631/CH01

Abstract

While department stores were among the defining institutions of Japanese pre- and post-war consumer culture, their sales and market shares have fallen in the post-bubble period, forcing companies to close some stores and to generally rethink their business models. As companies have rebuilt stores, reviewed cost structures, and increased their independence from suppliers, this chapter argues that the fundamental business paradigm of department stores itself is under threat. Changes in employment patterns, societal values, and demographics call into question the business model of department stores. While store operators are changing their ways, it is questionable whether they can create a new paradigm that distinguishes their stores as clearly as previously from the many offerings available to consumers in Japan today.

Keywords: department stores, Internet, gift-giving, social relations, consumption, baby boom generation

Introduction

Normal at first sight, simple at first sight, its ingenuity and perfectionism concealed. When you wear it, when you use it, you will understand. Created with sincerity and carefully selected. Precisely because we are a department store we can make these suggestions.¹

¹ www.takashimaya.co.jp/style/mono/index.html, accessed 28 February 2006.

In June 1992, Tobu reopened its department store on the west side of Ikebukuro, one of Tokyo's busiest commuter railway stations. The renovations that had nearly doubled the store size to 83,000 square metres, thus making it Asia's biggest department store, were estimated to have come at a price of ¥100 billion (approx. €606 million). With the renewed store Tobu expected to outdo the rival Seibu department store on the east side of the station, and to expand its customer base to fashionable, young people, thereby increasing sales to ¥216 billion (approx. €1.7 billion) by 1993. Indeed, over five million people visited the store in the first month after its renovation, spending over ¥20 billion (approx. €118 million). Yet, at the time of the store's opening, enthusiasm was somewhat muted. The decision to expand the store was made in 1989, at the height of Japan's booming bubble economy, which, through asset inflation, had also driven private consumption. With this period coming to an abrupt end in 1992, consumer spending was down, and recouping the investment was now expected to take at least six years, instead of the initially expected two years. In 1992, there was still anticipation that the Japanese economy would return to its previous continuous growth and consumer prosperity, but sustained economic recovery never materialized.² While other retailers found success with new business models during the 1990s (Meyer-Ohle 2003; Dawson and Larke 2005), the department store industry has experienced a long, drawn-out period of falling sales, leading to mergers and store closures in and outside of Japan since the burst of the bubble economy. Tobu Ikebukuro's sales for 2013 stood at ¥106 billion (approx. €815 million) below its pre-renovation figures of 1992, which were achieved in a much smaller store (Niida 2010; Larke and Causton 2005; Nikkei MJ Ryūtsū Shinbun 2014).

Japanese department stores implemented various initiatives to maintain their position in Japan's consumer markets. These included reviewing product groups, reaching out to new customer groups, making room for attractive fast-fashion chains as tenants, opening stores in suburban shopping malls or copying shopping-mall principles when redesigning their own stores, and, finally, reproducing their businesses online. In this chapter, I will take a closer look at this last strategy, arguing that, while moving their business to a new medium, the Internet, department stores left their underlying business paradigms largely unchanged. This paradigm sees

2 'Japan's Tobu Store Opening Collides with Slowdown', *Reuters News*, 8 June 1992; 'Tokyo's Stores Lament Loss of Big Spenders', *Financial Times*, 27 October 1992; "Kyokan" hyakkaten, deashi wa junchō – Tōbu Ikebukuro-ten, uriage mokuhyō kōsu', *Nihon Keizai Shinbun*, 24 July 1992.

the customer as dependent on the authoritative advice of the department store, as the opening quote indicates. Consumers are instructed on what is appropriate to buy for certain social settings and situations according to their status, age, and gender. This paradigm stands in stark contrast to recent perceptions of marketing, advertising, and consumption, which, in advanced consumer cultures, see leadership in the creation of meaning and trends as having largely shifted to sophisticated and sovereign consumers (Firat, Dholakia and Venkatesh 1995; Holt 2002). Indeed, it can be argued that the continued post-bubble slump that Japanese consumer markets have suffered is partly due to too many companies not having critically reviewed their paradigms and instead continuing to rely on established strategies for serving the Japanese consumer market.

To illustrate the activities of Japanese department stores, this chapter makes use of a set of data collected on the web presence of Japanese department stores. In order to be able to cover the strong seasonality of the marketing activities of department stores, data were systematically collected over the period of one whole year, from February 2006 to January 2007. The data cover six Japanese department store companies – Daimaru, Isetan, Matsuzakaya, Mitsukoshi, Takashimaya, and Seibu – selected because of their differences in location and historical development. The collection of data involved taking weekly screenshots of web pages. Due to the massive amount of data, not every single page could be recorded, so only those pages that appeared to have been newly added over the previous week have been used. Thus, the data do not represent the complete web presence of the selected companies, but a sample; however, this sample is very large, with the number of screenshots totalling nearly 10,000. To make this data set accessible, screenshots were coded using photo database software that allowed the data to be sorted and accessed based on various categories and combinations thereof, thereby enabling me to identify significant trends.

Department stores in Japan

With some of the leading companies evolving from the merchant companies of the Edo period, the history of the Japanese department store started well before Mitsukoshi declared itself a Western-style department store in 1904. Since then, the Japanese department store has survived various challenges, including wars, restrictive government regulations, and the advancement of new retail formats, despite concerns regularly being voiced over its future (for example, Nihon Keizai Shinbunsha 1985; Suzuki 1993;

Watanabe 1997). As one of the defining institutions of Japan's cities and consumption patterns, the Japanese department store has received a fair amount of academic attention. Moeran (1998), Young (1999), Richter (2004a and 2004c), Tamari (2006), and Jinno (1994) have looked at the roles that department stores played within the construction of an early consumer culture in Japan. Creighton (1991, 1992, 1998a, and 1998b) has followed this up by looking at the department store during the period of the late 1980s. Moeran's (1998) and Tamari's (2006) contributions on the history of Mitsukoshi are a reminder that Japanese department stores, despite at first sight appearing to have a traditional outlook, have, from the beginning, been highly innovative. This innovativeness stretches from store design to the procurement of merchandise; most importantly, it includes the way that department stores have continuously sought to create meaning for the products and services offered in their stores, a point also emphasized by all other authors. Especially remarkable is the way that department stores have simultaneously managed to present themselves as authorities on Japanese etiquette and products, while at the same time selectively introducing and legitimizing the use of non-Japanese customs and products. Richter (2004b) looks at store magazines published by department stores in the 1920s and 1930s, arguing that these magazines played a major role in discussing and defining a lifestyle with Western attributes that still complied with certain Japanese habits. She suggests that it was the correct understanding of this balance that led to the acceptance of these customs by Japan's new upper middle class. Young (1999) sees department stores as a strong driver of homogenization within Japan's newly emerging middle class of the interwar period, a concept that was transferred to mass culture in the post-war period.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, since the end of the bubble economy, which provided department stores with yet another period of strong growth after an initially rather pessimistic outlook at the beginning of the 1980s (Nihon Keizai Shinbunsha 1985), the situation for most department store companies has been challenging, with sales figures and store numbers dropping steadily. For example, Seibu Department Store, which under its charismatic and outspoken owner, Tsutsumi Seiji, led the industry in innovation and vision during the 1980s, and is therefore extensively featured in the articles of Creighton and also Ueno (1998), had to undergo a reorganization and was bought by general merchandising and convenience store group Seven & I Holdings in 2006. Mitsukoshi, which was the focus of most work on the earlier history of department stores, has merged into a holding company with Isetan, with the latter generally regarded as possessing the superior strength in the relationship with regard to financing and marketing.

The following examples show how department stores have presented themselves on the Internet. They demonstrate first how department stores, even post-bubble, have kept to their basic paradigm of being authoritative guardians, helping their customers to navigate complicated social relationships and situations by making the right purchasing decisions. However, other examples will show how department stores have continued with their efforts to set new trends and, in this way and because of their cultural capital, have linked existing concepts with new ones.

Educating customers: Is my diamond the right size? Am I wearing the right dress?

To meet the ring of your destiny, a compromise is taboo! 'Having come into the cruel situation where your diamond was smaller than that of your friends was slightly...' 'Having been modest and gone down one rank, you will regret this forever after...' These are the voices of seniors. To ensure that you get something that at whatever age and place can be worn without embarrassment, you will have to discuss it with him and lean on him a bit. Choose the ring that you will like all your life.³

Weddings have always been an important part of the business of department stores. Here, the department store can combine all of its merchandising skills, organizational capabilities, and cultural capital, equipping the bride and the groom from dress to honeymoon, as well as organizing the ceremony and providing appropriate wedding favours (or, more precisely, 'wedding return gifts' [*kekkon uchi iwai*]) for the guests. The above quote is taken from the entry page of a web feature by Seibu Department Store, announcing its autumn bridal fair; it links to four other pages that provide advice on how to choose the perfect wedding ring, how to best provide guests with wedding return gifts (guests themselves are expected to give cash), how to choose the right wedding gown, and, finally, what kitchen utensils and tableware to buy. These products come from several departments, yet the Internet allows the department store to present them all under a common theme.

The above advertisement text, which rather bluntly appeals to the bride not to be shy in her demands, exemplifies a common theme in the marketing of department stores. Products are not advertised for their essential, aesthetic qualities or their functional fit, but rather to educate, some might even say

3 www.2seibu.co.jp/bridal/select/ring.html, accessed 24 August 2006.

patronizingly, about how they will contribute to a person's social role, obligations, and standing. Consequently, even the kitchenware section argues:

When the wedding preparations come to a conclusion, start preparing for your new life straight away. When you are newly married, there are many occasions to invite parents and friends, so you'll need to get kitchen utensils and tableware, won't you?⁴

Other department stores similarly educate their customers. Matsuzakaya, the leading department store in the Nagoya area, has a special Internet page on customs in Nagoya and instructs the page visitor that:

[i]n the Nagoya area, in addition to the ceremonial exchange of marriage gifts, it is customary to provide every family member with an appropriate gift (for example: a white shirt, a belt, a handbag, a sash, etc.).⁵

Another common approach is to refer to experts with knowledge or experience, and these can be either so-called seniors, as in the above ad, or shop floor staff: 'Supported by professionals: the style that mirrors the ideal of being together as a couple.' At the same time, though, department stores make a conscious effort to reduce barriers and create familiarity by portraying their staff as approachable and caring. Photos show employees as friendly and average-looking, and they are often accompanied by a quote in ordinary, sometimes even somewhat casual Japanese, as opposed to the very formal language that is typically used in a department store setting.

The tone and text of department store advertisements may contribute to homogenized consumer behaviour and appearance. This becomes most apparent when advising customers on how to dress for certain occasions, such as school entry, graduation ceremonies, job interviews, or even entry interviews for private schools and kindergartens. Again, stores are authoritative in their advice. In a detailed web advertisement targeting parents preparing for entrance interviews for private schools and nurseries, Mitsukoshi promotes, without exception, very sober and expensive, governess-style dresses, with the only light-hearted aspect being a dress that has the English word 'success' stitched into one of the inner pockets. The accompanying 'One Point of Advice' page, which actually consists of 20 bullet points in small font, advises mothers ('Don't wear clothes that make

4 www2.seibu.co.jp/bridal/select/interior.html, accessed 24 August 2006.

5 www.honten.jp/topic/contents/bridalclub/bridal.html, accessed 20 February 2006.

you stand out more than your child'), fathers ('When you sit down on a chair your socks will be visible, so wear something that matches your suit'), and children on the appropriate dress choice ('It is necessary to change for sports and other tests, so choose clothing with few buttons').⁶

While Japanese department stores find it increasingly difficult to draw customers to the upper floors of their store buildings, the extensive food sections in the basement are usually packed with people. The retailers have transferred their expertise in selling food to their web pages and utilize a highly sophisticated and reliable infrastructure for home deliveries. The inclusion of food is a major distinction of the web pages and online business of Japanese department stores in comparison to those in other countries:

The Selection for Spring Gatherings. The beginning of new life and saying farewell to the previous life, spring is a time when you meet with an increasing number of people. For these gatherings we have brought together a range of appropriate sweets.⁷

In selling food, companies again position products less for personal pleasure than as a means for their customers to appropriately fulfil social expectations. The above quote is from Takashimaya's year-long series 'Sweets for Four Seasons'. Appearing in early March, it points out that April is the time to move house, start a new job, or start studying, which requires customers to meet new people and say farewell to existing friends and colleagues:

Beginning to study, starting a new job, spring is the time to begin a new life. Wherever you are, there will also be a lot of people who help you to get started. What is indispensable in beginning a happy new life? Courtesy visits. Regardless of age and gender, take the first step into your new life by creating good feelings with sweets that everyone likes. We recommend boxes with individually wrapped sweets.⁸

Additional pages recommend, in an equally educational tone, the right items for a dessert at a family dinner, a farewell party, or a simple tea party with friends:

6 www.mitsukoshi.co.jp/nihombashi/mensetsu/03.html, accessed 3 May 2006.

7 www.takashimaya.co.jp/shopping/food/contents/sweets/index.html, accessed 3 February 2007.

8 www.takashimaya.co.jp/shopping/food/contents/sweets/special/spring07/page02.html, accessed 2 March 2007.

Of course, with close friends it is unnecessary to get too carried away. Here, a snack around 3:00 p.m. is just right [...] We recommend a cake of the type that can be cut. Of course, when you start passing it around, the conversation will begin, with comments like 'A lot for me!' and 'For me, so many centimetres.'⁹

Other department stores similarly place food in a social setting, present beautiful pictures and poetic texts, or provide further context by introducing the person who has created or chosen the product:

In a building that is a large atelier rather than a factory, watched by Jean-Jacques, a member of the second generation, sincere-looking craftsmen who know every step of the procedure are silently at work. In front of an aged oven we listen to the third-generation Philippe [...] (on French chocolate maker Bernachon).¹⁰

Of course, not all the items offered in department stores are presented in a direct social context; yet, even when introduced in the context of personal pleasure, the consumer is reminded of the responsibilities and expectations that come with having reached a certain age. Here, the textual item appears that probably stands out the most in the web pages of Japanese department stores, being the very frequent use of the term *otona*, which can be translated as 'grown-up' or 'adult':

The daily life of women is brightened by the luxurious gloss of the superior-quality design [...] Please note that materials like luxurious cashmere have been used for these coats, making them appropriate for the adult man.¹¹

Similarly, Isetan presents a man's cologne as providing 'the grown-up, manly image that grown-up men yearn for'.¹² Daimaru advises customers to 'search for an adult backpack or shoulder bag that is just right for walking the streets

9 www.takashimaya.co.jp/shopping/food/contents/sweets/special/spring07/index.html, accessed 2 March 2007.

10 www.isetan.co.jp/icm2/jsp/store/shinjuku/event/chocola/bernachon/html, accessed 5 January 2007.

11 www2.seibu.co.jp/coat/man.html, accessed 3 November 2006.

12 www.isetan.co.jp/icm2/jsp/store/shinjuku/item/mens/limited.jsp, accessed 14 February 2006.

or for going on a short journey on a holiday'.¹³ Seibu advertises Hawaiian shirts as 'floral patterned Alohas that are fitting for the adult'.¹⁴

In his analysis of Japanese consumer behaviour, Clammer (1997) has pointed to strong expectations in Japan to change one's consumption style according to age, and department stores play to such demands. The dress style has to change with age, and even when one dares to do something that might be associated with being young, like using a backpack or wearing a Hawaiian shirt, this has to be done properly, not violating the image of an adult.

Developing new customer groups

Cool Biz Style – The summer temperature in the office is 28 degrees. At Matsuzakaya we recommend a business style that while cool and comfortable also ensures a good appearance.¹⁵

In March 2005, the Japanese government decided to contribute to the fight against global warming by setting the temperature of air conditioners in its administrative offices to 28 degrees. Companies were encouraged to follow this move. In return, a more casual dress style, deviating from the previously strictly enforced dress code of formal suit, dress shirt, and necktie was encouraged. For employees, who previously did not have to think much about what to wear to work, this led to considerable insecurity, as they did not want to appear either over- or underdressed.

Department stores realized that this was an opportunity to bring more men to their stores and positioned their sales floors and staff as the most appropriate place to turn to for advice. Matsuzakaya's Cool Biz campaign not only featured carefully coordinated styles for different age groups (30/40/50 years), but also an educational, illustrated example of a shopper in his fifties:

While Nagatanigawa-san was at first embarrassed by Cool Biz, he now understands how to choose a Cool Biz style, and enjoys being able to effortlessly select an outfit.¹⁶

13 www.daimaru.co.jp/view/goods/doods3/index.html, accessed 22 July 2006.

14 www2.seibu.co.jp/fathersday.coolbiz/father.index.html, accessed 20 May 2006.

15 www.matsuzakaya.co.jp/honten/select/mo60523.html, accessed 27 May 2006.

16 www.matsuzakaya.co.jp/honten/select/mo60523.html, accessed 27 May 2006.

Mitsukoshi even asked men to interpret Cool Biz as a chance to dress up:

This year is not just about being cool [...] At Mitsukoshi we have prepared various business styles that express individuality, from jackets and shirts to accessories like pocket handkerchiefs.¹⁷

Generally, with overall sales falling, department stores turned to the fashion needs of men as a new source for revenues, and this also extended to campaigns for Father's Day. Very much in tune with Japan's ageing demographics, campaigns depict elderly fathers being helped to be a bit more stylish by their wives and grown-up children.

LOVE TO PAPA – On Fathers' Day, a present for the husband, because we all wish for a father who is a bit more stylish. In your appreciation for every day, spice up your love a bit. Do you wish to improve your standing as his wife just a tiny bit more? How about these presents?¹⁸

The campaign by Daimaru features a fit-looking, 60-year-old Japanese model with greying hair and a beard, wearing a casual golf outfit. Encouraging wives to offer their husbands a Father's Day gift, suggestions include a watch ('embracing the moving hand of a man'), a polo shirt ('dressing casual as an adult is quite difficult'), or shoes ('real knowledge about style shows on the feet'). Mitsukoshi presents a similarly fit-looking, grey-haired man, dressed in a white linen suit and shirt ('my admirable father') and follows up with a selection of food and beverage items. A separate set of pages from its Nihonbashi store advertises a Father's Day Fair, categorizing presents as either 'on', for work ('The stylish father who attracts gazes in the office is defined by particular items'), or 'off', for leisure ('The father who is also fashionably smart during his relaxation time is defined by the refinement of his styling').¹⁹

With its pioneering store annex building for men's fashion in Shinjuku, Isetan has clearly established itself as the leader in male-fashion retailing. Traditionally, Isetan's Father's Day campaign only uses black and dark-brown tones, and features merchandise such as a leather travel bag, hiking shoes, and a stylish, leather-coated hip flask.²⁰ In another campaign for men,

17 www.mitsukoshi.co.jp/coolbiz/, accessed 1 July 2006.

18 www.daimaru.co.jp/shinsaibashi/papa06/main.html, accessed 24 May 2006.

19 www.mitsukoshi.co.jp/nihombashi/fathersday/, accessed 17 June 2006.

20 www.isetan.co.jp/icm2/jsp/store/shinjuku/event/0605fd/index.jsp, accessed 27 May 2006.

Isetan again keeps to the black and brown colours that have come to signal men's fashion, and in prominent white text introduces the men's suit store, The Stylegate, with the slogan 'Imagining the good old days of the Japanese, continuing classic style into the future'. This is presented next to a picture of four determined-looking tailors whose products are featured in the store. Illustrated with a picture of a clothes rail with a shirt, tie, hat, and suit arranged on it, is a long textual feature informing potential customers that

[t]hose who were the most expressive were the Japanese of the good old days. They represent, in essence, the legitimate classic. There were a lot of men in Japan's past, like Yoshida Shigeru, Mori Masayuki or Shirasu Jirō, who were well versed in style.²¹

Thus, as men's outfitters, Isetan is not only looking to the future, but also to the past, suiting the general trend in post-bubble Japanese media and society, which sees a lack of initiative and energy in the current young generation and hopes to overcome this by pointing to the shining examples of entrepreneurial endeavour, perseverance, and leadership found in the Meiji period and among the immediate post-war generation.

Similarly, department stores have depicted and linked the past and the future when advertising products for a sustainable lifestyle:

June, Environment Month – LOHAS as proposed by Nihonbashi Mitsukoshi – A return to Edo – Learning in Nihonbashi – Living only on energy drawn from nature and protecting the environment: these are the common people of Edo. Extracting wisdom, polishing their skills, creating practical everyday items and beautiful traditional craftwork. For eating and in everyday life, they use only natural materials. Absorbing and continuing this Edo culture and bringing it into the present in a joyful and stylish manner, this is Japanese LOHAS.²²

Japanese marketers have picked up the LOHAS (Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability) concept enthusiastically, and the above campaign by Mitsukoshi is a good example of how a department store has appropriated this concept to suit its own needs. Not limited to a certain product or a certain need and open to interpretation, a concept like LOHAS fits ideally within the

21 www.isetan.co.jp/icm2/jsp/store/shinjuku/mens/clothin/closeup/stylegate.html, accessed 2 April 2007.

22 www.mitsukoshi.co.jp/nihombashi/lohas/03.html, accessed 3 June 2006.

scope of a department store. Again stores came up with campaigns that included products and services from several departments and leveraged their organizational and cultural capital by organizing exhibitions and events. Daimaru's FEEL LOHAS Fair combines Japanese tableware and French champagne, explaining:

An evening in spring, calmly enjoyed with a beautiful sake cup. On a graceful autumn evening, quietly tasting a special beverage on your own is a luxury reserved for adults. The theme for early evening is champagne from Bourgogne in beautiful Japanese china.²³

In a separate column, Daimaru provides additional information, such as on the Mingei movement (the Japanese folk art movement of the 1920s and 1930s), the way to fold a *furoshiki* (a Japanese wrapping and carrying cloth), and the benefits of organic cotton. Both department stores' LOHAS campaigns thus strongly reference what is perceived as traditional Japanese culture, showing how culture can be preserved, but also how it can be adapted.

Mangos on Marine Day: Post-bubble department stores

The seventeenth of July is Marine Day (*Umi no Hi*). Since 1996, it has been part of the ranks of national holidays. Japan, being an island nation, cannot be separated from the sea. Currently, the marine leisure market is also growing, and with continuing developments it has also become necessary to take the pollution of the coast and other problems to heart. Thus, this holiday has been established as a day of thanks for the blessings of the sea and to ask for prosperity for the coastal nation of Japan [...], This being so, we introduce sweets made from mango, because mangos resemble beaches.²⁴

This rather laboured effort by Daimaru to sell mango products on the national Marine Day holiday reminds us that not every marketing campaign by Japanese department stores is as coherent and makes as much sense as the examples presented earlier. In addition, the differences between the department stores need to be acknowledged. Isetan emphasized non-Japanese

23 www.daimaru.co.jp/lohas/item/item4/index.html, accessed 23 October 2006.

24 www.daimaru.co.jp/shinsaibashi/foods/day/main.html, accessed 15 July 2006.

products, presented itself as the most fashionable of the department stores, and almost exclusively used non-Japanese models. Mitsukoshi was strong on Japanese tradition and food, while Daimaru had the most text-based website, liked to feature store personnel, and made an effort to involve its customers. Seibu, in line with its origin as a railway terminal department store, had a particular focus on products for everyday life. Takashimaya had the most advanced e-commerce site, and Matsuzakaya used its Internet presence to inform its customers about sales and other store events.

Overall, department stores particularly stood out from other retail formats because of the rich context that they created to market their products and stores on the Internet. Below, I summarize my main findings, based on my analysis of the set of data collected on the web presence of Japanese department stores.

Firstly, department stores continue to present themselves as authorities on how to behave in certain social settings, what to wear when and where, what to give as gifts to whom, and what to eat at what time of the year. This authority, while packaged nicely, is clearly conveyed to consumers. This approach is distinct from that normally described for Japan, in which much of the interpretation of the advertisement is left to the recipient by being indirect and aesthetically driven instead of message-driven, and which aims to create vaguely positive feelings or simply draw attention.²⁵

In addition, department stores position themselves as the authority on what constitutes the appropriate lifestyle according to age and, especially, the appropriate tastes, appearance, and behaviour for an adult. Buying products at a department store is portrayed as a sign of having achieved a certain maturity in life. This is a point that has not been developed fully in research on department stores published to date. This might indicate that this aspect has only gained importance in recent years, as department stores have increasingly had to differentiate themselves in a setting where consumers face a larger variety of stores, including many that promise to sell goods of a quality equal to those from department stores, but at lower prices.

My analysis confirms that department stores continue to present themselves as guardians of Japanese culture and traditions, but at the same time creatively present ways in which traditional items can be adjusted for, or combined with, newer or non-Japanese items for contemporary use. Japanese department stores also continue to introduce foreign products to their customers, legitimizing their consumption by describing long traditions and special craftsmanship as well as pointing to their popularity in

25 Berliner (as early as) 1925; Görtzen 1995; Dallmann 1998; Helgert 2005.

other countries and providing instructions on how to use them in a Japanese context. Finally, despite displaying their goods on the Internet, department stores present themselves as people's organizations by regularly featuring employees and their interactions with customers. Overall, department stores continue to show their powers of innovation by suggesting new ways of behaving, whether they be ways of combining Japanese and Western food, ways of dressing up instead of dressing down in response to higher temperatures in the office, or the idea of wives presenting gifts to their husbands on Father's Day.

Fujioka (2006), in her book about the development of the Japanese department store, refers to a group of Japanese university students in provincial Nagasaki that she had been teaching, none of whom had ever set foot in a department store or had any idea what a department store was about. Indeed, one may question whether the department store for the current, young generation will ever assume the role that it had for their parents and grandparents.

The declining importance of the department store in Japan has been linked to several factors. Internally, one factor is the loss of control over sales floors to suppliers as a result of focusing on commission sales and relying on delegated personnel to serve customers. Companies realize this and have been strengthening their own merchandising capacities by reorganizing processes, training their own buyers, and engaging in independent market research. Yet, considering the size of stores and the scope of merchandise handled, this remains an ongoing task. Another reason for struggling department stores is the quick growth, from the 1990s onwards, of price-aggressive fast-fashion retailers and other discount stores on the one hand, and large, comprehensive shopping centres and fashion stores on the other hand. Shopping centres that offer comprehensive facilities have become a destination for families, while fashion stores located on the top of commuter stations in metropolitan areas have been drawing younger, fashion-oriented customers (see Chapter 2). Consequently, some department stores have allowed price-aggressive retailers into their premises, or – when renovating their stores – have been adopting elements of the shopping mall by adding facilities and renting out space to independent tenants. The implementation of such measures was driven by consumers, who faced stagnating or even falling incomes, and yet, at the same time, had increasing communication and education expenses, and therefore were looking to reduce expenditure on clothing and food. Here, department stores, with their entrenched supply chain relationships and rigid cost structure, had very little room to adjust to

demands from consumers for the same product quality, yet at lower prices (Larke and Causton 2005; Fujioka 2006; Niida 2010).

Besides the often-cited reasons mentioned above, on a deeper level the fit of the underlying business model of the Japanese department store with current developments in society can be questioned. As outlined in this chapter, the business model of Japanese department stores relied on, and – as my analysis of the web pages of department stores shows – since the turn of the millennium has continued to rely on, guiding consumers on how to behave in line with societal expectations. However, this approach relies upon the continued validity of these expectations and behaviours, and there are indications that their importance is waning.

The paths that people's lives take have been changing and are less secure than in the past. Some young people do not want to, and many more do not manage to, secure the life-long, blue- or white-collar positions in Japanese companies that previous generations could rely on (Meyer-Ohle 2009). These long-term positions provided rising incomes and future security, but also implied compliance with rigid expectations with regards to personal appearance and the exchange of gifts to sustain relationships; they often even included expectations on how to arrange one's private life. With the rate of people working in non-regular employment patterns having reached 40 per cent, there is less need to comply. People still consume, yet their spending is to a much lesser extent guided by the need to fulfil social obligations and expectations; instead, they are guided by their individual aspirations and needs. Even for people in regular employment, the need to maintain relationships through gift-giving is declining. Fewer employees give gifts to their superiors during the two gift-giving seasons over the year, and some companies have even banned this practice. The same is true for the exchange of gifts among business partners, which used to be an important corporate market for department stores. People continue to give gifts, but prefer to give only to family and friends; therefore, less importance is placed on such gifts having the added value of having been purchased at a prestigious department store.²⁶

The above development correlates with changes in demographics. Japan's population is ageing and shrinking fast. Fewer young people also means fewer people entering or graduating from schools, and fewer people reaching adulthood, marrying, or being interviewed for and getting their first

26 'New Corporate Codes Bar Employees from Accepting Gifts', Entertainment, *Nikkei Weekly*, 27 April 1998, p. 3; 'Japan Business Seminar: "Oseibo", Christmas and the Art of Year-End-Gift-Giving in Japan', *Nikkei Weekly*, 26 December 2011, p. 28.

job – all events that the department store provided advice for and catered to. Department stores hope that these developments will be compensated for by the retirement of Japan's post-war baby boom generation, for whom the department store still has meaning. Retirees are seen as affluent, having had careers when the Japanese employment system still provided stability and assured career advancement, even when this meant having to sacrifice leisure and consumption. However, while this provides some opportunities for department stores, relief is only expected to be temporary, with people of the baby boom generation being expected to again restrict consumption once they reach the ripe old age of 75 years. The industry believes that, for the majority of people, this will happen in the year 2025, and this has led to articles calling to prepare for the '2025 problem'.²⁷

With regards to their future, the Internet is a double-edged sword for department stores. It not only provides department stores with a new sales channel, but also with a new outlet to display their authority in matters of consumption, and thus with a way to invite people into their stores. With the number of store visitors decreasing, non-store sales are increasingly becoming more important for department stores. However, the Internet also provides consumers with alternatives to the department store when seeking advice and reassurance about consumption decisions, not only from other retailers, but increasingly, and more importantly, from other consumers. Consequently, a survey showed some uncertainty among department stores about their ability to reach consumers online and whether the rewards from communication efforts and non-store sales fully justify the effort put into maintaining an attractive web presence (Nihon Hyakkaten Kyōkai 2007).

At the beginning of this chapter, Japanese department stores were described as being among the defining institutions of Japanese marketing and consumer culture. Traditional at first sight, the Japanese department store nonetheless continuously demonstrated its powers of innovation and creativity. With the ambition to preserve and shape Japanese customs and behaviour, not just for the upper, but also for the very broad middle class, department stores indeed had a business model that clearly distinguished them from other retailers. Yet, this business model seems to have lost much of its relevance today, and it is questionable whether department stores can again find ways to regain their special position in Japanese retailing.

27 'Dankai seidai ga kōki kōrei-sha, dankai junia 50-sai-dai ni', *Sutoaazu Ripooto*, January 2015, pp. 17-20.

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Consumption of Fast Fashion in Japan

Local Brands and Global Environment

Stephanie Assmann

Cwiertka, Katarzyna J. & Ewa Machotka (eds), *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan: A Transdisciplinary Perspective*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018

DOI: 10.5117/9789462980631/CH02

Abstract

The post-bubble decade of the 2000s witnessed both the increasing bifurcation of luxury consumption and growing demand for the low-priced brands offered by casual-wear chains Uniqlo (UNIQLO) and Mujirushi Ryōhin (MUJI). These trends coincided with sociological debates about increasing societal inequality and growing concerns among Japanese citizens about how to secure a middle-class future. The initial liberalization of the labour market and the growing number of women who entered and remained in the workforce also characterized this period. This chapter traces recent consumer trends with regard to clothing against the background of a globalized society characterized by increasingly diversified lifestyles and consumer patterns, and argues that low-priced 'fast fashion' items have become integral to the fashion landscape in Japan.

Keywords: fast fashion, social stratification, consumer behaviour, brands, sustainability, ethical consumption

Introduction

A stroll through the Ginza, Tokyo's exclusive shopping district, reveals a succession of exclusive fashion stores. A giant UNIQLO flagship store is situated close to a Hermès retail store. High-end fashion retailers are positioned next to fast-fashion retailers that have been able to expand domestically within Japan as well as globally. Since the beginning of the 2000s, the fashion retail market in Japan has been characterized by an increasing bifurcation of consumption of luxury brands such as Louis Vuitton and Hermès on the one

Figure 2.1 UNIQLO store on the Ginza in Tokyo



Photograph taken by the author on 22 May 2015

hand, and a growing demand for more affordable brands such as UNIQLO and MUJI on the other (Assmann 2005). Affordable and low-priced brands that are now known as 'fast fashion' have become an integral part of the fashion landscape, not only in Japan, but also in other industrial nations.

Based on a study of the Japanese retail fashion market conducted in 2000 (ibid.), the purpose of this chapter is to revisit this market fifteen years later to investigate whether fast-fashion retailers have been able to secure their market presence on a long-term basis against the background of a globalized society characterized by diversified lifestyles, biographies, and consumer patterns.

I argue that two significant changes in consumer behaviour patterns have led to a continuing, strong market presence of fast-fashion retailers in Japan. Firstly, larger societal trends, which include a deregulation of the labour market, an increase of unstable working conditions, and a subsequent decline of disposable incomes, have resulted in a rethinking of consumer behaviour and an increasing demand for moderately priced clothing. Secondly, prior to the collapse of the economic bubble, consumption had been closely tied to social stratification, in particular to a high identification of Japanese citizens with the 'middle class'. But during the post-bubble periods of the 1990s and 2000s, the dominance of the middle class came under scrutiny. Consumers placed greater emphasis on consumption as an expression of their individual needs and desires, as opposed to consumption as a symbol of a middle-class living standard. The burst of the financial bubble at the end of the 1980s did not mean the end of consumption, but instead led to a rethinking of consumer behaviour in the post-bubble period. Hedonistic consumption of exclusive brand items did not cease to exist, but hedonism was supplemented by more frugal consumer behaviour patterns that included purchasing moderately priced fashion and outdoor clothing. In 2000, the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* observed that:

On fashionable streets in Tokyo, for example, it is common to see women carrying expensive Prada bags while wearing 2,900 yen [...] jeans from UNIQLO, a low-price retail chain with original brand clothing, run by Fast Retailing Co., or from a Muji brand shop of Ryōhin Keikaku Co.¹

Background: Social stratification and consumer behaviour

Prior to the bursting of the bubble, Japanese post-war society had often been characterized as a homogeneous, middle-class society, whose members exhibited similar patterns of consumption. Sociologist Motohashi Toyohide (1994) has shown that this identification with the middle class is linked to consumption patterns that targeted the ownership of a house in the suburbs, a car, and a selection of electronic devices that enabled a

1 'Passing the Torch', *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 12 June 2000.

comfortable lifestyle and symbolized economic progress. Motohashi's view was supported by sociologist Simon Partner, who has argued that during the economic high-growth period, between 1955 and 1973, the 'creation of a middle-class consuming public' (Partner 1999: 3) was closely tied to the purchase of desirable electronic goods such as refrigerators, washing machines, and black-and-white television sets. These consumer goods used to be considered luxurious, but in the course of the economic high-growth period rapidly became part of the standard equipment of the middle-class lifestyle of a salaried businessman with a family living in urban suburbs.

Consumer goods that were part of the standard household equipment symbolized material progress and security. The close identification of the middle class with consumption was revealed by the results of public-opinion surveys (*yoron chōsa* or *kokumin seikatsu chōsa*) and *SSM chōsa*² that the Japanese government has conducted on a regular basis since 1955. Both surveys include a self-evaluation of Japanese citizens with regard to the social stratum they feel they belong to. According to both surveys, the majority of approximately 90 per cent of Japanese citizens considered themselves to be part of the middle class. In particular, three characteristics were used to determine this identification with the middle class. The first characteristic was the ability to afford a certain material standard. The second characteristic was an equal income distribution, whereas the third characteristic defined equal access to educational and occupational opportunities as part of a middle-class lifestyle.

Today, this close identification with the 'middle class' has not changed. According to the results of the *yoron chōsa* for the year 2014, which the government of Japan's Cabinet Office (Naikakufu) conducted, only 1.3 per cent of the respondents considered themselves to be 'upper class' (*ue*), and a mere 5.2 per cent of all respondents considered themselves to be 'lower class' (*shita*). These data contrast with 12.9 per cent of all respondents who evaluated themselves as belonging to the 'upper middle' (*naka no ue*) class, whereas 56.3 per cent considered themselves to belong to the 'middle of the middle' (*naka no naka*). Another 22.9 per cent of all respondents felt that they belong to the 'lower middle' (*naka no shita*) class (Naikakufu daijin kanbō seifu kōhō shitsu 2015).

Despite the fact that, in 2014, the majority of Japanese citizens still considered themselves to be 'middle class', this strong belief in a homogenous,

2 The abbreviation SSM stands for a terminology taken over from English, namely 'social stratification and social mobility', which is translated into Japanese either as *shakai seisō to shakai idō* (Hamashima, Takeuchi and Ishikawa 1999: 39) or as *shakai kaisō to shakai idō* (Tominaga 1994 [1979]: 4).

middle-class society with a predominantly middle-class lifestyle has come under intense scrutiny since the beginning of the 1990s. This time period is characterized by the burst of the bubble economy, which was followed by the onset of a long-term period of economic decline. In particular, the post-bubble 2000 to 2010 decade witnessed concerns among Japanese citizens and sociologists about the rise of inequality within Japanese society and a growing uncertainty about how to secure a middle-class lifestyle. Sociologist Kōsaka Kenji (1994) questioned the egalitarian income distribution using the Gini coefficient, which measures income differences.³ The Gini coefficient decreased from 1955 (0.426) to 1975 (0.314), which pointed to greater income equality. However, the Gini coefficient rose to 0.358 in 1985, stood at 0.432 in 2000, and climbed to 0.488 in 2009, which underlines an increasingly unequal income distribution (Murata and Aramaki 2013: 4). With regard to equal access to educational and occupational opportunities, sociologist Satō Toshiki (2000) argued that – based on the data of the *SSM chōsa* from 1955 until 1995 – after a period of increasing social mobility between the second half of the 1960s and the first half of the 1980s, access to occupational opportunities since the second half of the 1980s depended more strongly on the education and profession of the father than had previously been assumed (Satō 2000).

This awareness about the rise of inequality in society was the result of a liberalization of the labour market and a gradual erosion of the lifetime employment system, which had previously guaranteed stable employment within the same company to mostly male university graduates. With an ailing economy in the 1990s, the need to raise the competitiveness of Japan's industry resulted in pressure to promote deregulation policies that had enabled companies to freely hire workers as part-time employees, temporary workers, and contract workers.⁴ One example of a neo-liberal reform is the Labour Dispatch Law (*Rōdōsha Haken-Hō*), which was enacted in 1986 and has undergone a number of reforms with regard to applicable occupations and the duration of temporary employment (Yuasa 2008: 108). At the time of enactment, the law affected just thirteen professions; it was expanded to cover 26 professions in 1996. In 1999, the law applied to all occupations except the manufacturing industry (*seizōgyō*), the construction industry (*kensetsugyō*), lawyers, and doctors. In 2004, the Koizumi government lifted

3 In case of completely egalitarian income distribution, the Gini coefficient has a value of 0, whereas in the case of completely uneven income distribution, the Gini coefficient has a value of 1.

4 Non-regular employment includes part-time work up to 35 hours per week (Broadbent 2005: 6), temporary work, dispatched work, contract work, and work that is done from home.

the last remaining ban on temporary work in manufacturing. The incremental deregulation of the Labour Dispatch Law reduced Japan's employment protection for temporary workers to a substantial extent while employment protection for regular workers remained intact (Assmann and Maslow 2010).

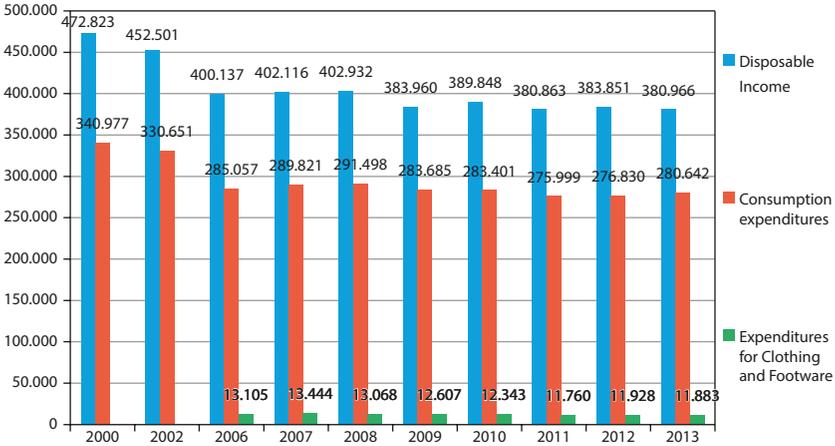
As a consequence of the deregulation of the labour market, the number of non-regularly employed workers has risen. In 2014, the overall rate of non-regular employees (*hi seiki shain*), including both genders, stood at 37.4 per cent, compared to 15.3 per cent in 1984, 32.6 per cent in 2005, and 33.5 per cent in 2007 (Kōsei rōdōshō 2014).

The deregulation of the labour market has also deepened existing gender discrepancies. Non-regular employment patterns in particular affect women who re-enter the labour market, mostly as part-time workers in their late thirties and early forties after a period of family responsibilities (Assmann 2014). Kuba Yoshiko (2011) has pointed out that the employment rate of women has risen from 37 per cent in 1985 to 43.5 per cent in 2008. However, despite the increased visibility of women on the labour market and the enactment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL, *Danjo Koyō Kikai Kintō Hō*) in 1986, women are still subjected to gender-specific differences with regard to recruitment, promotion, and wages. According to data compiled by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (Sōmushō), employment rates in all age groups remain lower for women than for men. Wage discrepancies between men and women prevail (Kuba 2011: 11). Numbers of female non-regular workers rose from 37.9 per cent in 1999 to 51 per cent in 2003 and rose to 53.6 per cent by 2009. In 2011, 54.4 per cent of all women who were in employment were employed as part-timers or as non-regular employees, whereas just 20.3 per cent of all men who were in employment were part-timers or worked in other forms of non-regular employment (Kōsei Rōdōshō 2011).

Declining incomes and consumer expenditures

The larger trends on the labour market described above were reflected in incomes and in consumer behaviour patterns. Earlier, I mentioned the gradual increase of the Gini coefficient, which points to an unequal income distribution. Along with the rising inequality of income distribution, household incomes have been declining since the early 2000s – a look at disposable incomes (*kashobun shotoku*) and consumption expenditures (*shōhi shishutsu*) confirms that. In correspondence with declining incomes, consumption expenditures have also declined. Consumption expenditures per household stood at ¥340,977 (approx. €3,390) in the year 2000 and have

Table 2.1 Disposable incomes, consumption expenditures, and expenditures for clothing and footwear: Yearly average of monthly disbursements per household (total household)



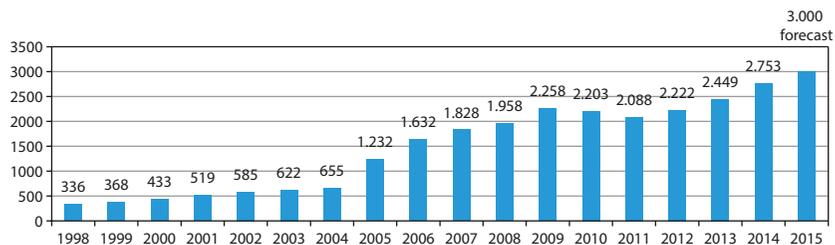
Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Statistics Bureau (2014)

fallen to ¥280,642 (approx. €2,159) in 2013. Likewise, expenditures for clothing and footwear per household have decreased and are between ¥11,000 (approx. €75) and ¥13,000 (approx. €100) between the years 2006 and 2013.

Fast Retailing: The outdoor brand UNIQLO

Despite declining incomes, since the early years of the twenty-first century, Japanese fast-fashion retailers have globally and domestically expanded, and now compete with international fashion brands such as Hennes & Mauritz (better known by the abbreviation H&M) and ZARA. The term ‘fast fashion’ has been defined as ‘low-cost clothing collections based on current, high-cost luxury fashion brands’ (Annamma et al. 2012: 275). Speediness of production and rapid replacement with ever new fashion items are two characteristics of the fast-fashion industry. For example, global fast-fashion retailers such as H&M and ZARA have accelerated the turnaround time from the catwalk to consumers from previously six months to several weeks (ibid.).

One example of a company that was able to expand after the collapse of the bubble economy is Fast Retailing, which was founded in 1963 under the name Ogori Shōji. The company is headquartered in Yamaguchi Prefecture,

Table 2.2 Fast Retailing: Number of stores between 1998 and 2015

Source: Website Fast Retailing; <http://www.fastretailing.com/eng/about/business/aboutfr.html>, accessed 3 May 2015

in western Japan. Fast Retailing offers casual wear and outdoor clothes under the label UNIQLO – an abbreviation of Unique Clothing Warehouse. The first UNIQLO store opened in 1984 in Hiroshima. For a long time, UNIQLO's outdoor clothes were regarded as reasonably priced and practical, but they were not considered very fashionable or attractive. An interview, which I conducted with a 24-year-old female university student in Kyoto in January 2001, confirms this:

Recently, the quality of UNIQLO has improved significantly. We knew UNIQLO when we were children and went to secondary school. UNIQLO has been around for a while, but only recently has [the brand] become more popular. Previously, you went to UNIQLO to buy something cheap; you did not pay much attention to the quality. We hesitated to say: Today, I am wearing clothes that I bought at UNIQLO.⁵

The late 1990s brought a significant change and turned UNIQLO into a more popular brand. In 2014/15, Fast Retailing documented net sales of ¥780.1 billion (approx. €5.37 billion). There were two reasons for that: 1) In 1998, Fast Retailing launched the sale of previously high-end-market products, such as fleece pullovers that were sold at a retail price of ¥1,900 (approx. €12.75) per piece (Porter Prize 2009). The so-called ¥1,900 Fleece campaign generated great interest among consumers; and 2) this campaign coincided with the opening of the first UNIQLO store in Tokyo, in the city's Harajuku district, in November 1998, which symbolized the company's outreach to urban areas in Japan. UNIQLO was the first company in Japan to establish an SPA model, which stands for Specialty Store Retailer of Private Label Apparel,

5 Assmann 2005: 117; interview translated from Japanese by the author.

and encompasses all stages from design and production to distribution and sales to the customers (Nitta 2008: 70-75). The fact that Fast Retailing circumvents the multi-layered wholesale distribution system, which is common in Japan, has enabled the company to position reasonably priced clothing items on the retail market on a consistent basis (ibid.: 70-71).

As the above table shows, Fast Retailing has gradually been able to expand its number of stores in Japan since 1998. In March 2015, Fast Retailing operated 840 UNIQLO stores in Japan (Fast Retailing Website 2015a). A further milestone in the company's history was the opening of the first overseas UNIQLO store in London, which marked the beginning of the company's global expansion. The launch of the first store in Europe was followed by the opening of the first UNIQLO store in Shanghai in September 2002. Since 2002, the company has been able to expand its business in Asia and to launch a number of UNIQLO stores in South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia. After Japan, UNIQLO is most strongly represented in China, with 345 stores.

Table 2.3 Global expansion of UNIQLO stores

Country	Opening of first store	Location	Number of Stores (as of 31 March 2015)
Japan	1984	Hiroshima	840
United Kingdom	2001	London	9
China	2002	Shanghai	345
South Korea	2004	Seoul	139
Hong Kong	2005	Hong Kong	25
USA	2006	New York	39
France	2007	Paris	8
Singapore	2009	Singapore	22
Taiwan	2010	Taipei	53
Malaysia	2010	Kuala Lumpur	24
Russia	2010	Moscow	5
Thailand	2011	Bangkok	22
Philippines	2012	Mainly Manila	23
Indonesia	2013	Jakarta	6
Germany	2014	Berlin	1
Australia	2014	Melbourne	4

Data compiled from the Fast Retailing website (Fast Retailing 2015a)

Reasonably priced outdoor and casual clothing items accompanied by a rapid domestic and global expansion contributed to the success of Fast Retailing's UNIQLO brand. However, low retail prices alone are not sufficient to secure a stable position on the retail market on a long-term basis. In March 2009, Fast Retailing started a cooperation with the German luxury fashion designer Jil Sander under the name +J, which was successful but was nevertheless terminated in winter 2011.⁶ Brands offered by Fast Retailing include GU and Theory by the company Link Theory Japan, which distributes fashion items and was launched in New York in 1997. French brands include Princesse Tam.Tam, a French lingerie brand, and Comptoir des Cotonniers, an exclusive women's fashion brand.

Ryōhin Keikaku: The label without a label – Mujirushi Ryōhin

Another retailer that has been able to expand its operations amidst the economic downturn is the company Ryōhin Keikaku, which was founded in 1988 as an affiliation of the retail company Seiyū. Under the label Mujirushi Ryōhin (MUJI), which was first established as a private brand of Seiyū in 1980, Ryōhin Keikaku sells a diverse assortment of clothes, household articles, and food. Internationally, the brand has become well known under the name MUJI. Initially, the brand was sold in retail outlets inside Seiyū department stores, but in 1983 the first outlet store under the name Mujirushi Ryōhin opened in Tokyo. Since then, the company has expanded globally. The first MUJI store opened in London in 1991. As of February 2015, Ryōhin Keikaku operates 301 MUJI stores outside of Japan. Ryōhin Keikaku has a particularly strong presence in Asia, with 128 stores in China, 14 stores in Hong Kong, and 33 stores in Taiwan.

Despite the growing acceptance and popularity of moderately priced fast-fashion items, the brand and quality consciousness of Japanese consumers remains. An interview with a 24-year-old female university student in Kyoto in February 2001 addresses the significance of brands:

I do not really have brand consciousness, but to a certain extent I do pay attention to brands, even when I shop at Mujirushi Ryōhin. Mujirushi [Ryōhin] was not a brand to begin with, but eventually [it] developed into one [...]. Yes, if I think about it, I do have brand consciousness to a certain extent. Sometimes, I think that I could purchase an item somewhere

6 <http://www.fastretailing.com/eng/>, accessed 15 October 2015; Nishimura 2010: 67-8.

Table 2.4 Global expansion of MUJI stores

Country	Number of Stores (February 2015)
Great Britain	12
France	12
Italy	9
Germany	8
Ireland	1
Sweden	7
Norway	4
Spain	6
Turkey	2
Poland	1
Portugal	1
USA	9
Canada	1
Hong Kong	14
Singapore	9
Malaysia	4
South Korea	14
China	128
Taiwan	33
Thailand	11
Australia	2
Indonesia	2
Philippines	7
Kuwait	1
United Arab Emirates	3
Total	301

Source: Table compiled based on data available on <http://ryohin-keikaku.jp/eng/corporate/index.html>, accessed 16 June 2015

else for an even lower price, no matter how much less expensive, and especially when I am looking for a simple design, there are certainly stores that are less well known and cheaper, but I choose the stores that are better known. So, I must indeed have some brand consciousness.⁷

Since the 1990s, Japanese consumer behaviour patterns evolved into a new form that combined hedonism and frugality. The above interview revealed that brand consciousness – which was equated with quality consciousness – not only applies to high-end fashion retailers, but also to fast-fashion

7 Assmann 2005: 133; interview translated from Japanese into English by the author.

retailers. For Japanese consumers, fast-fashion brands became a viable alternative to purchasing luxury brands, which Paul and Feroul (2010: 8) have explained as follows:

[N]ew, foreign brands were trying to shake up the market share of existing luxury companies in Japan by offering high quality at competitive prices. [...] The entry of H&M into the market completely revolutionized it. As a consequence, the effectiveness of the business models of brands like Zara, H&M or UNIQLO enabled them to compete with quality brands amazingly quickly. Affordability was a new concept that was radically changing the mind set of Japanese consumers, who were always eager to resemble top fashion models from catwalk shows.

Fast fashion and sustainability

Moderate prices continue to be of importance on the fast-fashion market, but low prices alone are no longer sufficient to secure a stable customer base. Annamma et al. (2012) point to an increasing interest in sustainability and ethical consumption, in particular among younger consumers, who are the main target groups of fast-fashion companies. Sustainability is a contested and often vague concept. However, according to the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), which differentiates between environmental, economic, and social sustainability, sustainability 1) acknowledges the needs, in particular the needs of the world's poor; 2) recognizes the limitations imposed by technology and social organizations on the environment's ability to meet these needs; and 3) refers to activities that meet the needs of the current generation without compromising the needs of future generations.

Annamma et al. (2012) point to the contradiction between an increased awareness of sustainability among consumers and the manufacturing and distribution practices of fast-fashion retailers. Fast-fashion companies respond to rapidly changing trends on the fashion market, exhibit a high turnover of fashion, and outsource their production to low-labour-cost countries in order to maintain low retail prices. In other words, fast-fashion companies pursue manufacturing practices such as minimalizing production costs in order to gain maximum profit within a short time. At the beginning of 2015, Fast Retailing was attacked for the harsh working conditions at its supplier factories in China, and the company has struggled with labour disputes at its Chinese production sites (Kawakami 2015).

In order to counterbalance this lack of sustainability, fast-fashion companies have underlined their efforts to contribute to environmental protection and charity. In October 2001, Fast Retailing started the All-Product Recycling Initiative. The Fleece Recycling Initiative (Zen Shōhin Risaikuru Katsudō) was soon expanded to cover all items offered by the UNIQLO and GU brands. Since the launch of the initiative, more than 32.5 million articles of clothing have been collected and more than 14.2 million items donated to 53 countries and regions around the world. Since 2007, Fast Retailing donates used clothes to refugees and displaced persons in cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In March 2011, Fast Retailing extended the recycling initiative to South Korea.

Retailer Ryōhin Keikaku also emphasizes its participation in environmental activities on its website. Using the motto 'Creating a pleasant life', Ryōhin Keikaku has pledged to contribute to waste elimination, to the preservation of natural resources, and to the prevention of global warming. Since 2010, the company takes part in a recycling initiative called the FUKU-FUKU Project (FUKU-FUKU Purojekuto: Sen'i Seihin No Risaikuru). This project allows customers to return used textile items, among them clothes (except for underwear), towels, sheets, textile covers, and nylon products, to MUJI outlets or Seiyū outlets four times a year.⁸ These returned items are subsequently recycled and resold. A related project, titled PLA-PLUS Project (Pura Pura Purojekuto: Purasuchikku Seihin No Risaikuru) is a plastics recycling project, which encourages customers to return used plastic items to MUJI outlets.⁹

International competitors: ZARA and H&M

The entry of international fast-fashion brands has had a lasting impact on the Japanese market. Whereas Fast Retailing and Ryōhin Keikaku have stabilized their retail market share in Japan and in East Asia, globally both companies compete with major fashion retailers, among them the Spanish retailer Inditex, the parent company of ZARA, as well as the Swedish fashion retailer Hennes & Mauritz (H&M).

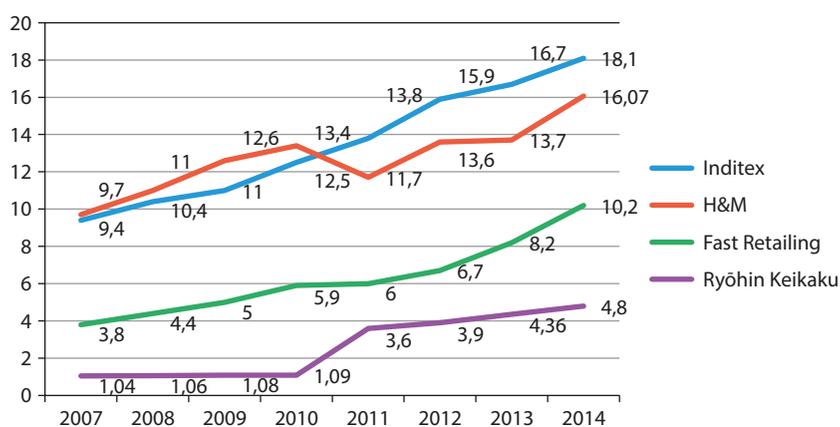
Both fast-fashion retailers have been very successful in Japan. Headquartered in Coruña, Spain, the company Inditex was founded in 1963;

8 http://ryohin-keikaku.jp/eng/csr/list/list_003.html, accessed 15 October 2015.

9 http://ryohin-keikaku.jp/eng/csr/list/list_032.html, accessed 15 October 2015.

their brand ZARA generates 75 per cent of Inditex's profit. In Japan, ZARA was established in 1998. The Swedish retail company H&M was founded in 1947 in Västerås, Sweden. H&M expanded its market presence to Asia and entered the market in Japan in September 2008. Since then, the Swedish fast-fashion retailer has been very successful in Japan: a collaboration between H&M and Rei Kawakubo, the designer of the fashion label Comme des Garçons, led to the launch of an avant-garde collection presented in two newly opened stores on the Ginza and in Harajuku in Tokyo (H&M 2015e: 8). As of August 2016, H&M operates 63 outlets in Japan.

Table 2.5 Net sales of Inditex (ZARA), H&M (excluding VAT), Fast Retailing, and Ryōhin Keikaku (currency: billions of euro)¹⁰



Data accumulated from the websites of Inditex (2015a and 2015b), H&M (2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d, and 2015e), Fast Retailing (2015b), and Ryōhin Keikaku (2015)

A high-end fashion retailer: Louis Vuitton

Fast-fashion retailers in Japan not only compete with international fast-fashion companies, but also with high-end fashion retailers. Despite the economic downturn, luxury brands remain highly sought after by brand-conscious Japanese consumers, in particular female consumers who are in their twenties and thirties. One example of a successful luxury-goods company is the French company Louis Vuitton, which is famous for its leather handbags and suitcases. Net sales figures of Louis Vuitton amount

¹⁰ Figures calculated using exchange rates of the beginning of May 2015.

to US\$10 billion (€8.8 billion).¹¹ The company was established in France in 1854 by Louis Vuitton. The family enterprise gradually expanded and opened its first overseas store on Oxford Street in London in 1885, followed by store openings in New York, Bombay, Washington, Alexandria, and Buenos Aires. By the mid-1970s, the company was overseen by the third generation, Gaston-Louis Vuitton, who advanced the globalization of the company. The market entry in Japan in 1977 commenced with the opening of two Louis Vuitton stores in Tokyo and Osaka. In 1978, Louis Vuitton established shop-in-shops in major department stores such as Seibu and Mitsukoshi. Since then, the company has been represented throughout Japan through individual stores and outlets in department stores. In 1981, Louis Vuitton Japan was founded. The market entry in Japan was followed by market entries in Taipei, Taiwan in 1983 and Seoul, South Korea in 1984.

Whereas fast-fashion companies emphasize sustainability, other marketing strategies contributed to Louis Vuitton's ongoing success in Japan. Firstly, Louis Vuitton was the first global luxury brand to enter the Japanese market without the help of a Japanese distributor (Paul and Feroul 2010: 10). Secondly, Louis Vuitton responded to the economic crisis of 2008 by adjusting retail prices of leather goods, watches, shoes, and accessories by 7 per cent (*ibid.*: 9). Thirdly, Louis Vuitton has succeeded in combining luxury with art and architecture. In an effort to respond to Japanese consumers who combine a consciousness for brands and quality with a taste for novelties, Louis Vuitton embarked on a collaboration with Japanese artist Murakami Takashi for the spring and summer collection in 2003. Murakami created a colourful version of the Louis Vuitton monogram in 33 colours on a black-and-white background (*ibid.*: 11). The Murakami line was a huge success, which led to an increase of Louis Vuitton's profits by 10 per cent. In 2008, Louis Vuitton launched another new product line, called Monogramouflage, which combined the Louis Vuitton brand monogram with print designs by Murakami Takashi and Marc Jacobs (*ibid.*: 12).

Architecture also has had an impact on the company's success. The Japanese architect Aoki Jun designed the Louis Vuitton flagship stores on the Ginza (Louis Vuitton Matsuya Ginza) in 2013, in the Omotesando shopping district in the middle of Tokyo in 2002, and in Nagoya in 1999, in addition to Louis Vuitton stores in overseas locations.¹² On 1 September 2002,

11 'The World's Most Valuable Brands', *Forbes* (2014), <http://www.forbes.com/companies/louis-vuitton/>, accessed 22 June 2015.

12 <http://www.aokijun.com/ja/works/>, accessed 15 October 2015.

the opening of the flagship store in Omotesando attracted 2,800 visitors; the turnover on the first day of the opening amounted to ¥25 million (approx. €2.7 million) (Assmann 2005: 126).

The significance of price, brand, quality, and sustainability: The post-bubble consumer

Exclusive brands such as Louis Vuitton continue to play a significant role in Japan's fashion retail market. But fast-fashion retailers have significantly increased their market presence since the beginning of the 2000s, in the middle of a period of economic decline. Fast-fashion brands such as UNIQLO and MUJI have become attractive brands, particularly in East Asia. In contrast to the early years of the twenty-first century, Japanese fast-fashion retailers now compete with international fashion retailers such as H&M and ZARA, with internationally established retailers taking the lead. Also, in contrast to the decade 2000-2010, Japanese retailers are now increasingly responsive to consumers' awareness of sustainability issues by initiating recycling campaigns that are combined with charity schemes.

Fast-fashion retailers have been able to stabilize their market presence through domestic and global expansion as well as through a diversification of strategies that include a combination of low retail prices, cooperation with high-end luxury designers, and an emphasis on sustainability and environmental consciousness. Two reasons for the ongoing success of fast-fashion retailers can be given here. Firstly, economic factors include the deregulation of the labour market and the fragmentation of employment patterns – non-regular employment has become more common, which has led to lower disposable incomes and a decline of consumer expenditures. The second reason is related to the fact that this decreasing purchasing power has not led to a decline of brand consciousness, but instead has initiated a rethink among consumers who combine the purchase of exclusive fashion items and accessories with low-priced fast-fashion items, while at the same time pursuing sustainability and ethical consumption. The values of Japanese consumers have changed: consumption has become an expression of individual choice and preference and is no longer a symbol of a middle-class lifestyle centred on the possession of a standard set of consumer goods.

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Konbini-Nation

The Rise of the Convenience Store in Post-Industrial Japan

Gavin H. Whitelaw

Cwiertka, Katarzyna J. & Ewa Machotka (eds), *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan: A Transdisciplinary Perspective*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018

DOI: 10.5117/9789462980631/CH03

Abstract

Convenience stores (*konbini*) are a common part of Japan's contemporary commercial landscape. The sheer concentration of stores, their long hours of operation, predictable offerings, and speedy service make them a popular daily destination for many people. A number of factors have contributed to the rise of the convenience store as an everyday institution. This chapter examines the development of the convenience store in Japan and its efflorescence beginning in the late 1990s. Rather than seeing these stores as a sign of global uniformity, this chapter argues that their expansion both reflects a process of 'structured differentiation' in Japanese society and the contradictions that are contributing to important social shifts within Japan's social arrangements.

Keywords: convenience store (*konbini*), waste (*haiki*), rubbish (*gomi*), globalization, recycling, Tokyo

Introduction

Convenience stores, or *konbini*, as they are popularly known in Japan, are so ubiquitous today that they can be forgettable, that is, until you need one. There are currently over 56,000 *konbini* operating nationwide. The sheer concentration of stores, their long hours of operation, predictable offerings, and speedy service make them a popular daily destination for many people. No matter the time of day or night, anyone can drop by a *konbini* to purchase an *obentō* (lunch box), pay a bill, read magazines, or use the toilet. Yet, before the early 1980s, relatively few Japanese even knew

what a konbini was. Indeed, it was not until the mid-1990s that the word 'konbini' entered the Japanese lexicon.

Details such as these help make konbini a reoccurring staple for glossy periodicals and business school case studies that laud the efficiency, competitiveness, and innovation these stores bring to Japan's commerce-scape. But the message imparted by such stories may ultimately be about the homogenizing tendencies of these stores and the part they play in consumer capitalism's incessant march towards global uniformity. Drawing on two years of ethnographic fieldwork and over a decade of research, I argue for a different perspective, one that positions the konbini not as the agent of sameness, but as a metonym for a post-industrial Japan characterized as much by standardization as the transposition of difference (Kelly 1993; Gordon 2007). In the pages that follow, I trace the development of the convenience store in Japan and its beginnings in the late 1990s. By matching the rhythms and needs of various population segments – singles and families, farmers and salarymen, hostesses and housewives, toddlers and retirees, Japanese, foreigners, and even the occasional anthropologist – the konbini has not dissolved societal differences. Rather, these stores have come to reflect the process of 'structured differentiation' (Kelly 2002: 241) that has taken place within post-war Japanese society while highlighting the tensions and contradictions that are contributing to the denouement of its New Middle Class arrangements.

Coming of age with konbini

Since the category of convenience store came into being in the late 1960s, over a full generation of consumers has come of age with these stores (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Age cohorts and konbini expansion

	Number of konbini in Japan: 0	Number of konbini in Japan: 1,100	Number of konbini in Japan: 25,500	Number of konbini in Japan: 45,200	Number of konbini in Japan: 55,000
y.o.b.	1964	1974	1984	1994	2004
b. 1949	15 years old	25 years old	35 years old	45 years old	55 years old
b. 1959	5 years old	15 years old	25 years old	35 years old	45 years old
b. 1969	-	5 years old	15 years old	25 years old	35 years old
b. 1979	-	-	5 years old	15 years old	25 years old
b. 1989	-	-	-	5 years old	15 years old
b. 1999	-	-	-	-	5 years old

In the words of one Generation X informant, konbini are 'like the air you breathe' and for certain generations of Japanese, it is difficult to imagine life without access to these 24-hour stores. Endō Eiji, a native of Tokyo, is one such example. Endō was in his late twenties when he quit his job with a Tokyo television company and spent a year and all his savings travelling around Europe and Africa. In an email to friends, he lamented that the one thing the countries he visited lacked were konbini like in Japan. He reported that in France and Hungary there were small shops to buy things, but that they were not open all hours, did not stock much for him to read, and lacked the kind of food he wanted to eat. What Endō longed for most was a konbini *onigiri* (rice ball). Well-known Japanese celebrities also have a fondness for konbini. Former Japanese football star Nakata Hidetoshi, aged 30, spent many years abroad playing for foreign football teams. In interviews, he admitted that the one difficult thing about living outside of Japan was the lack of konbini (Masujima 2007: 78). Newspapers and television programmes have documented Nakata's habit of visiting konbini to buy Japanese snacks immediately after touching down at Narita Airport (Nishimura 2004).

It is increasingly difficult to find areas in Japan without a major konbini chain. Japan's largest konbini chain, 7-Eleven, has yet to establish its franchises in Okinawa. As late as 2011 there were still no 7-Eleven in Aomori, Akita, Tottori, and the whole of Shikoku. More often than not Japan's remote but inhabited islands and mountain communities are disconnected from the convenience grid. This is largely due to the fact that populations are too small to support stores, or the distribution logistics too costly and complicated to attract companies. The proximity of a given location to a konbini is an accepted measure of geographical remoteness in Japan. In 2004, the *Daily Yomiuri* newspaper ran a story about the Olympic women's wrestling team and its preparation for world competition in a bucolic corner of Niigata Prefecture:

Deep in the mountains of Niigata, the sound of bodies slamming to the mat wafts through the nearby rice fields. It is here, nine kilometers from the nearest convenience store and well away from the hustle and bustle of city life, that a group of Japan's brightest hopes for gold medals in Athens are preparing for battle (Marantz 2004: 22).

This, too, is now changing as companies like Lawson and 7-Eleven experiment with mobile store units. Spurred on by rapidly ageing populations and relief efforts in the wake of natural disasters, larger chains have developed refrigerated vehicles that are reminiscent of the trucks (or *idohanbasha*)

long used by local shop owners to bring products and services to Japan's remote communities and less mobile populations.

Stories of convenience stores opening in remote parts of the Japanese archipelago make the news. Take, for example, Tokunoshima, one of the numerous isolated islands that lie between the southern tip of Kyushu and Okinawa. In October 2003, the island's first 24-hour konbini chain, Everyone, opened. Brought ashore by a local entrepreneur seeking to diversify his business holdings, the mainland chain's appearance has changed people's lives on the island (Umesawa 2004: 54). During its first three days of business, the konbini served roughly a quarter of the island's population. It sold 500 *onigiri* and 2,000 servings of *oden* (various ingredients stewed in soy-flavoured broth). Some customers even queued with their own bowls in hand. After three days in business the store grossed ¥6.3 million (approx. €49,330) in sales. Within a few months, competing shops and the local supermarkets lengthened their hours of operation (Umesawa 2004: 55). Kano Ayako, a clerk at the new store, remarked how children on the island began to greet her differently when they saw her on the street. 'They call out, "*Irasshaimase, konnichiwa*" [Welcome, good afternoon],' said Kano. She admitted she felt embarrassed saying the konbini's manual greeting at first: 'People are so familiar with each other that even going into a store you hardly ever hear "*irasshaimase*"' (Umesawa 2004: 59).

Other accounts of rural openings come from essayists. Tokyo-based writer Watanabe Rumi made an about-turn in her lifestyle and returned to her native Shikoku to live after 22 years of living as a Tokyoite. In *Inakagurashi wa tsurakatta* (Country living was tough), an autobiographical account of her 'U-turn' experience, Watanabe wrote that one of her first major adjustments to the countryside was adjusting to life without a konbini nearby. Watanabe, aged 45, admitted that 'fifty percent of her Tokyo existence had been supported by konbini' (Watanabe R. 2005: 80). On the first floor of her Tokyo residence there was a konbini, and within a two-minute walk of the front door there were another five stores (as well as a supermarket, discount shop, family restaurants, and small book shops). Watanabe was a heavy konbini user. When buying a meal, she went from konbini to konbini to get the products she liked: Lawson for milk, FamilyMart for side dishes (*sōzai*), 7-Eleven for baked bread, Sunkus for *onigiri*, and Ministop for ice cream (Watanabe R. 2005: 80). But, as integrated as the stores were in her life, they were also part of the reason she wanted to leave Tokyo. Five times a night, she could hear the sound of the konbini delivery vehicles parking below the window of her apartment. In the Shikoku countryside, Watanabe was shocked to find that when a konbini finally did come to her town, it was

a major municipal event. A line of customers snaked out the store's door on opening day. Her mother even rushed over for a look.

There are less visible ways in which konbini consumption also affects the livelihoods of people in rural areas. In June 2006, the regional, Yokohama-based konbini chain Three-F began a new line of *obentō* and *onigiri*, made with 'almost' organic rice from Yamagata. An official from the Eastern Japan Rice Sales Division of the Japan Agriculture Association confirmed that Three-F had signed a contract with a small town's agricultural cooperative to purchase 1,000 tons of its rice harvest. The deal between Three-F and this regional farmers' cooperative underscores the gradual reduction of government support for local agriculture and the opening of once regulated markets to competitive bidding. As part of the deal, representatives of the rural cooperative visit Three-F headquarters several times per year and Three-F officials conduct a seasonal inspection of the fields in Yamagata. The cooperative hopes that this initial venture may lead to greater access to metropolitan consumer markets.

In Tokyo, it is not unusual to see the proximity of konbini printed on apartment rental advertisements. Real-estate agents, such as Kurihara Setsuko, who runs a small office near Waseda University, attest that when university students look for a place to rent, the proximity of an apartment to a konbini is one of the things they often take into consideration. Such consumer convenience-driven concerns are not unique to students, however. ANA, a Japanese national airline company servicing the small airport of Yamagata, changed its flight schedules as a cost-cutting measure. The company rearranged the flight schedule such that the plane would depart from Tokyo in the evening and return from Yamagata on the following morning. The change in schedule required the Tokyo-based flight crew – captain, co-pilot, and two stewardesses – to spend the night in a small city not far from the rural airport. The airline struggled for a time to find appropriate lodgings for its employees, however. According to a local taxi driver assigned to shuttle the crew from the airport to the hotel, the problem was not in locating a hotel, but in finding one where the flight crew would have easy late-night access to a konbini.

Access to konbini is not just a concern for flight attendants. For decades, bureaucrats, public servants, and researchers employed by the Japanese government in central Tokyo braved the crowded cafeterias of their office buildings or left the building and rushed to scrounge a meal from the paltry number of shops that serviced the area. But the sweeping reorganization of Japan's central bureaucracy in January 2001 brought about changes at many

1 The rice being sold is officially labelled as containing 'reduced pesticides, reduced chemical fertilizers' (*gennōyaku genkagaku hiryō*).

levels within Japan's ministries. One breakthrough welcomed by government employees was the appearance of am/pm konbini outlets inside the government office buildings. Shimizutani Satoshi, a visiting economist at the Ministry of Labour, led me to the basement of Central Joint Government Building No. 2 (Chuōgōdō Chōsha Dainigōkan) to show off the 'bureaucrats' konbini'. Shimizutani pointed to a wall of Kleenex boxes to the left of the magazine rack. 'These are one of the best-selling items in the store,' he told me. 'The Japanese government no longer subsidizes nose-blowing.'

Relocalizing konbini

Despite their growing role in daily life, konbini are not always warmly received wherever they appear. Residents of urban and suburban communities where the konbini is already a familiar presence question the need for more stores. The brightly lit, 24-hour stores are associated with shifts in town policy, local character, and community relations. In 2005, a Three-F konbini opened at the train station in the seaside town of Furuhama,² not far from Yokohama. Furuhama already had a number of konbini, including one Three-F, and the location of a new store with its bright signage and brick façade at the side of the town's century-old train station ignited protest and debate about the direction of development the town should take as it entered the new millennium.

'In truth, it is not that I hate that konbini. But I only wish they could change the store sign. I don't find it pleasant – the colour,' explained Satō Junko, a local resident and mother of three who sympathized with a group of residents who protested at the opening of the bright new store. The pressure group sent a series of emails to chain headquarters demanding that the store signage be modified. While the company did not change the store's banner, they did make concessions in other aspects of appearance and removed company logos at the back of the store facing the train platform. Satō said that she hoped the town and train line company would have considered other uses for the space, like a communication area where people could drink tea and talk:

I prefer inconvenience. It makes people think more. People may buy what they need before riding a train. But when there is inconvenience, perhaps they can find another method. So, I don't think it is necessary to have the store. I think that it is OK to have a place from where we can transmit our culture (*bunka hasshinchi*). Once the konbini opens, a need

2 Furuhama is a pseudonym.

is created. It can't be helped. My point is that it doesn't need to be there. Now that the store exists, everyone drops in before catching a train. And because everyone drops in, sales grow.³

The Hasedera family, who owned the konbini franchise, worked to adjust the store to the town from the inside. They reached out to local shops on the town's main road and offered them space in the store to stock a few of their products – locally made goods – that might interest tourists and commuters. Seven businesses, including a flower shop, tofu maker, and bakery, took them up on the offer. From the perspective of the Hasederas, their store was accommodating to local flavours and livelihoods.

For Satō, the presence of the new store opened her eyes to a different side of her community. She realized that the town had a large population of young people, for example, and she became aware of their habits and practices:

Three-F made me realize that there are so many young people in town. I see them eating ramen [outside the store], for example. I want to say something about their manners, but that's just a personal issue. Please understand, it is not that these kids are bad. I like seeing young people doing their best. They are taking a short break at the store on their way home. I have never seen them doing anything wrong. So, I don't have a bad image of them. When the konbini opened, I came to realize that there are so many young people like that.

Satō's comments reveal how the convenience store becomes a site where different arrangements of people and practices are made more visible to a local population. Konbini are cultural transmission stations, although not in the sense that Satō uses the term.

As konbini become more visible and heavily used institutions in local communities like Furuhamu, communities are asking more of these stores. Convenience store owners willingly allow their stores to be incorporated into educational programmes and municipal safety efforts. Three-F was on the list of businesses that teams of Furuhamu primary-school students visited in 2007 when collecting material for a school-wide project on their town. The students learned about what kinds of products the store offered, how products were ordered, and how the weather affects what is sold.

3 All translations from Japanese in this chapter have been carried out by the author.

Some school systems ask local konbini to provide even more elaborate educational services. Shiraishi Ward's Board of Education (Shiraishi-ku Kyōiku Iinkai), in the city of Sapporo, now teams up with local shops and businesses, including konbini, to give primary-school students the opportunity to experience work first-hand. The programme is an effort to stem the rising numbers of unemployed youth by exposing children to jobsites early on in their educational careers. Konbini clerkships are among several mini-apprenticeships that students are assigned. 'I thought konbini work was saying "*irasshaimase*" and scanning items at the till,' said a fifth-grade boy after mopping floors, picking up rubbish, and stocking shelves (Tsunashima 2006: 28).

Local approaches for reappropriating konbini as educational sites in the service economy are being expanded and even commercialized. On 19 January 2007, the Kyoto City Board of Education (Kyōto-shi Kyōiku Iinkai) opened the Kyoto City Learning Town 'Life Quest' Centre (Kyōto-shi Manabi no Machi Ikikata Tankyūkan). The centre is located in a former secondary school that fell into disuse in March 2002, when the city school board merged two secondary schools due to falling enrolment numbers. For fiscal and emotional reasons, schools were difficult to tear down, and, following the lead of other communities, the Kyoto City government sought out other uses for the space. Investing ¥166 million (approx. €1.4 million), the city refurbished the old school into a new style of educational centre where, according to an article in the *Asahi Shinbun*, primary- and secondary-school students learn how the economy operates and 'develop a feeling for work' (*shokugyōkan o yashinai*) (Shimizu and Hiraoka 2007: 5). Former classrooms on the third floor of the old school have been converted into twelve businesses, including a bank, a mobile phone company, an airline office, and a konbini. Primary- and secondary-school students learn to run these businesses and are also taught lessons in personal finance, such as how to obtain a loan, create a household spending budget, calculate food expenses, and pay utility bills. Two similar job theme parks currently exist in Tokyo. One of these, Kidzania, stands just blocks from Japan's first 7-Eleven and offers children the opportunity to sample work in its 50 different job pavilions. Kidzania is a global franchise business based in Mexico; it plans to open similar pavilions in Jakarta, Lisbon, and Dubai (Inda 2007).

Japanese artists have also collaborated on the indigenization of the konbini, using it both to comment on the relationship between mass consumption and art and to support their careers as artists. Murakami Takashi, for example, brought his Super Flat movement to the konbini shelves by designing and mass-distributing a limited series of figurines

under the title *Museum Superflat* in early 2000. Several years earlier, in 1997, Tokyo-based artist Majima Ryōichi received critical recognition for his one-person show, entitled *Majimart*. Playing with the boundaries between artist, art, museum, and mass consumer culture, Majima's exhibit transformed a traditional gallery space into a convenience store, complete with well-stocked shelves of the artist's work and obsequious gallery attendants dressed as konbini clerks. *Majimart* offered its own special service in which the artist would accept and 'repair' (*shūzen*) everyday artefacts and unfinished artworks that people brought to him. Once completed, the repaired goods were stocked on *Majimart*'s shelves for sale to the general public, with all profits being split equally between Majima, the gallery, and the original owner. While pleasing people with such unusual products and innovative practices, Majima's *Majimart* invited his audience to consider the boundaries that separate art and the everyday, industrialized standardization, and creativity. Even the title, *Majimart*, involved multiple readings. It was a probable chain name – 'Maji-Mart'. It was also a fusion of the artist's name and 'art' – 'Majima Art'. And it also hinted at being a joke. The word *maji* is a slang expression of disbelief similar to 'honestly?'. Was *Majimart* really a store? Was Majima truly an artist? Was Majima's art actually art?

Convenience becoming 'konbini'

While it is clear that people's lives have been affected by the konbini, the process works both ways. As konbini become more common, people use them in new ways and thus change the way that the stores are perceived and their possible future uses. One way in which the interaction between society and store can be traced is through language. The shift from 'convenience store' to 'konbini' speaks to the transformation that the store has undergone over time.

When 'convenience store' entered the Japanese language it appeared as *konbiniensu sutoa*, spelled in katakana, a phonetic writing system often used for non-Japanese words and names. Japan's national newspaper, the *Asahi Shinbun*, introduced its readership to the *konbiniensu sutoa* in August 1970 by running a short article on the new retail model in its evening business section:

'Small but highly productive', the words tingle like pepper, and so the *konbiniensu (benri) sutoa*, which our nation appreciates, is rapidly

increasing in number. These stores are of particular interest to food makers, large supermarkets and the head offices of voluntary chains.⁴

Over the next decade, references to convenience stores gradually increased in print. However, changes to the term were already visible. By the time the *Asahi* ran a short, two-sentence blurb about the Kansai superstore chain Daiei's plans to launch its own convenience store chain, called Lawson, the two words had fused into one: *konbiniensusutoa*. The definition for *konbiniensusutoa* was also condensed: 'a small store open long hours (*chōjikan eigyō*) that sells daily necessities (*seikatsu hitsuyōhin*)'. In July 1981 the *Asahi* announced that superstore chains Seiyū and Jusco aimed to extend their reach into the 'late hours' (*shinya*) with their own chains of *konbiniensusutoa* – FamilyMart and Ministop, respectively. It took another eight years before Imidas, an almanac of new business words, dropped the two-word spelling for convenience store and went with simply *konbiniensusutoa* (Wakana 1989: 217).

During the 1980s, other abbreviations for convenience store appeared in popular writing and speech. In some circles, convenience stores were known as *konbiniensu* (convenience). The term *konbiniensu* did not frequently appear in newspapers, but was prevalent in books, essays, songs, and on television. Izumi Asato, a popular essayist, teamed up with Itō Seikō to write a column about urban, late-night wandering, convenience store products, and people for *TVBros*, a popular tabloid. They called the series *Konbiniensu monogatari* (Convenience story) (1992). The column ran for nearly a year, before a publisher then put the articles together in a hardback book of the same title. TV Tokyo also produced a six-episode drama called *Konbiniensu monogatari*.

In the postscript of *Konbiniensu monogatari*'s 1990 reprinting, Izumi and co-author Itō discuss in greater detail the evolution of the word 'konbini'. Both writers mention first hearing the word used in a national television commercial featuring the actor Yanagiba Toshirō. Whether the word 'konbini' was the creation of a commercial scriptwriter, or was taken from a term that was beginning to circulate in urban areas at the time, is difficult to know. What is certain, however, is that as the word for convenience store shed syllables, the number of convenience stores in Japan was rapidly rising. Between 1981 and 1991, Japan's total number of convenience stores doubled to nearly 40,000 units. Convenience stores in the early 1990s were no longer a retail experiment, but a fully fledged industry of 24-hour outlets, equipped with new technology, eye-catching uniforms, and an always expanding

4 'Konbiniensu sutoa', *Asahi Shinbun*, 23 July 1970, p. 8.

horizon of products. The word 'konbini' (which in Japanese is written as ko-n-bi-ni) suited this breed of store, which was now coming into its own. The four syllables rolled off the tongue with the same uninhibited ease that customers entered these stores.

By 1993 the word 'konbini' was fully entrenched in the popular lexicon. Essayists used both 'konbiniensu' and 'konbini' in their writing. The popular writer Takahashi Genichiro, for example, wove a short essay around how convenience stores are actually *konbiniensu-kyokai* (literally, 'convenience churches'). He argued that the konbini was the church, and *konbiniensu* the religion of Japanese society.

Shifting perceptions

Starting in the latter half of the 1990s, konbini have been referred to as 'life infrastructure' (*seikatsu infura*), akin to critical public services such as water, gas, and electricity. They are also categorized as 'social infrastructure' (*shakai infura*) (Ōe 2003) alongside hospitals, banks, post offices, and neighbourhood police stations (*kōban*). A number of factors contribute to the rise of the konbini as an everyday institution. The stores themselves are marketed on the basis of their adaptability. They have fused mass-marketing and niche interests by being a little of everything to everyone – supermarket, entertainment centre, information hub, and public service '*madoguchi*' (window).

Many youth are outright *konbinisuto* (konbinists), who spend a significant amount of time working, resting, playing, and eating in or near these stores. Adults are also increasingly konbini-savvy. Konbini are equipped with fax machines, colour photocopiers, mobile-phone recharging units, and postal and package delivery services. A konbini can become a makeshift office centre when the need arises. Konbini also offer ATM services and are easier to get to than the bank. The elderly are adjusting to konbini, just as konbini are making adjustments for them by providing softer foods, lower shelves, eat-in areas, and home delivery services. A young employee at a 7-Eleven in a small town spoke to me about her store's most loyal customer, a man in his eighties who came to buy *oden*. Some days he came to the store in his indoor *yukata* (robe) and carried a small pot to take his single serving home in.

Indeed, konbini are no longer simply thought of as – or marketed towards – just young consumers. Paralleling Japan's large demographic trends, seniors are the industry's fastest-growing consumer segment. In 2005, 7-Eleven released figures showing continued decline in the percentage of customers under 20 and a steady increase in customers over the age of 50

(Baba, Toda and Takimoto 2005: 39). Factors of push and pull have helped these stores gain ground in the silver sector. As fewer babies are born in Japan, and the number of senior citizens grows, the stores are, like most other businesses, forced to accommodate an older demographic. At the same time, the thinning out of small retail due to ageing proprietors, increased competition, and the rationalization of the distribution system leaves the konbini as one of the small stores that remains. Deregulation of certain commodities and services, the weakening of merchant associations, and the willingness of the government to downsize its services and increase profitability contribute to the increasing number of services that konbini are able to offer. Elderly consumers have few choices but to go to konbini.

Konbini panics and convenience concerns

Konbini provide a standardized, nationally branded package of sales and services but on a small, local scale and in a recognizable format that feels anonymous yet somehow personalized. Proximity and accessibility combine with a constantly updated selection of products and services, which enable these stores to 'adhere' (*micchaku suru*) to people's lives. It is the konbini's convenience that customers appreciate and increasingly rely upon. In a magazine survey conducted in the summer of 2004, over 70 per cent of people polled said that their lives would be inconvenienced if they did not have access to a konbini (Yoshioka 2004). As convenience stores support an increasingly divergent range of lifestyles, their expansion generates new discourses and anxieties about the nature of this success and its wider social implications. 'Konbini panics' have arisen as the stores have grown more common.

Initial concern about convenience stores, particularly the chains associated with American companies, centred on whether this new type of retail was a convenient backdoor through which foreign products could infiltrate the Japanese market. But the convenience store did not end up offering very many foreign products. In fact, konbini marketers pursued lines of 'Japanese-style' fast-food products and everyday goods more common to small supermarkets and certain kinds of corner shops.

As konbini grew more numerous and were more heavily used, they were periodically admonished for their unhealthy food offerings, waste, round-the-clock noise, and for promoting poor manners and bad behaviour in young people. Konbini consumer practices are blamed for weak bodies and exhausted students. A national football coach said Japan's poor performance

in international competitions was because of all the konbini *obentō* that the team's players ate. Konbini are also blamed for overstimulating youth and encouraging them to stay up late at night. One study carried out by university researchers found a correlation between store lighting and poor work habits at school (Ayukawa 2003).

Some researchers argue that konbini have become a replacement for the mother and family. Miura Atsushi, a professor and marketing consultant, has gone as far as to declare the rise of 'konbini civilization' (*konbini bunmei*) in Japan. Miura makes the case these 24-hour institutions are raising children:

I call the konbini a 'mother'. If you leave the home and enter a konbini there will be food. Whenever and wherever you go there is always a mother looking after you. [Konbini] are [open] 24-hours [per day], in the worst-case scenario they are more convenient than a mother (*okaasan yori benri*). Food is lined up waiting. Saying 'thank you' is not necessary. Konbini are better than mothers. However, when this happens, when people can always get what they want, then people start to want things immediately. Thus, when something isn't available, it is easy for people to lose their tempers (*kireyasui*). This should be expected. For most people when hunger sets in their mood turns sour. In short, young people are only raised today within this mode of consumption (Miura 2005: 112).

Konbini are not just targets of consumer health groups and cultural pundits. Because of their late hours and the amount of cash that the stores often have on hand, konbini are the targets of robberies and other forms of assault. Television news reports about such attacks appear weekly on national and local news stations. Statistics about konbini robberies are difficult to find, but the problem is significant enough that the Japan Franchise Association (JFA) has held nationwide meetings on the issue.⁵

'Konbinize Me': Waste and want

Faced with looking at konbini as both a life support and a 'mode of consumption' that replaces parents, deforms anatomy, and contributes to insomnia,

5 One solution is for konbini and taxi companies to collaborate. Konbini lend their front parking spaces to taxis at night and allow the taxis to make the stores a temporary night base while waiting for calls.

I decided to throw myself into a month-long konbini embrace, and examine through lifestyle immersion the positive and negative sides of konbini culture.⁶ During preparatory research, I had spent a week getting most of my meals at a convenience store. It turned out that this sort of thing had been tried and written about several times, beginning in the mid-1990s. Week-long konbini dining testimonies appeared in konbini guidebooks starting as early as 1994 (Group 2001 2001: 207-21; Hyper Press 1998; Noguchi 1996: 42-9; NTV 1994). These stories gave me confidence that a month on a konbini diet would be more challenging and more revealing as to the selection, expense, and flavour that konbini had to offer. But restricting myself merely to food felt too simple a task and too narrow a focus considering all the functions these stores could and did fulfil in people's lives. The types of consumption taking place in and around konbini were more than just about eating food; rather, they involved services, killing time, and finding relaxation.

In 2005, living in downtown Tokyo, I was at the epicentre of konbini urbanization. Within a quarter of a mile of where I lived there were 23 konbini representing eleven chains. I did not need to wait for konbini to arrive; they came to me. Both am/pm and 7-Eleven offered delivery services. Despite the notion that all konbini are essentially the same, when I shifted into using only konbini, the differences between stores (even within the same chain) became stark. One store carried quartered heads of cabbage; the others did not. Another store stocked *Asia Newsweek* and the English-language version of the *Daily Yomiuri* newspaper. The rest did not. When there was a particular product I needed, all stores were not the same.

Although convenience store cuisine is often picked out for its negative effects on people's health,⁷ it simply has not garnered the sort of attention and vitriol received by other sectors of the fast-food industry. Certainly, part of this is the time, effort, marketing expense, and advertising weight that the companies invest into making their stores appear like small supermarkets, with a greater emphasis on prepared foods.

After two full weeks of konbinizing, I found that my refrigerator had flushed itself out and reached a steady state of near emptiness. Most of what I had fitted on the front shelf and I knew exactly what my refrigerator contained. But by the end of the second week, I was also feeling emotionally empty. Carting home plastic bags filled with plastic-wrapped food to reheat in the microwave, or to wolf down before they became cold, left me feeling bored and detached. I took greater pleasure in eating unsold lunch boxes

6 I draw here on early analyses of this experiment (see Whitelaw 2014).

7 TCMLI 1998; Watanabe N. 2001; Yamada 1996, 1999, 2003, and 2004; Yokokawa 1999.

(*obentō*) at the konbini where I worked. I lingered after my shifts to nibble and chat, simply because it was nourishing not to be alone. Contributing to the depression I was feeling back at the apartment was my attempt to clean, collect, and weigh as best I could all the rubbish that my konbini lifestyle was producing. In the course of just the first week, I had amassed 28 plastic bags, 6 plastic straws, 13 chopsticks, 11 plastic spoons of various sizes, a few plastic forks, and two 10-litre bin bags of plastic plates, covers, cellophane wrapping, and PET bottles. I initially thought it would be interesting to see the petrochemical footprint of a month of konbinization first-hand, but the resulting volume of waste was already clogging my apartment.

Feeling that I had proved to myself that plastic waste was indeed a significant by-product of the konbini, I decided to add another task to my konbinization list: 'returning' my rubbish to a konbini each day. This was morally not as simple as it sounded. Through the process of conducting participant observation at konbini as a clerk, I knew that owner franchises had to pay their own rubbish bills and that the cost of hauling away konbini rubbish was a considerable expenditure. I heard stories about people throwing away household rubbish in konbini rubbish bins when they were too late to bring their rubbish to the curb on rubbish pick-up day and listened to owners gripe about people who never came into the store but freely availed themselves of the store's rubbish bin. The compromise I came up with was to drop my rubbish at several *chokuei* konbini and some konbini that were owned by a 'mega-franchise' company. I felt that konbini headquarters and large companies had pockets deep enough that my waste would not be noticed.

By embarking on my ritual of rubbish return, I grew more aware of what rubbish bins held. In Tokyo, almost all konbini chains take part in municipal recycling programmes. Whereas in the United States one is lucky to find one rubbish bin outside a shop, in Japan there are four, even five: non-combustibles (plastic products, Styrofoam material), combustibles (newspapers, magazines, food products), cans and glass bottles, and PET bottles (recyclable plastic bottles). Whether a plastic bag is a combustible or non-combustible depends on the person who is doing the discarding, but I found that the non-combustible rubbish bin was usually brimming with konbini bags and many of the bags were from chains other than that of the store whose rubbish bin I was using.

On my daily visits to store rubbish bins, I also crossed paths with people, usually men, tugging shopping trolleys or suitcase dollies with boxes strapped to them with bungy cords. These people paid quick visits to the combustible rubbish bins and fished out magazines and comic books. On

one occasion, I followed one of these printed-matter gleaners on his rounds, starting at Daily. His pace wore me out, but thanks to him I learned the location of half a dozen new konbini. Japan's homeless (*rojō seikatsusha*, lit. 'people living on the street') earn part of their living by gleaning and recycling from konbini rubbish bins. In addition to magazines, *rojō seikatsusha* also collect cans that they redeem for money. Until 2006, one kilogram of cans earned the collector ¥116 (just under €1). The rate has since risen ¥10 (Sakaguchi 2007: 43). Can competition around konbini is fierce according to a *rojō seikatsusha* couple interviewed by architect and activist Sakaguchi Kyōhei. Many konbini, including Daily, lock their rubbish bins to prevent rubbish and recyclables from being easily taken. Some *rojō seikatsusha* form private agreements with shop owners to cart away cans.

Several studies have been conducted to examine the patterns of people living on the street. In 1995, the forced eviction of thousands of *rojō seikatsusha* from the several major parks around Osaka prior to the APEC Summit, and a similar round-up before the 2002 World Cup Football Tournament, prompted economists at Osaka University to study why *rojō seikatsusha* congregate in certain urban areas. The team members were surprised to find that convenience store density and access are statistically more important in street life settlement patterns than proximity to welfare offices or even public hospitals (Suzuki 2002). In 2005, members of the same team assisted with a survey of *rojō seikatsusha* in Tokyo's Sumida Ward (Mizuta et al. 2005). Of the 600 people surveyed, 8 per cent reported eating expired convenience store foods. In Shinjuku Ward, the number was 12 per cent. Much of this food may not have come from the rubbish, but may have reached the hands of *rojō seikatsusha* through the backdoor beneficence of konbini owners and store staff.

'Between' places

My Konbinize Me experiment made me think more about the blurred and shifting boundaries between consumer, customer, and acquaintance. Sociologist Ray Oldenburg developed the term 'third place' to describe places outside of home, work, and school where people come together to nurture bonds. In his book *The Great Good Place*, he defines third places as 'the core settings of informal public life [...] a generic destination for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work' (Oldenburg 1989: 16). Oldenburg admits the term is meant to be

neutral, brief, and facile, and it should be seen as the solution for what is increasingly missing in (American) community today. To support his claims, he visits beer gardens, main streets, pubs, cafés, coffeehouses, and post offices. Drawing on this fieldwork, he identifies commonalities that link these seemingly disparate spaces. Third places are where people can gather and interact. In contrast to ‘first places’ (home) and ‘second places’ (work), third places are social levellers that situate guests on more neutral ground and foster communication and open exchange. Third places are accessible and accommodating; they have ‘regulars’, but the preference for third spaces vary from person to person. Third places offer forms of psychological support and comfort similar to that of a ‘good home’. *A Bowling Alone* (Putnam 2000), Riesmanian (1953) sense of community in the grips of decline informs Oldenburg’s mission to cultivate third-place awareness:

Without such place, the urban area fails to nourish the kinds of relationships and the diversity of human contact that are the essence of the city. Deprived of these settings, people remain lonely within their crowds (quoted in Schultz and Yang 1997: 120).

The relationship between nurturing profit and nourishing relationships has interested social theorists from Max Weber to Daniel Miller. Oldenburg’s view did not exclude commercial enterprises from being third places, but he felt the composition must prevent profit motives from swallowing affect and free association. In his study of a shopping district in England, Daniel Miller (1998, 2001) found that consumers who moved freely between a range of retail settings, the ‘third places’ in town – the local hair salon and hardware store – were not, however, the most financially successful. Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks, embraced Oldenburg’s third-place concept and his charge that ‘the survival of the coffeehouse depends on its ability to [meet] present day needs and not those of the romanticized past’ (quoted in Pendergrast 1999: 375). He turned the third-place idea into a *raison d’etat* for making Starbucks an ‘extension of people’s front porch’ (Schultz and Yang 1997: 314) across America and throughout the world.

Using the konbini and observing how other consumers used them, I felt that the stores were a place between places. They were anonymous, silent, and distancing, but also close, comforting, and possessing a certain affect of their own. Konbini accommodated both faster and slower paces. In supermarkets and department stores the goal is to attract customers and keep them at the store as long as possible, because each additional minute of shopping increases the probability of further purchases. Such

rules do not apply to konbini. The amount of money a customer spends in a konbini rises sharply within the first five minutes of entering the store, then tumbles thereafter. Thus, customers who spend fifteen minutes in a konbini spend almost half as much as customers who only spend one minute in a konbini (MCR 1997).

Conclusion

Whether used intensively or just from time to time, the konbini embraces and reflects the lifestyles it supports. It has embedded itself in people's daily lives by supplying a little bit of the various things that people need: food, entertainment, money, shelter, anonymity, and, sometimes, intimacy. The pillars of the konbini model are speed, predictability, and convenience, but it is in the realm of 'convenience' where arguably the most change has occurred. The meaning of the term 'convenience store' has been transformed as the stores themselves have been retrofitted into the basements of government buildings and turned into classrooms for Kyoto school children.

As society becomes more familiar with these spaces, which seem to be unconcerned with customer cultivation or locking in long-term relations, the question arises as to what happens when a konbini disappears. Konbini are, after all, flexible institutions and the billboards of the rapid-service economy.

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Serving the Nation

The Myth of *Washoku*

Katarzyna J. Cwiertka

Cwiertka, Katarzyna J. & Ewa Machotka (eds), *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan: A Transdisciplinary Perspective*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018

DOI: 10.5117/9789462980631/CH04

Abstract

In December 2013, 'Washoku, traditional dietary cultures of the Japanese, notably for the celebration of New Year' was inscribed on the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage. This chapter explores the rise of *washoku* (lit. 'Japanese food' or 'Japanese cuisine') to the status of cultural heritage and analyses the major motives behind this process. It argues that *washoku*, as it is currently being promoted, is a myth constructed for the purposes of the UNESCO inscription, whose propagation ultimately aims to solve the problems faced by the Japanese authorities since the beginning of the post-bubble era: Japan's declining competitiveness in the global marketplace, the Japanese population's poor opinion of their country's achievements, and the country's low food self-sufficiency ratio.

Keywords: Japanese food, *washoku*, UNESCO, intangible cultural heritage, gastrodiploamacy, food self-sufficiency

Introduction

On 4 December 2013, the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Heritage inscribed fourteen new elements on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.¹ One of those elements was 'Washoku, traditional dietary cultures of the Japanese, notably for the celebration of New Year' (*Washoku; Nihonjin no dentōteki na shokubunka – shōgatsu o rei to shite*). Following the inscription, the word

1 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/8-representative-list-00665>, accessed 29 July 2016.

'washoku' was transformed from an ordinary noun with the comprehensive meaning of 'Japanese food' into a brand name denoting 'traditional Japanese cuisine' and began to attract worldwide attention. For example, in 2014, the term featured four times in *The New York Times*, which was nearly as many as in the previous ten years put together.² Similarly, *The Japan News* – a leading Japanese newspaper published in English (prior to 2013 known under the name *Daily Yomiuri*) – featured the word 55 times between the UNESCO announcement on 4 December 2013 and the end of 2015. The word appeared in the paper's headlines on nine occasions in these two years. In contrast, before the announcement, over the course of 24 years, the word washoku had featured in the newspaper a mere twenty times, of which just seven times were in headlines: five times in 2013 in anticipation of the UNESCO announcement, once in 2012, and once more eight years earlier.³

The exposure in the English-language media does not even compare to the 'washoku fever' that infected the Japanese-language media following the UNESCO inscription. In 2014, 'washoku' featured in the headlines of 66 articles that appeared in the leading daily newspaper, *Asahi Shinbun*. Just ten years earlier, in 2004, 'washoku' appeared in the headlines on only nine occasions; twenty years earlier – in 1994 – the term featured just twice in the entire year.⁴ This trend has not been restricted to the mass media, but has also been reflected in the publishing industry. According to the records of the National Diet Library (NDL), as of the end of 2015, a total of 631 books with the word washoku in their titles had been published in Japan since the establishment of the library in 1948. These included cookbooks, restaurant guides, and gastronomic essays, as well as more serious publications on Japanese culinary history. The NDL is the leading Japanese library, which, like the British Library in the United Kingdom or the Library of Congress in the United States, contains a copy of all the books published in the country, with a small number of exceptions.⁵

It is hardly surprising that the two years following the UNESCO inscription saw a surge in such titles – 128 books on washoku published between January 2014 and December 2015 are on file at the NDL. More astounding is the fact that 95 per cent of all the books on the topic have been published in the last 25 years: 100 throughout the 1990s and 496 between 2000 and 2015.

2 Reuters 2014a, 2014b; Phanner and Yang 2014; Robinsons 2014.

3 Yomidas Rekishikan Database, <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/database/en/>, accessed 27 October 2016. The full-text database of *The Japan News* starts in 1989.

4 Asahi Kikuzo Database, <http://database.asahi.com/library2e/>, accessed 27 October 2016.

5 The books can be searched for through this URL: <https://ndl.opac.ndl.go.jp/F/1G85M7DDV5H46SITY9F4UIJQBRFUR63TITYRRILYDKP86YNC3D-3756i?func=find-b-o>, accessed 27 October 2016.

In contrast, a measly 34 books appeared before the 1990s: 25 in the 1980s, five in the 1970s, and two each in the 1960s and 1950s. The logical conclusion that can be drawn from these data is that the concept of washoku clearly gained popularity during the post-bubble period. This chapter argues that the timing of this development was far from accidental.

What's in a name?

In the UNESCO nomination, washoku is described as a 'social practice based on a comprehensive set of skills, knowledge, practice, and traditions related to the production, processing, preparation, and consumption of food. It is associated with an essential spirit of respect for nature closely related to the sustainable use of natural resources.'⁶ This definition is a surprisingly imaginative interpretation of a common noun meaning 'Japanese food' or 'Japanese meal', which, for decades, has been used interchangeably with the term *Nihon ryōri*. The major difference in the grammatical use of both terms was that the word washoku implied a 'Japanese meal', while *Nihon ryōri* indicates a 'Japanese dish' or 'Japanese dishes' (Masuda 1989: 1225, 1950). Both can be translated into English as 'Japanese food', 'Japanese cuisine', or 'Japanese cooking'. Some Japanese-language dictionaries offer more nuanced definitions, by specifying the meaning of *Nihon ryōri* as exclusive restaurant cuisine, while linking washoku more generally with the daily food of the common people, with home cooking at its core (Shibata and Yamada 2002: 1042). This distinction has been emphasized in the UNESCO nomination and echoed repeatedly in the statements of its prominent advocates, such as Kumakura Isao, the chairman of the Washoku Japan Foundation (Washoku Bunka Kokumin Kaigi) and former chairman of the Investigative Commission for the Nomination of Japanese Food Culture on the List of World Intangible Cultural Heritage (*Nihon Shokubunka no Sekai Mukeyi Isan Tōroku ni Muketa Kentōkai*) (Kumakura 2012: 5, 2013: 10).⁷ However, in the popular use of the terms – at least up until the UNESCO inscription – the difference between *Nihon ryōri* and washoku was not clearly distinguishable, as the analysis below confirms.

6 See Nomination file no. 00869, p. 3, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/8-representative-list-00665>, accessed 5 October 2017.

7 <https://washokujapan.jp>, accessed 27 October 2016. 'Washoku Japan' is not the correct English translation of the Japanese name, but the name that the foundation chooses to use.

Figure 4.1 Pork cutlet (*tonkatsu*) is one of several Western dishes introduced to the Japanese diet during the early decades of the twentieth century



Photograph by Jurre van der Meer

Firstly, it needs to be clarified that ‘washoku’ is a relatively new word, created in the late nineteenth century, when similar neologisms with the prefix ‘wa’, meaning ‘Japan’, ‘Japanese’, or ‘Japanese-style’, emerged in response to the encroachment of Western culture (Yanagita 1957; Jansen and Rozman 1986; Yumoto 1996). Everyday objects, such as food and clothing, which had not previously needed any particular designation, now had to be specified as Japanese or Western (Fig. 4.1). For example, the word *wafuku*, meaning ‘Japanese-style clothing’, emerged in response to the trend for wearing Western clothing, which was called *yōfuku*, with the prefix ‘yō’ indicating a Western origin. Similarly, the term *washoku* emerged in response to the phenomenon of *yōshoku* (Western food), and has consistently been used as its counterpart.

Very little information on the etymological trajectory of the word *washoku* is available. No trace of the word can be found in monolingual, Japanese-language dictionaries before its appearance in the 1981 edition of *Nihongo daijiten* (Comprehensive dictionary of the Japanese language) (Shōgaku tosho 1981: 1883, 2516). This fact by no means implies that the word had not been commonly used earlier than this. ‘Washoku’ gradually began to enter common usage from the late nineteenth century. However, it did not appear to connote home-cooked food, as indicated above, but precisely the opposite: food enjoyed in a restaurant setting.

The reasons behind such usage are very logical. As a novelty at the time, Western food (*yōshoku*) was primarily served in restaurants, and since

washoku functioned as its counterpart, the two words were frequently used in reference to the restaurant scene. For example, from the 1920s onwards the word appeared alongside *yōshoku* on the menus of restaurants in Japanese department stores. Both terms also turn up in restaurant advertisements in newspapers. As early as 1892, for example, the term washoku features in an advertisement from the NYK (Nippon Yūsen Kaisha) shipping company, informing prospective passengers on the Kobe-Otaru ferry about the prices of the Japanese and Western-style meals served on board. The NYK line was famous for its exquisite cooking.⁸

A detailed analysis of the databases of two Japanese daily newspapers – *Yomiuri Shinbun* and *Asahi Shinbun* – reveals that, over the course of the twentieth century, the use of the word washoku was initially reserved to indicate Japanese-style food in a very broad sense. For example, in 1941, *Yomiuri Shinbun* announced that washoku had been a big favourite at the banqueting table on the Nanking-Kobe cruise.⁹ In 1968, *Asahi Shinbun* reported on how instant miso soup and pickles – referred to as washoku – were being sent to Mexico City to serve as ‘restorative remedies’ (*kitsuke gusuri*) for the Japanese athletes competing at the Mexico Olympics.¹⁰ In 1986, the same newspaper proudly announced that Princess Diana liked washoku and was practising using chopsticks in preparation for her visit to Japan.¹¹ A 2005 article referred to the popularity of Japanese-style fast food in China, also using the term washoku.¹² Thus, this analysis reveals that the word washoku was not used in the mass media to refer to home-cooked food, but instead was utilized to refer to any type of food of Japanese origin, from innovative products of the food-processing industry to banqueting dishes served to royalty.

The UNESCO nomination

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, commonly referred to by its abbreviation UNESCO, was established in 1945 with the aim of facilitating ‘the building of peace [...] and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information’.¹³

8 *Asahi Shinbun* (Tokyo edition), 7 October 1892, p. 6.

9 *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 16 June 1941, p. 3.

10 *Asahi Shinbun*, 25 September 1968, p. 12.

11 *Ibid.*, 18 April 1986, p. 12.

12 *Ibid.*, 4 October 2005, p. 3.

13 ‘Introducing UNESCO: What We Are’, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/about-us/who-we-are/introducing-unesco/>, accessed 28 July 2016.

The organization is perhaps best known for its World Heritage List – an inventory of world heritage sites that form part of the global cultural and natural heritage and are considered to have ‘outstanding universal value’. At present, the list contains over a thousand sites, ranging from the Statue of Liberty, Vatican City, and the Great Wall of China, to the Grand Canyon National Park and Mount Fuji.¹⁴ In 2003, UNESCO came up with a new initiative, the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which aimed to enhance the visibility of the world’s intangible cultural heritage and awareness of its significance. In 2008, the first elements were inscribed on the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and it now includes such diverse entries as Argentinian tango, Chinese calligraphy, and Indonesian batik.¹⁵ UNESCO defines ‘intangible cultural heritage’ as ‘practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces [...] – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage’.¹⁶ Although no direct reference to food and drink is made in the text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, it is today considered the most prolific instrument of international law used to protect culinary traditions (Maffei 2012: 248). The first three inscriptions that focused specifically on culinary culture – ‘Gingerbread craft from Northern Croatia’ (Inscription 5.COM 6.10),¹⁷ ‘Gastronomic meal of the French’ (Inscription 5.COM 6.14),¹⁸ and ‘Traditional Mexican cuisine – ancestral, ongoing community culture, the Michoacán paradigm’ (Inscription 5.COM 6.30)¹⁹ – joined the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010, a year after an expert meeting had been organized (in April 2009) specifically to discuss the role of culinary practices in the implementation of the convention (Maffei 2012: 232).

So far, the year 2013 has been the most abundant in terms of culinary inscriptions – five out of the total of 25 newly inscribed elements focused on consumable heritage: ‘Ancient Georgian traditional Qvevri wine-making

14 The full list is available at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/>, accessed 28 July 2016.

15 The full list is available at <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00559>, accessed 28 July 2016.

16 Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/convention>, accessed 28 July 2016.

17 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/gingerbread-craft-from-northern-croatia-00356>, accessed 11 May 2017.

18 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/gastronomic-meal-of-the-french-00437>, accessed 11 May 2017.

19 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/traditional-mexican-cuisine-ancestral-ongoing-community-culture-the-michoacan-paradigm-00400>, accessed 11 May 2017.

method' (Inscription 8.COM 8.13),²⁰ 'Mediterranean diet' (Inscription 8.COM 8.10),²¹ 'Kimjang, making and sharing kimchi in the Republic of Korea' (Inscription 8.COM 8.23),²² 'Turkish coffee culture and tradition' (Inscription 8.COM 8.28),²³ and 'Washoku, traditional dietary cultures of the Japanese, notably for the celebration of New Year' (Inscription 8.COM 8.17).²⁴

Following the UNESCO rules, all these nominations had to be submitted to the UNESCO Secretariat by 31 March of the previous year in order to be screened by the Evaluating Body and be presented for final examination by the Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee. All successful applications must meet the five criteria specified in the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage:

R.1: The element constitutes intangible cultural heritage as defined in Article 2 of the Convention.

R.2: Inscription of the element will contribute to ensuring visibility and awareness of the significance of the intangible cultural heritage and encourage dialogue, thus reflecting cultural diversity worldwide and testifying to human creativity.

R.3: Safeguarding measures are elaborated that may protect and promote the element.

R.4: The element has been nominated following the widest possible participation of the community, group or, if applicable, individuals concerned and with their free, prior and informed consent.

R.5: The element is included in an inventory of the intangible cultural heritage present in the territory(ies) of the submitting State(s) Party(ies), as defined in Article 11 and Article 12 of the Convention.²⁵

The first three criteria concern how the nominated element is embedded in society and the ways in which it is to be protected, while the final two specify the more formal prerequisites to be met before UNESCO's approval.

20 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/ancient-georgian-traditional-qvevri-wine-making-method-00870>, accessed 11 May 2017.

21 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/mediterranean-diet-00884>, accessed 11 May 2017.

22 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/kimjang-making-and-sharing-kimchi-in-the-republic-of-korea-00881>, accessed 11 May 2017.

23 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/turkish-coffee-culture-and-tradition-00645>, accessed 11 May 2017.

24 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/washoku-traditional-dietary-cultures-of-the-japanese-notably-for-the-celebration-of-new-year-00869>, accessed 11 May 2017.

25 Quoted from 'Inscription on the Representative List', <https://ich.unesco.org/en/procedure-of-inscription-00809#inscription-on-the-representative-list>, accessed 5 October 2017.

For the purpose of this chapter, I will concentrate on point 4, which requires filed nominations to demonstrate that the initiative is not merely concocted by the governments that file them ('State Parties' in UNESCO's bureaucratic jargon), but enjoys the strong support of the community. In the case of the washoku nomination, the required evidence was provided in the form of consent statements, complete with the names and signatures of supporters. An impressive PDF document containing scans of 1,606 such statements is available to download from the UNESCO website.²⁶ Alongside individuals and businesses – from local banks to restaurants, food retailers, and food-processing enterprises – support for the washoku initiative was conveyed by the representatives of a variety of grass-roots organizations, such as consumer associations, women's groups, and local committees.

A closer look at the submitted scans leads to quite a puzzling discovery. None of the support statements dated between September and late November 2011 actually refers to the nomination for 'Washoku, traditional dietary cultures of the Japanese, notably for the celebration of New Year'. Instead, they support the nomination of 'Distinctive Japanese cuisine with traditional features centred on *kaiseki*'. In contrast, all statements dated after 26 December refer solely to washoku, with a transitional period between late November and late December, when documents using either term can be found. *Kaiseki* refers to a multi-course restaurant meal that could best be described as Japanese *haute cuisine* (Rath 2013).

How can this rather curious mix-up of documents be explained? Firstly, it seems unlikely that the inclusion of statements referring to 'Distinctive Japanese cuisine with traditional features centred on *kaiseki*' to support the application of 'Washoku, traditional dietary cultures of the Japanese, notably for the celebration of New Year' was intentional. Rather, it seems surprising that the bureaucrats of the Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunkachō) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (Nōrin Suisanshō; hereafter MAFF), who were responsible for submitting this documentation to UNESCO, allowed such an error to slip in. The dates on the statements suggest that an application that focused on 'Distinctive Japanese cuisine with traditional features centred on *kaiseki*' was the initial intention and that a change of plan occurred in November 2011. The minutes of the meetings of the aforementioned Investigative Commission for the Nomination of Japanese Food Culture on the List of World Intangible Cultural Heritage

26 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/8-representative-list-00665>, accessed 5 October 2017. To access the file, scroll down to application no. 8.17 and click on 'Consent of communities'. The file will download automatically onto your computer.

and the timing of the shift provide us with further clues as to the possible reason for this change.²⁷ The change coincided with the sixth session of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which took place in Bali between 22 and 29 November 2011. This was the moment when UNESCO announced its decisions concerning the nominations that had been submitted the previous year for inscription on the list. Among the rejected nominations was 'Royal cuisine of the Joseon dynasty' (Nomination file no. 00476), submitted by the South Korean government. It had already been designated as Important Intangible Cultural Property by the South Korean government in 1972, which covered the last of the five UNESCO criteria mentioned earlier. However, the ICH Committee did not find the information provided satisfactory to meet criteria 1, 2, and 4. The precise wording of the decision was as follows:

R.1: Additional information would be needed to identify more clearly the community concerned with the element and its current social function for them, as well as to describe how the practice is recreated by its bearers and provides them a sense of identity and continuity today;

R.2: The State should demonstrate clearly how inscription of the Royal cuisine of the Joseon dynasty on the Representative List could contribute to ensuring visibility of the intangible cultural heritage and awareness of its significance;

R.4: Although two masters and two Institutes participated in the nomination process and provided their free, prior and informed consent, additional information is needed on the participation of a larger community outside the academic environment.²⁸

We can surmise that the negative decision came as a shock, not only to the Koreans, but also to the Japanese authorities who were preparing their own nomination for 'Distinctive Japanese cuisine with traditional features centred on *kaiseki*', which was to be submitted within a couple of months. Apparently, the people in charge of the Japanese nomination assessed that the likelihood of the current application being rejected on the same grounds as the South Korean application was too high, and decided to put together

27 http://www.maff.go.jp/j/study/syoku_vision/kentoukai.html, accessed 25 October 2016.

28 Quoted from 'Report of the Subsidiary Body on its Work in 2011 and Evaluation of Nominations for Inscription in 2011 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity: Addendum', <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/doc/src/ITH-11-6.COM-CONF.206-13+Corr.+Add.-EN.pdf>, pp. 57-8, accessed 29 July 2016.

an entirely new application that would safely meet all of the UNESCO requirements. This fact alone suggests that having Japanese food recognized as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity was a goal that had to be achieved at all costs, even if that meant tweaking the truth.

National branding and food self-sufficiency

Among the four characteristic features of washoku specified in the UNESCO nomination is the 'one soup and three side dishes' (*ichijū sansai*) structure of a Japanese meal, with rice at its centre. As I have elaborated elsewhere (Cwiertka and Yasuhara 2016; Cwiertka forthcoming), this assertion is problematic in combination with the claim of washoku being a home-cooked meal, since *ichijū sansai* is the basic structure of restaurant meals, which are largely based on the principles of *kaiseki*. In the remaining part of this chapter, I would like to argue that washoku, as it is currently being propagated, is a myth constructed for the purposes of the UNESCO inscription, and ultimately to solve the problems that the Japanese authorities have faced since the beginning of the post-bubble era: the declining competitiveness of Japan in the global marketplace, the low esteem of the Japanese population about the achievements of their country, and the country's food self-sufficiency ratio of just 40 per cent, one of the lowest in the industrialized world (Assmann 2010: 4).

From the perspective of food security, this high dependence on food imports in the face of an envisaged global food shortage is far from ideal, without taking into consideration the impact of this situation on the ailing Japanese agricultural sector, which is in grave need of revitalization (Van der Meer and Yamada 2005). Ironically, both the economic bubble of the 1980s and post-bubble conditions have contributed to this state of affairs. As Kako Toshiyuki from Kobe University explains, before the first oil shock the rising demand for animal-based food products was the primary reason behind the steady decline of Japan's food self-sufficiency ratio, which had dropped to 55 per cent by 1973 (Kako 2009: 2). Livestock production had made Japan increasingly dependent on imported animal feed – mostly maize and soybeans from the US. The Japanese government imposed low tariffs on imported animal feed with the intention of boosting the Japanese livestock industry. The same rationale was used to justify low tariffs on oilseeds, enabling the production of inexpensive oils and fats, which were also in high demand. However, the main factors responsible for the further decline in food self-sufficiency during the late 1980s and early 1990s – from

53 to 43 per cent – were different (Kako 2009: 6). The first was the rising value of the yen, which led to an increase in imports of livestock products, fish, shellfish, and fruit. Then, after the bursting of the bubble economy in the early 1990s, the rate of growth in food imports decelerated due to the loss of the effect of a strong yen. Despite this, Japan's food self-sufficiency ratio continued to fall, reaching 42 per cent in 1996 and 40 per cent in 2005 (Kako 2009: 7). This time, other factors were at play: firstly, a sharp decline in agricultural production, closely linked to the continuously falling demand for rice; secondly, the rise of the food-processing and restaurant industries, which relied heavily on cheap imports. By 2000, pre-prepared foods and eating-out comprised 27 per cent of the total food expenditure of Japanese households.

The Japanese government has taken a variety of measures to tackle the problem. For example, in 1999, it enacted the Basic Law on Food, Agriculture, and Rural Areas (*Shokuryō Nōgyō Nōson Hō*) (Kako 2009: 11), followed in 2005 by the Basic Law on Food Education (*Shokuiku Kihon Hō*). The latter aimed to counterbalance the high dependency on food imports by encouraging the Japanese public to buy domestic food products (Assmann 2010: 4). This was to be achieved not only through various 'eat local' campaigns, but also by strengthening the consciousness of a distinct Japanese dietary culture as part of the Japanese national identity.

These efforts coincided with the rise of *bunka gaikō* (cultural diplomacy), a catchphrase that sums up the enthusiasm that emerged in 2004 within the Japanese government for employing popular and consumer culture to further national interests. The Japan Brand Working Group (*Nihon Burando Wākingu Gurūpu*), newly established within the framework of the Intellectual Property Strategic Programme (*Chiteki Zaisan Senryaku*), was entrusted with developing a strategy for improving Japan's national image overseas through the propagation of the 'Japan brand' (*Nihon burando*). Three main goals were identified by the experts entrusted with the task: firstly, to foster a rich dietary culture; secondly, to establish diverse and reliable local brands; and thirdly, to establish Japanese fashion as a global brand (Akutsu 2008). Indeed, in the following year, food culture was chosen as one of the assets that was to represent the 'gross national cultural power of Japan' (Sakamoto and Allen 2011: 109-10). In October 2006, the MAFF and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Gaimushō*) jointly developed a promotional scheme called 'Washoku – Try Japan's Good Food', which consisted of organized events at which Japanese food produce could be sampled at Japanese embassies and consulates all over the world. Roughly 20 such events were organized each year (see Table 4.1), and the promoted produce not only

included food items that could clearly be labelled as ‘Japanese’, such as rice, miso, and seafood, but also ‘ordinary’ agricultural products that are commonly grown elsewhere, such as tomatoes, cucumbers, apples, and peaches.²⁹

Thus, the definition of the word *washoku* as utilized for the purpose of this scheme could be summed up as ‘all agricultural produce grown on Japanese soil’, which was much broader than the one used for the UNESCO nomination.

Table 4.1 ‘Washoku – Try Japan’s Good Food’ campaign events, 2006-2011

Year	Number of Events	Date and place
2006	5	10 October (Japanese Embassy in Finland)
		17 November (Japanese Embassy in Mexico)
		7 December (Consulate General of Japan in Sydney)
		12 December (Japanese Embassy in the United Arab Emirates)
		14 December (Consulate General of Japan in Honolulu)
2007	23	18 January (Japanese Embassy in the Republic of Slovakia)
		30-31 January (Japanese Embassy in India)
		31 January (Japanese Embassy in Croatia)
		18 February (Consulate General of Japan in Dubai)
		12 March (Japanese Embassy in the People’s Republic of China)
		14 March (Consulate General of Japan in Penang)
		2 May (Japanese Embassy in Egypt)
		3 May (Japanese Embassy in Russia)
		7 May (Japanese Embassy in Bulgaria)
		19 June (Japanese Embassy in Norway)
		27 June (Office of the Representative of the Government of Japan to the European Union)
		25 July (Japanese Embassy in the People’s Republic of China)
		17-18 August (Japanese Embassy in Denmark)
		10 September (Consulate General of Japan in Vancouver)
		28 September (Japanese Embassy in the People’s Republic of China)
		31 October-1 November (Japanese Embassy in Ireland)
		16 November (Consulate General of Japan in Düsseldorf)
		19 November (Japanese Embassy in Malaysia)
21 November (Consulate General of Japan in Dubai)		
4 December (Japanese Embassy in Singapore)		
9 December (Japanese Embassy in Kuwait)		
11 December (Japanese Embassy in Brunei)		
13 December (Japanese Embassy in Russia)		

²⁹ The full list of promoted produce is available at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/zaigai/washoku/>, accessed 29 July 2016.

Year	Number of Events	Date and place
2008	24	10 January (Consulate General of Japan in Hong Kong) 23 February (Consulate General of Japan in Dubai) 5 March (Consulate General of Japan in San Francisco) 8-10 March (Consulate General of Japan in Toronto) 10 March (Japanese Embassy in Peru) 11 March (Consulate General of Japan in Boston) 13 March (Consulate General of Japan in Los Angeles) 18 June (Japanese Embassy in France) 25 July (Japanese Embassy in Malaysia) 11 September (Consulate General of Japan in Hong Kong) 16 September (Japanese Embassy in the United Kingdom) 16 September (Japanese Embassy in Russia) 22 September (Japanese Embassy in Canada) 24 September (Japanese Embassy in Bulgaria) 11 October (Consulate General of Japan in Guangzhou) 15-19 October (Japanese Embassy in the People's Republic of China) 22-23 October (Japanese Embassy in the Republic of Korea) 13 November (Consulate General of Japan in Düsseldorf) 19 November (Consulate General of Japan in Chicago) 19 November (Consulate General of Japan in Hong Kong) 26 November (Consulate General of Japan in Dubai) 1 December (Japanese Embassy in Oman) 3 December (Japanese Embassy in Russia) 3 December (Japanese Embassy in Singapore)
2009	10	30 June (Office of the Representative of the Government of Japan to the European Union) 20 July (Consulate General of Japan in Sydney) 14 August (Japanese Embassy in Malaysia) 1 October (Consulate General of Japan in Düsseldorf) 4 October (Japanese Embassy in Indonesia) 10 October (Japanese Embassy in the Netherlands) 29 October (Japanese Embassy in Switzerland) 13-14 November (Consulate General of Japan in Guangzhou) 16 November (Japanese Embassy in Oman) 7 December (Japanese Embassy in Singapore)
2010	5	8-9 August (Consulate General of Japan in Chicago) 13 September (Consulate General of Japan in Vancouver) 17 October (Consulate General of Japan in Guangzhou) 1-2 November (Consulate General of Japan in Boston) 3 November (Japanese Embassy in the United Kingdom)
2011	4	23 January (Japanese Embassy in Oman) 25-27 February (Japanese Embassy in Singapore) 5 March (Japanese Embassy in Saudi Arabia) 6 March (Representative Office for Business of Japan in Dalian)

Source: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/annai/zaigai/washoku/>, accessed 30 December 2016

Conclusion

Food has shaped diplomatic interactions for centuries, but, as the recently coined term 'gastrodiplomacy' indicates, it has lately achieved a far more prominent place in public-policy outreach, and not only in Japan. Gastrodiplomacy is defined as a form of public diplomacy that highlights and promotes the awareness and understanding of a national culinary culture among a foreign public. Simply promoting a food product of foreign origin does not equate with gastrodiplomacy. Rather, gastrodiplomacy denotes a more holistic approach to raising international awareness of a country's edible national brand through the promotion of its culinary and cultural heritage (Rockower 2014: 14). It has been pointed out by scholars of Japanese gastrodiplomacy that in the minds of many Japanese government officials, washoku is yet another form of Japan's so-called content industries, whose products range from Pokémon and other manga and anime, to digital media, fashion, visual arts, and design (Bestor 2014: 60). The 'Japan brand' is now as intricately linked with washoku as it is with Hello Kitty. In other words, Japan's intangible culinary heritage provides a connection to much more tangible issues, such as foreign investment, international tourism, and Japanese agricultural and fishery exports.

From the perspective of the Japanese government, the carefully crafted nomination for the inscription of washoku on UNESCO's Intangible World Heritage List has been a smashing success. Hardly anyone remembers that, according to the purposely fabricated myth, washoku is supposed to be the home-cooked food of the community, needing UNESCO's protection. Instead, it is now being creatively expanded to include exclusive cuisine served in restaurants (Fig. 4.2), as testified by the Washoku World Challenge cooking competition for non-Japanese professional chefs. So far, the competition has been held four times and the fifth round is scheduled for February 2018.³⁰ The newest initiative in the domain of the washoku business is the Washoku Sangyō Ten (lit. 'Washoku Industry Exhibition'), which is translated into English as International 'Washoku' Show Japan.³¹ The expression 'washoku industry' (*washoku sangyō*) – avoided in the English translation of the name – is in itself a contradiction, considering the intangible heritage status of washoku.

Since its inscription on the UNESCO Intangible World Heritage List in December 2013, washoku has been rapidly transformed into a heritage brand name, which is being extensively used by governmental agencies as well

30 <http://washoku-worldchallenge.jp/5th/en/>, accessed 5 October 2017.

31 <http://www.jma.or.jp/washoku/en/index.html>, accessed 25 October 2016.

Figure 4.2 DVD case of the documentary *Washoku Dream: Beyond Sushi* (2015)



Photograph taken by the author

as a variety of businesses.³² This has considerably affected perceptions of washoku as a concept (Cwiertka forthcoming). It remains to be seen, however, whether the promotional activities surrounding washoku will have an equally powerful impact on the consumption practices of the Japanese population. This brings us back to the classical theoretical discussions on the meaning of food and eating in human society (Mennel, Murcott and Van Otterloo 1992), on how such meaning is constructed and implanted in behaviour, and on how the material and the immaterial are blurred with one another in the course of historical change.

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32 A random sample includes the hotel industry (<http://www.washokukentei.jp/index.php>), producers of kitchen appliances (<http://www.mitsubishielectric.co.jp/club-me/washoku/02.html>), and food-processing firms (<http://www.marukome.co.jp/knowledge/washoku/index.html>); <http://park.ajinomoto.co.jp/recipe/corner/ichijjuunsai>); all websites accessed 27 October 2016.

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Consuming Domesticity in Post-Bubble Japan

Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni

Cwiertka, Katarzyna J. & Ewa Machotka (eds), *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan: A Transdisciplinary Perspective*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018

DOI: 10.5117/9789462980631/CH05

Abstract

Post-bubble Japan is characterized by an unprecedented diversity and proliferation of options for lifestyles for women. Paradoxically, it was the bursting of the economic bubble in the 1990s that caused the market to intensify its grip on Japanese women of all ages. This chapter focuses on one of the main social roles still available to women in Japan – that of the full-time housewife (*sengyō shufu*). I argue that as the vision of ‘good wife, wise mother’ gradually becomes obsolete, and the hold of the housewife role loosens, new images of women as homebound are emerging. Focusing on the production of seemingly new images of female domesticity, this chapter shows how the status quo has been reasserted and reproduced.

Keywords: female domesticity, housewives, gender policies, women’s magazines, triple disaster

Introduction

On 11 March 2011, northern Japan was hit by a devastating earthquake, followed by an unprecedentedly large tsunami that caused a disastrous nuclear accident. Soon after the disaster, it seemed that the Japanese state, which had received warm and supportive sympathy and aid from the entire world, planned to use the crisis to urge the Japanese people to rebuild their nation, which had been facing economic and other difficulties and crises since the burst of the economic bubble in the early 1990s. In his message for the public on 13 March, Prime Minister Kan Naoto – who would resign a few months later – declared that he considered the triple disaster to be

‘the most severe crisis in the 65 years since the end of the Second World War’. The prime minister concluded his speech by addressing his people in a somewhat personal, though affirmative tone:

I believe that whether or not we Japanese are able to overcome this crisis is something now being asked of all Japanese individually. We Japanese [*watashitachi Nihonjin*] have overcome many very trying situations in the past to create our modern society of peace and prosperity [...]. Through this resolve, let us all now – each and every individual – firmly reinforce our bonds with our families, friends, and communities, overcoming this crisis to once more build an even better Japan [...].¹

This plea to the Japanese people to struggle again together as a nation to overcome the bad times was captured by a major sign campaign all over Japan that read ‘Ganbarō Nippon’ (Don’t give up, Japan). I believe that the use of ‘we Japanese’ (*watashitachi Nihonjin*) in this appeal to the nation is not accidental and can be read as embodying a specific kind of nationalism that emphasizes the inner Japanese spirit and the restoration of the pride of the Japanese people.

This nationalistic spirit, which was coined ‘disaster nationalism’ (Hornung 2011), was promoted by a variety of agencies both in and outside of Japan. As March 2011 caught me in the last stages of compiling my book on Japanese housewives (Goldstein-Gidoni 2012), I was naturally especially drawn to the involvement of the idols of domesticity admired by the women I studied in this nationalistic effort to rebuild Japan, along with the pride of its people, in an alleged attempt to echo the spirit of post-war recovery.

No wonder that the great idol for housewives and domesticity, icon Kurihara Harumi, soon jumped on the nationalistic spirit bandwagon; she came as a saviour, bringing the message of sustainable, traditionally Japanese cooking to relieve the pain and reduce tension. As will be discussed below, in recent years Kurihara had gained the image and role of mentor, or domesticity sage, for many women in Japan. Naturally, her main contribution to the Ganbarō Nippon campaign was brought in the form of reviving and energy-saving recipes such as a ‘joyful salad plate’ and ‘relieving potatoes’, which were surely accompanied by a ‘mother’s smile’ (Kurihara 2011a: 14).

This chapter is, however, not about how the Japanese nation has recovered, or has aimed to recover, from the triple disaster. Instead, my aim is to show how the commercialization of the role of the housewife and of female

1 ‘Message from the Prime Minister’, 13 March 2011, http://japan.kantei.go.jp/kan/statement/201103/13message_e.html, accessed 14 August 2015.

domesticity since the 1990s, and especially since the turn of the century, can be seen against the background of a certain 'reactionary rhetorical climate' (Robertson 2010), which among other things reproduces 'traditional' gender roles. This is certainly not to argue that there have not been any changes in gender roles. Undoubtedly, post-bubble Japan can be characterized by a growing diversity and proliferation of options in terms of women's lifestyles. As I further show, this proliferation of roles and images supplied a basis for a competitive market. There is no doubt that the cultural hegemony of the role of housewife, which in the 1990s 'became so strongly normative that it was practically synonymous with womanhood' (Ochiai 1996: 35), has lost some of its grip. Nevertheless, even within this process of the diversification of women's roles, it is still worthwhile looking more carefully at the social role of the housewife (*shufu*) and its cultural implications, taking into account that in modern Japan the idea of *shufu* has been regarded as the 'cardinal point' (*kiten*) with regard to which women reflect about themselves (Itō 1973; Ueno 1982).

As was clearly demonstrated by Kathleen Uno (1993), the vision of women as homebound wives and mothers, as it emerged in the Meiji period with the *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother) slogan, continued to influence state policies regarding welfare, education, employment, sexuality, and reproduction at least until the late 1980s, albeit in a somewhat transmuted version (Uno 1993: 294-5). However, as the vision of 'good wife, wise mother' has gradually become obsolete and the hold of the housewife role has been loosened, new images of women as homebound have begun to emerge periodically including, as we will see below, the charisma housewife (*karisuma shufu*), the happy, cute, and romantic housewife, and even the most recent 'hot mama'. These are obviously largely the inventions and products of the media and the market, which, as State agencies, have been highly involved in the production of images of women in post-war Japan.

The State (with a capital S) is regarded in this context as a shorthand for several dominant agents and agencies, including the government, the corporate sector, the media, and the market, which collectively, though not seamlessly, produce and reproduce the status quo (see Corrigan and Sayer 1985; Robertson 2007). As suggested by Corrigan and Sayer (1985: 119-200), the power of 'the State' becomes comprehensible when state forms are understood as cultural forms and cultural images are regarded as extensively state-regulated. Through this State power, which is often invisible, culturally dominated images and self-images are constructed through continuous suppression of alternatives coupled with active 'encouragement' by state activities and agencies of preferred forms, which then become recognized and taken for granted as reality.

The *Hanako* tribe: Single women as hedonistic consumers

Data for this chapter were collected between 2003 and 2011, and in 2013 and 2014. They comprise in-depth interviews with over fifty housewives, the majority of whom reside in a typical, middle-class neighbourhood, a suburban condominium complex (*manshon*) located in the Kansai area and at a convenient commuting distance from central Osaka. Interviews were also conducted with some of these women's idols, with a focus on the most renowned 'charisma housewife', Kurihara Harumi. In addition to interviews, the data include a survey of popular women's magazines and other media platforms and Internet sites.

The women who formed the largest age and social group in the suburban neighbourhood and who made up the majority of the interviewees were born between 1966 and 1970. They were in their twenties during the late 1980s and early 1990s, the last days of the bubble economy. This generation was described as a generation that celebrated a consumer lifestyle. Cultivating so-called individualistic and hedonistic ideas unknown to former generations of women in Japan, they were dubbed the *Hanako* tribe (*Hanakozoku*), after a women's magazine titled *Hanako*, whose advice on fashion, dining, and travel was almost religiously followed by its readers, most of them young women (Pollak 1993). *Hanako* readers were expected to make a change both in women's lives and in the nature of the Japanese family. However, as lamented by the family sociologist Ochiai Emiko (2005: 161), they broke this promise of social change, as upon reaching their thirties, 'one after the other [they] married, had children and became housewives', following in the footsteps of their mothers' generation.

The *Hanako* mothers, who together with their salarymen husbands allegedly rebuilt Japan after the war, have become the epitome of 'Japan's new middle class'. During the period of high economic growth, since the 1960s, they became for the rest of Japan the symbols of the *akarui seikatsu* (bright new life) (Vogel 1991 [1963]: 71). The idea of 'bright life', which had a widespread impact and was propagated as a symbol and promise of Japan's future (Cwiertka 2006: 159), actually implied possessing a 'modern' home with a middle-class standard of living and 'a nuclear family with a housewife at its center' (Partner 1999: 137). The role of this housewife was characterized by high levels of self-sacrifice, endurance (*gaman*), hardships (*kurō*), and arduous work (*taihen*) (Lebra 1984: 35).

The discrepancy between the values of the generation of the early post-war mothers and their daughters is thus hard to ignore, and was highlighted by the public condemnation of the 'selfish' generation, which has become

bon ton since the 1990s. The Japanese media and public commentary on the whole have tended to emphasize the generation gap between the young, carefree, and indulgent women and their family-oriented, responsible mothers (Nakano and Wagatsuma 2004). Truly, this critical campaign, largely promoted by conservative, mainly male politicians and social critics, cannot simply be explained in terms of value disapproval only. The background to it was the almost national panic with regard to Japan's demographic problem, of which delayed marriage and non-marriage have largely been identified as the major causes (Akagawa 2004; Nemoto 2008).

Marriage and childbearing are usually considered as the final, crucial steps for Japanese women to become full social persons (*shakajin*) and wholly mature (*ichinin mae*) (Matsunaga 2000: 123; Brinton 2011: 31 n19). However, it seems that in the case of the *Hanakos*, who were inherently suspected of being ill-equipped for the role of wife and mother, the change in marital status alone was not enough. Their initiation into their new social role required further symbolic acts to mark the genuineness of this transition.

During the happy days of the economic bubble, the excessive consumption of branded goods became one of the emblems of the lifestyle of the *Hanako* tribe. However, alas, what should a perfect housewife, who is expected to put the welfare of her family before her own personal needs, do with such symbols of consumerist self-fulfilment? Sakai-san, one of those women considered by her neighbours and friends as a 'model housewife' (*shufu no kagami*), who is a paragon of perfect role performance as a wife and a mother, described this dilemma when two contradictory sets of 'necessities' or 'normal' habits clash:

If I were to work and have some income, I would spend it on my family. There are so many *necessary* [her emphasis] things that I need. I don't think I would want to buy brand-name handbags as I used to do when I was an OL [office lady]. I'd rather buy my son a football or some clothing. I still have some brand-name shoes and handbags, a total of five items, but truly I have no idea how to use them now. When I was an OL I went to sales, I shopped at duty free shops when travelling overseas, just because it was the normal thing to do. In fact, I am not so sure anymore if I really liked [the brand-name items] in the first place.

Sakai-san still holds on to the precious objects that she now deems useless, whereas some of her friends and neighbours, with either more pressing financial needs or more entrepreneurial ideas and better access to technology, have actually sold their own such items through Amazon Japan. 'Where would I use a Chanel bag?'; 'Can I wear a brand-name blouse when going to

a PTA [Parent-Teacher Association] meeting?'; and 'I don't go out anyway', were the frequent explanations they gave for this explicit act.

Japanese women tend to follow an orderly life plan (Brinton 1992), which can be regarded as a series of transitions from one social role to the next (Goldstein-Gidoni 2012). Upon marriage, the women of the *Hanako* tribe sensed that a further symbolic initiation to the next social role in their life as wives and mothers was required, and thus they got rid of the epitomes of their self-oriented, hedonistic years as office ladies. Ironically, later in life, when the women reach their forties and fifties, they are faced with new images urging them to consume in what appears to be a similar manner to that in which they did in their pre-marriage social role as hedonistic consumers.

The production of new consuming tribes: Women's magazines at the burst of the bubble

As observed by Betty Friedan in her study of American housewives in the late 1950s, the market, the mass media, and especially women's magazines have a great impact on carving the 'right' female image and role (Friedan 2001 [1963]: 34). Women's magazines form a large part of the Japanese print media. From early in the twentieth century, the massive publishing industry found women of all ages a good target. Studies of these magazines have revealed their vast and varied impact on women's lives. They influence women's consumption habits and play a significant role in the formation of women's identities and the cultivation of ideas of self-fulfilment (Assmann 2003; Sato 2003; Skov and Moeran 1995).

Women in different age groups read different magazines, which allegedly reflects their transition from one life stage to the next. However, this tendency of women's magazines does not necessarily reflect an 'objective reality'. It can rather be explained against the background of the tendency of media and advertising people that developed in the hyper-consumptive bubble years to invent age and social categories for easier targeting of fairly discrete groups, whose members can be made to think of themselves in a certain way (Clammer 1997: 10-11).

The new type of women's magazines launched at the burst of the economic bubble in the mid-1990s illuminates well this same inclination of the media to create generational 'tribes', which, above all, are consuming tribes. As shown clearly by Ishizaki (2004), the magazine industry made a clever shift by demolishing the widely accepted and fixed image of the (everyday-)life information magazines aimed at housewives and replacing

them with new magazines shaped in the format of young women's fashion magazines to target housewives. The genre of young women's fashion magazines, termed 'new women's magazines', first appeared in the 1970s (Inoue and Josei Zasshi Kenkyūkai 1989; Sakamoto 1999). The then distinctly new format was characterized by a close relationship between advertising and editorial material, which meant glossy and colourful visual stimuli. Another major feature was the extensive use of titles printed in roman script that look like English but often have no meaning in English (Sakamoto 1999; Skov and Moeran 1995: 60). The clear distinction between young women's flashy magazines and the more practical housewives' magazines, maintained at least until the 1990s, was eliminated by these new, glossy fashion magazines for housewives of the late 1990s and the early 2000s.

Very, one of the most popular women's magazines launched in 1995, provides an excellent example of the process of image change reported by Ishizaki. From its first issue in 1995, *Very* addressed housewives using the format of *JJ*, a popular fashion magazine for young women. Unlike the disappearing practical housewives' magazines, *Very* offered its housewife readers the image of a 'maiden' (*shōjo*) and a fashionable housewife by using imaging and vocabulary previously closely identified solely with young, unmarried women, including 'cute' (*kawaii*) or 'sweet' (*amai*) clothes. *Very* also began applying the language of self-fulfilment through fashion and hobbies with regard to housewives.

By targeting housewives in a style previously aimed at unmarried women, *Very*, published by Kobunsha, the company that also publishes *JJ*, constructed its style and its popularity by creating an impression of growing up with its readers, who 'naturally' had married and had become housewives as they reached their thirties. This impression was intensified by using a model who had appeared on the covers of *JJ*: Kuroda Chieko made an 'admirable comeback' when she appeared on the first cover of *Very* in July 1995. Kuroda has become *Very*'s in-house 'poster model' and main figure, thereby establishing herself as a renowned charisma housewife.

This tendency to keep on forming new generational consuming tribes undoubtedly carried over to *Story*, a magazine for women in their forties, launched in 2002, also by Kobunsha. This magazine openly declared, in December 2002, the 'debut' of the 'Story generation' (*Story sedai*) of adult women, while clearly pointing at those generations of women who were 'raised' on the sequence of Kobunsha magazines: *JJ*, *Classy*, and *Very* (*JJ*, *Classy*, *Very de sodatta otona no josei 'Story sedai' debut!!*). The star of this debut was naturally none other than Kuroda Chieko, who herself had grown up with Kobunsha magazines and their readers.

The change of the housewife's image brought about by *Very* in the mid-1990s, and carried over to *Story* and later also *Hers* (for women in their fifties), had two interrelating faces. On the one hand, by ascribing youth, cuteness, fashion, and self-enjoyment to housewives, *Very* seemed to have done something atypical of women's magazines in blurring age and social-role differentiation. On the other hand, this shift may be regarded as the creation of yet another new tribe, the tribe of happy and fashionable housewives.

Different from the former housewives' magazines, new-style magazines like *Very* and *Story* encourage housewives to smarten up before collecting their husbands at the train station on a rainy day² and to dress fashionably when they go out to dine with them. The *Very* generation of women in their thirties is captured by pictorial 'storyboards', such as that of a stylish, young woman pushing a baby stroller while heading for lunch with her husband with the caption: 'Stepping up from the cool OL style to a graceful and refined "madam style"³; whereas the *Story* generation is even more entitled to 'thoroughly enjoy being a woman', as in the main theme of its August 2009 issue. Apparently, the means to enjoy this new kind of womanhood is directly related to consumption. The content of the August 2009 issue focused on 'dates' with husbands in luxurious locations, such as is clear from the caption 'Means to thoroughly enjoy being a woman: Ginza date with the husband'. Another 'romantic' spot was described as 'a date at the new Armani shop in Ginza' (p. 26). In another storyboard, the smiling woman has the pleasure of reminding her husband that this fancy jewellery shop is the same one where he had bought her a present 20 years ago, while teasing him by saying: 'Don't I look nice? As I'm an adult (*otona*) now, won't you buy me something with diamonds this time?' (p. 27) Needless to say, all the 'storyboards' are accompanied by full-page pictures of the women posing with a range of fashionable items, which of course carry the details of prices and where they can be purchased.

Women's magazines, especially *Very* and *Story*, seemed to be very popular with women in the Osaka neighbourhood I studied. Some of the most enthusiastic readers went as far as to take the promise offered in those magazines as something to cherish and follow. Kudō-san, who always made an extra effort to look fashionable and stylish, even though she was not working outside the house, carried with her in her purse the embodiment of her idea of a perfect and happy housewife as a scrap from an article that appeared in *Very* a few years earlier. Being nostalgic about her life as a stewardess before becoming a full-time housewife upon her marriage,

2 *Very* (December 2007), 'Sō da, papa o mukae ni ikō', p. 27.

3 *Ibid.*, 'Kūru na ōerukei kara suteppu appu sasete, madamufū no yūga na sutairingu', p. 30.

Kudō-san remembered well all the details of this magazine item, which as always carried the picture of the woman subject in a fashionable pose. She remembered how the woman told the readers about the weekly French lessons that she took because she regularly accompanied her successful husband on his business trips to France. However, according to Kudō-san, the main point of this magazine piece was a quote from this beautiful housewife, which Kudō-san had memorized: 'Some housewives say that they have no time to paint their nails, but what if you get up at 6:00 in the morning? Then you can definitely have some time to yourself.' Kudō-san concluded, 'I agree with her, and I cherish this scrap as she was so stunning (*suteki*), and moreover she looked so totally happy preparing good food for her husband.'

Japanese women's magazines make extensive use of 'reader models' (*dokusha moderu*; Marx 2007). These amateur models, like the stunning former airline stewardess who has become a perfect fashionable housewife, provide some material for fantasy, just like professional models. In both cases, what makes these married women admirable to ordinary housewives who read those magazines is that they give the impression of women who 'have not retired, [who] are still in active service', as articulated by Kudō-san with regard to this stunning housewife.

Ogura Chikako, one of the sternest critics of women's magazines, accuses them, and *Very* in particular, of creating an image of a woman who 'never retires [from being a woman] even when she gets married' (*kekkon shitetemo gen-eki*; Ogura 2003: 57). With this phrasing, Ogura definitely does not refer to women's working lives. On the contrary, she criticizes women who, despite the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEO, Danjo Koyō Kikai Kintō Hō) enacted in 1986 (see Lam 1992), still believe that they have the privilege of not working and continue to wear 'sociable (or fashionable) clothing' even after having a baby. Unlike the earlier models for housewives, 'new' and 'happy' housewives should not 'retire' from being a 'woman' (*onna*) even after stepping into their social roles as wives and mothers.

The new-type housewives as a post-bubble return to 'traditional' gender roles?

The emergence of the new magazines for women in their thirties and forties coincided with changes in women's attitudes, namely women's growing distaste for the all-too-familiar 'Mrs-ly', 'housewifely', and 'motherly' (*misesu-rashiku*, *shufu-rashiku*, *hahaoya-rashiku*) images (Ochiai 2000).

They also coincided with the government report on the ‘orientation to a new type of housewife’. The new orientation reported was expressed in role expectations among young women as epitomized in the expression: ‘A man [husband] works full-time and shares housework. A woman [wife] does housework and pursues hobbies (or hobby-based work).’⁴

In her 2003 book *Kekkon no jōken* (Preconditions for marriage), Ogura further elaborates on this ‘orientation to a new type of housewife’ (*shin sengyō shufu shikō*). Ogura, who interviewed single, urban women in their thirties and early forties, found that some women, and especially graduates of junior colleges or lower-ranked four-year universities, saw marriage as a means for continued self-actualization and pleasure, and not as a gateway to a life of constraint, as it was for their mothers. Ogura explains that those women – who grew up during the time of economic growth and observed the life led by their absent corporate-worker fathers and their hardworking mothers, who on top of their total dedication to their families’ welfare had to work as part-timers to supplement the family income – tend to reject this hardworking lifestyle and to seek a better way of living.

But what does the label ‘new-type housewife’ conceal behind the new magazines’ glossy covers and the fashionable images of middle-aged women? A very recent governmental ‘White Paper on Gender Equality’ (Cabinet Office 2014: 19) reports that ‘increasing numbers of single women find economic advantage in marriage’. Moreover, according to the same report, female college graduates born after 1963 have more traditional attitudes towards gender roles than their predecessors (2014: 20). Interestingly, an editor of a leading magazine for young women articulated the same concern with regard to the younger generation. In 2004, Harada, chief editor of *Frau*, who had been with the magazine for over two decades, made a revealing observation when comparing the women of the early 1990s, when the magazine was launched, and the women of the 2000s. Harada described the single, working women of the early 1990s as independent and stylish women who were intellectually ambitious and knew how to spend their own money. Unlike them, Harada suggested, the young women at the beginning of the twenty-first century attached too much importance to men and to the male point of view and were in general much more conservative (*konsaba*; see Shirakawa 2004).

This tendency of young women to hold more conservative views about gender role divisions and, more particularly, what appears to be the recent

4 ‘Heisei 10 ban – kōsei hakusho’, http://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei_hakusho/hakusho/kousei/1998/dl/03.pdf, accessed 9 February 2017.

inclination of single women to aspire to marry into a somewhat remodelled, but still male-breadwinner model of family life, coincides in a seemingly paradoxical manner with conflicting tendencies of especially highly educated women to postpone marriage (Nemoto 2008). So, how can this be explained?

I suggest that, at least partially, it can be understood against the background of what Jennifer Robertson (2010) has succinctly defined as a 'reactionary rhetorical climate'. This same 'climate' was recently described well by Yamaguchi Tomomi (2014a), who shows how the term 'gender free', which was initially coined by Japanese feminists to refer to freedom from imposed gender roles, has become the target of an intense wave of criticism by conservative forces. The term 'gender free' has become a buzzword and quickly spread to government projects and programmes, including the 'Vision for Gender Equality' (Osawa 2005: 162). However, at the same time it initiated a backlash against feminism and against the new ideas they tried to promote with regard to gender equality.

Yamaguchi (2014a: 559-60) suggests that the worst part of the 'gender free' discourse for conservatives is the attempt to impose such values on housewives, (heterosexual) marriage, and traditional families. Indeed, one of the sternest critics of feminism and its new ideas about gender roles and gender equality is Hayashi Michiyoshi, a leading social critic, who started a furious nationalistic campaign to restore the Japanese family. Following the success of his 1996 book *Fusei no fukken* (Restoration of fatherhood), Hayashi, who is also a practising counsellor, continued to promote his nationalistic aim of reconstructing the Japanese household or family system (*ie*) by setting out to restore the value of the 'housewife'. His 1998 book *Shufu no fukken* (Restoration of the housewife) attempts the 'rehabilitation of maternity' and, more generally, the 'restoration of the family and the household'. Hayashi's ideas about the family as 'the smallest unit of society, or the cell, the basis [...] [which] therefore must not be broken apart' strongly resonate with pre-war ideas that focused on the 'good wife, wise mother' as the cornerstone of the family.

Hayashi's book is a moral manifesto calling to restore 'traditional' values (see Tanaka and Suzuki 1999). 'We must reverse the psychology influenced by feminist thought that has spread in the air, ideas that encouraged women to leave the home and go out into society, to work or to get involved in various groups or activities,' Hayashi asserts. He continues:

There is too much to be done at home. The most important thing for a woman is to protect the home (*ie o mamoru*), to create in the home a safe place where children can be raised wholesomely, and where the family can relax.

Aware that the model of ‘men as breadwinners, women as housewives’ has actually not changed greatly, Hayashi does not see the ‘evil’ in career women, whom he hardly mentions, but in the women he dubs ‘ugly housewives’ (*mi-nikui shufu*). These are housewives who betray their role at home and become the malicious opposite of the ideal, ‘beautiful housewife’ (*utsukushii shufu*).

One of the worst evils of ‘ugly housewives’, according to Hayashi, is ‘being obsessed with maintaining a youthful appearance’. He despises housewives who ‘put on heavy makeup, wear bright red clothing, keep themselves skinny, dye their hair, all in order to look young’. Hayashi’s message for housewives seems to be the opposite from the one that has been promoted by influential women’s magazines and other media and market venues since the 1990s, which aimed at blurring the distinctions between youth, beauty, and housewives’ appearances, as shown above. Furthermore, according to this reactionary view, a housewife who devotes too much effort to cultivating her outward attractiveness does not merely lack a good sense of what constitutes proper conduct, her shocking wrongdoing is alas closely related to a dangerous lack of Japanese spirit. The strength and beauty of this spirit should derive from inner beauty (*utsukushisa*), which is inherently in conflict with outer appearance.

The reactionary and nationalistic tone here is very clear, especially when associated with similar aspirations to this same kind of unique, Japanese ‘beauty’. In his 2006 bestseller *Utsukushii kuni e* (Towards a beautiful nation), then prime minister Abe Shinzō rephrases ‘beautiful nation’ into ‘a Japan that we can be confident and proud of’ (see Tsujita 2009: 196). Abe, who was once a powerful voice of the backlash (Yamaguchi 2014a: 571), was re-elected to the position of prime minister in 2012 and has since declared his aim to promote *womenomics* and ‘a society in which women shine’.⁵ Nevertheless, as suggested by Yamaguchi as well as by others, there is much evidence that Abe’s current gender policies are motivated by other concerns, such as the low fertility rate, rather than by a genuine support for gender equality or an actual discouragement of traditional gender roles.⁶

To summarize, post-bubble Japan seems to have produced an ultraconservative reactionary climate, which has born fruits in the form of a variety of schemes, including market-oriented ventures and media buzzes that

5 ‘Address by Prime Minister Abe Shinzo at the 68th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations’, 26 September 2013, http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/statement/201309/26generaldebate_e.html, accessed 14 August 2015.

6 Yamaguchi 2014a, 2014b; ‘Abe seiken no “josei no katsuyaku” seisaku ni hanron zokushutsu’, *Nikkei Business Online*, 13 June 2013, www.nikkeibp.co.jp/article/matome/20130612/354019/?ST=business&P=1, accessed 14 August 2015.

encourage and reproduce 'traditional' gender roles. These traditional roles may be masked by fresh and colourful attire, as we can see in the example of new women's magazines like *Very* and *Story*. The 'new housewife' portrayed in the pictorial pages of such new magazines seems far removed from the 'typical young housewife, clad in slip-on sandals and the loose, cotton shift called "home wear"', as described, for example, by Kondo (1990: 17) only a decade ago. However, as I will show in what follows, the designer aprons 'with a twist' bestowed on the women of the first decade of the twenty-first century to replace the cotton, full-body aprons dedicated housewives used to wear, should be viewed with a dose of scepticism, as, arguably, they simply reproduce the 'traditional' role of the Japanese wife and mother while packaging it in a new and attractive chic style.

Female domesticity is fun: Marketing the joy of housewifery

Kurihara Harumi, largely considered as Japan's Martha Stewart, is undoubtedly the most renowned of Japan's 'charisma housewives', a rather recent media invention of female idols who are leading figures of the housekeeping world. Whereas the early versions of the 'charisma housewives' in the late 1990s and early 2000s were mainly ordinary housewives who may have had a special, unique wisdom or talent, since the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century images of such individuals have become much more intensively produced by the market, and especially the commercial media (Mori 2004; Goldstein-Gidoni 2012: 151-4). As is often the case with commodification processes, the 'product' itself constantly changes and acquires new faces. The old, ordinary images have largely been replaced by images of elegance and style. Arimoto Yōko, an expert in Italian cooking, and Fujino Makiko, a dessert queen, are revealing, prominent examples of this kind of new aura of elegance and international sense. Both learned their trade abroad, where they had lived when their husbands were sent overseas to take up high-level bureaucratic and political positions in the service of the state. Fujino became not only a media star, but also a member of the Japanese parliament; nevertheless, like Kurihara and fellow charisma housewives, she never neglects to assert that 'to me, being a charismatic housewife is about doing what you can to bring joy to your family and being a figure of stability and warmth' (Chambers 2007: 167).

More than 24 million copies of Kurihara's cooking and lifestyle books and magazines have been sold worldwide, and more than 60 shops and cafés in Japan sell her homeware, cookware, and clothing ranges. Nevertheless,

despite her immense success, Kurihara insists that she is 'only a simple housewife' (Goldstein-Gidoni 2012: 147-51; Newcomb 1997) who made a re-debut into society after dedicating the requisite years to child-raising and the home. The image of a 'simple housewife' well suits the 'life story' of the great charisma housewife, as told by her and of her. Born in 1947 to a traditional-style family, in fact, Kurihara never had the experience of working in 'society', as she put it in our conversation. She went to a junior college 'with no clear aim' and then, as a typical daughter-in-a-box (*hakoiri musume*) (Cherry 1987: 41-2), returned home to help her parents in their family business (Kurihara 2005). Kurihara married young to a man much older than her, a busy and successful anchorman of one of the leading TV channels. She recalls being happy preparing his bath (*ofuro*) and meal and waiting for his return every night. Yet, he was the one who grew tired of her pointless waiting and urged her to take advantage of her cooking talents outside the house.

'Female domesticity is fun' is one of the main messages Kurihara delivers to the women of the twenty-first century. *Mō hitotsu no okurimono: Ie no naka ni mo tanoshii koto ippai* (One more gift: In the house, too, there are plenty of fun things [to do]) is the title of one of Kurihara's successful books, or one of the 'gifts' she has bestowed upon Japanese women (Kurihara 1999). Like her numerous other books, this one is a blend of allegedly intimate accounts of scenes from her own private domestic family life, such as a quasi-poetic description of her family's house cats (title: 'Just being with them makes us happy, our house cats') and tips about household management and the like, all interwoven with Kurihara's ideologies, or truths, about the joy of female domesticity. Kurihara is keen to deliver this message at any opportunity. The joy of polishing the living-room windows while feeling the 'warmth of the sunshine filling the room' (Kurihara 1999: 34) is one of her favourite, vivid illustrations for this joy:

I have always done my housekeeping job fully, polishing each and every window, but we shouldn't perform such duties feeling it is an obligation. When you have your window polished, you can enjoy the sunlight, or even on rainy days, you feel like looking outside through a well-polished window. [On the contrary,] if you leave the window dirty, you never feel like looking outside. I believe that if you live that way [neglecting cleaning], you cannot fully enjoy your life. You are wasting your life.⁷

7 Kurihara Harumi, interview, November 2007.

The message of domestic pleasure seems to be more catchy (and, in fact, usually also cheaper to achieve) than the happiness that lies in shopping for elegance offered by women's magazines, as described above. Allegedly, there is no need to take the extra step 'back into society' after years spent at home dedicated to child-rearing. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily imply that Kurihara is falling behind on the trends that produce and promote the new, happy (and happily consuming) housewife.

Tradition in fashionable wear: Designer aprons as symbols of the new femininity

'Please have this apron that I designed as a present. I hope you enjoy it. I like creating things that make women smile,' Kurihara tells me during our long conversation. Admitting that the life of a housewife has a tendency to become 'boring and full of routine', she goes on to say how she has always tried carefully to design products that will make the life of housewives enjoyable and meaningful. Aprons are regarded as one of the leading designer wares in her product line. A full section is dedicated to aprons in her shops, just as it is on her official website, which uses a quote from the priestess herself to explain the significance of aprons:

[Kurihara] Harumi says 'When I tighten an apron, I feel that I am ready to work. I would like to enjoy cooking and housework, dressed fashionably. A nice apron does something to create an opportunity to enjoy daily life.'⁸

She has designed hundreds of patterns. Each has some kind of 'silly' twist, Kurihara says in our lengthy conversation. The one she gave me, for example, can be turned into a bag; others are easily transformed into tablecloths, or have mittens, and so on. Kurihara easily assumes the role of a mentor:

I know these are all unnecessary things. But once [*shufu*] try [them], it can be fun. I recommend this way of living. To live your life, you must take at least one step forward, no matter in what way. Whether you set the prepared meal nicely or not may change your life. As you only live once you should always challenge things. If you do nothing, nothing will change. This is the message I want to deliver.

8 'Products', *Yutori no kukan* (Kurihara Harumi Official Site), n.d., <http://www.yutori.co.jp/en/products/index.html>, accessed 29 March 2015.

The new housewife, as portrayed and promoted by Kurihara, and by most other comparable media and market idols, is expected to create this uniquely Japanese type of harmony (*wa*) not merely through hard work and sacrifice, like the housewives of the post-war generation, but also by her 'fashionable spirit'. As Kurihara tells the readers of her most popular books and her successful magazine, she has realized the beauty and significance of greeting her husband with a 'good morning' as her fashionable self and not as she looks when she wakes up. Even when she stays home all day she has made it a rule to put on some light lipstick and her favourite earrings soon after she awakes, before donning her (designer) apron. These are neither petty matters in her life, nor should these habits be taken merely as a kind of outward way of impression management. This vital 'fashionable spirit', Kurihara asserts, is, in fact, the genuine expression of the female's care for her family and the heart of the value she attaches to its well-being.

Through her commercial empire of feminine domesticity, Kurihara Harumi sells both material and non-material products, beautifully adorned in the latest fashionable attire, but which produce, or rather reproduce, old patriarchal family values and conservative divisions of gender roles. Using the power of 'traditional Japanese' values, Kurihara's unique promise of the joy of domesticity seems to carry with it deeper meanings; it involves the bigger promise of 'Japanese-style' harmony (*wa*), which is actually not very remote from the idea of Japanese beauty (*utsukushisa*) of spirit that a housewife should have in order to maintain the traditional family unit as carried by male reactionaries:

The expression *senjyō shufu* might give foreigners the impression that we [Japanese women] are bound by our obligations, but I believe it is in fact the opposite. The housewife holds the power to make the family stick together. Some housewives may complain that they are working so hard with no one really appreciating their great contribution. However, I keep on working hard, believing that one day they [my husband and children] will understand the value of my existence. I believe that it is the mother, and not the father, who actually creates the family's peace and harmony (*wa*).⁹

By linking outward appearance to inner beauty (*utsukushisa*), which allegedly allows the housewife to create the uniquely Japanese harmony (*wa*) in her own family, Kurihara (or her marketing advisers) has made

9 Kurihara Harumi, interview, November 2007.

an astute commercial move. Their strategy, I believe, is very shrewd, as it appears to run counter to the familiar conservative criticism like that of Hayashi Michiyoshi mentioned earlier. Hayashi despises any attempt by new Japanese housewives to present a pleasant and young appearance, or to enjoy their lives, and regards this kind of attractiveness as wholly opposed to inner beauty, which in his view is purely Japanese. On the other hand, Kurihara and the like keep Japanese women safe within the domestic sphere while letting them feel that they are part of society by consuming fashion and by giving them 'permission' to enjoy life, or take full advantage of domesticity, which is no longer described only in terms of perseverance and hardship.

Female beauty and domesticity as a new kind of national spirit

I opened this chapter by relating to a novel kind of nationalism following the March 2011 triple disaster that devastated Japan and the world. As suggested, my perspective on this kind of nationalist spirit, which has gained the term 'disaster nationalism' (Hornung 2011), is focused on the involvement of the agencies of femininity and domesticity – which I propose relating to as State agencies in terms of this nationalist spirit. The examples are plausible, but before focusing on the way the great 'charisma housewife' has entered into this spirit, it may be worthwhile looking briefly at other campaigns. For example, *Bi-Story*, a new beauty (*bi*) version of the *Story* magazine, sent its beauty and fashion staff to the temporary residents of evacuation shelters in the Tōhoku region on 20 April to give hair, facial, and body treatments, 'believing that fashion and beauty can give power (*chikara*) and vitality (*genki*)'. The magazine featured a piece with photographs from the spot, including pictures of the cosmetic products that the staff distributed to the survivors at the shelters, which obviously carried the trade names of the contributing companies.¹⁰

Kurihara, or her army of shrewd marketing advisers, was not slow to join the trend, with the aim of setting the tone for the feminine nationalist spirit that puts the wife and mother at the centre of the process of recovery. In the June issue of her successful *haru_mi* magazine, Kurihara (2011b: 9) gave her readers a personal, handwritten message expressing her deep sorrow and sympathy for the victims who had suffered from the huge earthquake and tsunami. In the same issue, she also offered a few easy recipes. In some of

10 'Fasshon ya byūti ga chikara ni naru to shinjite', *Bi Story* (July 2011), pp. 25-6.

the recipes, she makes a point of using dried food specialties of the Tōhoku region. The others are mainly suggestions for ways to use ingredients that are easy to get, even in difficult times and against the background of an energy-saving environment.

The national Japanese spirit in this special issue of *haru_mi* magazine is hard to ignore, as Kurihara uses this historic turning point in the life of her nation to rethink her own perspective. In the 'From my kitchen, with love' (*Kitchin kara kokoro o komete*) section, Kurihara writes a kind of memo containing her personal thoughts: she relates how she, who had always had a strong yearning for the West and for Western styles, only started to get the sense that 'Japan is great, Japanese people are wonderful' once she had begun working with other countries. It was not merely the greatness of traditional Japanese food that Kurihara rediscovered through her encounter with the West; it was also the Japanese mentality. Now, this unique, great virtue of the Japanese people was discovered by the whole world as people overseas watched the Japanese people's reaction to the disaster; this made Kurihara feel proud: '[T]hree months have passed since the day. I feel proud being Japanese.'

Conclusion

In this chapter I aimed to show the involvement of the market in producing new platforms for consumption for women in post-bubble Japan. I argued that while it may seem paradoxical, it was, in fact, the burst of the economic bubble in the 1990s that caused the market to intensify its grip on Japanese women of all ages, as it gradually blurred the distinction between the hedonistic *Hanako* girls and the reserved and hardworking wives and mothers. This should firstly be understood against the background of the general comprehension that consumption still plays a pivotal position within Japanese society. Furthermore, compared with earlier periods in post-war Japan, when domesticity for women was so pervasive that other lifestyles were regarded as non-normative, it has become necessary to compete with alternative, sometimes even more attractive role models for women. One of the apparently productive ways for succeeding in this competition between a growing variety of role models is to borrow ideas and vocabularies from alternative lifestyles. The *karisuma shufu*, the classy and elegant housewife, now aggressively promoted by the consumer market and the media as an attractive role model for women, is a very good example of this process.

I suggested that the market and the media, which were the focus of this chapter, should be regarded as agents of the larger State. Certainly, they are not formally recruited by the official government of the state. Nevertheless, it is hard to ignore the role they play in reasserting and, in fact, reproducing the status quo. I hope I have successfully demonstrated here that designer aprons and flashy fashionable shopping dates with husbands for housewives should not be mistaken for a profound change in gender roles. Instead, they may provide further evidence that the Japanese State, encompassing the business sector, and the market still have a vested interest in keeping middle-class women at home.

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The Metamorphosis of Excess

'Rubbish Houses' and the Imagined Trajectory of Things in Post-Bubble Japan

Fabio Gygi

Cwiertka, Katarzyna J. & Ewa Machotka (eds), *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan: A Transdisciplinary Perspective*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018

DOI: 10.5117/9789462980631/CH06

Abstract

This chapter looks at the ways in which the 'rubbish house' (*gomi yashiki*) emerged in Japan as a socially recognized phenomenon in the years after the collapse of the bubble economy. Rather than understanding it as a local variation of hoarding, the aim is to locate the *gomi yashiki* as a phenomenon related to consumption at the intersection of two distinct regimes of value: the bubble years of overconsumption in the 1980s and the years of economic stagnation in the 1990s. The rubbish house can be conceptualized as a place of stagnation, from where things can always return. Uncomfortably straddling the gap between discourses on wastefulness (*mottainai*) and self-enhancing consumerism, it becomes a manifestation of the ambiguity of value itself.

Keywords: 'rubbish houses' (*gomi yashiki*), hoarding, circulation of goods, consumption, rubbish disposal, recycling

Introduction

What happens to things that are consumed? 'To consume' is derived from the Latin *consumere*, meaning 'altogether' (*con-*) 'taking up' (*sumere*). In Japanese, the word *shōhi* is created by combining the Chinese character for 'cancelling, erasing' (*kesu*) with the character for 'to spend/squander' (*tsuiyasu*). In other words, consumption is a disappearing act – except that it is not. The ideal object of consumption is that which uses itself up in the process of being consumed. Food and drink are close to this ideal of disappearing by being transformed into something else (sustenance,

energy, merriment), but even they come in packages that remain behind, an accursed share. The problem is exacerbated when considering so-called consumer durables. These are also consumed, but this process extends far beyond the human lifespan and, more importantly, far beyond the cultural and social utility of a commodity. Their time is out of joint with the faster-moving development of new and improved goods. The challenge every consumer society faces, then, is to render absent that which has been consumed but remains as material excess.

This essay examines what happens when excess refuses to disappear, when the imaginary trajectory of things that leads from production to consumption to waste is interrupted and redirected. More specifically, it looks at a phenomenon called *gomi yashiki* (rubbish houses), whose prominence in the Japanese mass media overlaps in significant ways with the onset of what is now referred to as the 'post-bubble' period. It is my contention that the trope of the rubbish house crystallizes anxieties about consumption, ownership, and the value of things at a point in time where value itself has become unstable.

The notion that things acquire meaning and value not just from the way they are produced, but also from the way they are exchanged and consumed, is one of anthropology's key contributions to the study of material culture (Mauss 1990 [1925]). In a critique of Marx's notion of the commodity, Appadurai (1986) points out that being a commodity is something that happens to a thing (rather than being an essential property of it, as Marx has it when defining commodities as 'congealed labour'). Objects are in motion, they move along trajectories and can be alienated as commodities or appropriated as personal possessions as they mediate social relationships through a range of networks. It is more difficult, however, to understand waste and refuse in these terms. If commodities are said to have social lives, can we also say that they die, or is this taking the evocative metaphor of biography (Kopytoff 1986) too far? Is 'being rubbish' just another reversible state or condition a thing can find itself in, and is the movement of a commodity therefore 'reversible and nonlinear, without beginning or end [...] as the metaphor of a circuit implies' (R. Foster 2006: 289)? Or do we need to conceive of a non-reversible process of transformation by destruction, a one-way trajectory so to speak? Kopytoff's example of the hut of the Suku of Zaire seems to suggest that dissolution is a kind of death (1986: 67), while recent geographical scholarship emphasizes waste as a commodity in ongoing processes of recycling and transformation (Moore 2012; Herod et al. 2013). Either way, the trajectory of things is both an empirical fact – in that material objects move in time and space – and a product of the imagination through which things are made meaningful in different cultural contexts (Appadurai 1990).

The empirical and the imaginary do not always fit together seamlessly. I shall argue that what renders objects dynamic, transformative, and sometimes unpredictable, is the fact that meaning and matter – usually thought of as two aspects of the same entity – can be out of joint, creating friction and agency that goes beyond the model of discrete stages. This is not only a question of materiality (Gregson and Crang 2010) but also one of temporality, for different dimensions of meanings may survive radical material transformations and vice versa: materiality can outlive meaning and utility. In other words, the imagined and the empirical trajectory of things can contradict and destabilize our notion of thinghood and render objects uncanny.

The trope of the *gomi yashiki* brings the material and the imaginary into uncomfortable proximity; it connects what is normally thought of as separate categories: possessions, waste, individuals, institutions, and the promise and nightmare of consumption. It uneasily straddles the pursuit of the new in the late 1980s with the emerging concern with recycling and reuse in the early 1990s. It becomes a salient metaphor, precisely at the moment when we ask: ‘Where do things go?’ This essay aims to trace these connections, from the emergence of the *gomi yashiki* as a media phenomenon to the shifts in consumption and understandings of value that it embodies to the ways it is represented in literature.

Attack of the rubbish aunt!

On 11 November 1993, the women’s weekly *Josei Seibun* published an unsigned article called ‘The woman who takes home other people’s rubbish: She strikes again this morning!’ The three-page article had a second headline reading: ‘A crisis that puts pressure on the Owada family!?’ The Owadas referred to in the article are the parents of crown princess Masako, who is married to the successor to the Chrysanthemum throne, crown prince Naruhito. The article starts as follows:

Morning at the corner of a high-class residential area in the A ward of Tokyo. Salarymen, Office Ladies and students hurry to the closest private railway station. Amongst them are also those who carry plastic bags to the rubbish collection site along the street. Picking their way through these people are of course the housewives who come out briskly to throw away their rubbish. This familiar morning view one can see everywhere is contradicted by one elderly woman. Wearing a green cardigan, a grey skirt and white sneakers in

the style of an 'active auntie', she appears at this street corner too this morning. This older lady, upon arriving at the rubbish collection site, opens the thrown-away rubbish bags and peers inside. Then she takes something out and puts it into another rubbish bag. This she does for approximately 10 minutes. As soon as she grabs the two rubbish bags that seem to contain what she has chosen, she carries them home with surprising speed [italics in original].¹

As this is the first report that frames a concern with the accumulation of domestic refuse, which subsequently served as a template for many others, it bears examining more closely. The article starts out with an evocation of the quotidian that defines urban and suburban landscapes in Japan: streams of people and things moving at a prescribed time on prescribed trajectories in the same direction. Subverting this flow is the figure of the elderly woman who reverses and redirects the current of certain things towards her house. This contrast is further developed by the description of her decrepit, old house, overflowing with rubbish, that stands amidst the middle- and upper-class residential mansions, dramatically building up to the vicinity of members of the imperial family. The relatives of the imperial family are mentioned to add a scandalous dimension to the woman's actions and to situate the article more comfortably in a magazine whose main staple is celebrity gossip, fashion, and scandal. But it is not only the proximity of these two worlds that is threatening. The article goes on to describe a very concrete fear: that the woman would extend her range of scavenging and eventually reach the rubbish of the Owada house. Although this is not elaborated on further, the sense of unease is palpable. As in many examples of sympathetic witchcraft in anthropological literature, there is something deeply disturbing about such a material connection between two different social worlds, a connection, furthermore, through which the lower world could create a direct association with, and thus some kind of control over, the higher world, against its will. What is ambiguous here is the ownership of discarded things and to what degree they still belong to persons, or persons to them. In short: how material objects mediate knowledge and relationships of, to, and with persons.

Inspired by the article in *Josei Seibun*, the underground manga artist Nemoto Takashi (1994) wrote an article titled 'Gomi no daibutsu no maki' (Rubbish Buddha) for his idiosyncratic column 'Nemoto Takashi no jinsei kaidoku hatoba' (Nemoto Takashi's life detox wharf) in the magazine *Takarajima*. He starts with the same premise – the vicinity of the Owada

1 'Tanin no gomi-mochikaeri-obasan kesa mo shutsudō', *Josei Seibun*, 11 November 1993, p. 5. All translations from Japanese in this chapter have been carried out by the author.

family home – and the column follows a similar pattern: first a description of what is visible, then a recounting of interviews with some neighbours, and finally the life story of the woman who is friendlier to him and his colleague (who works as a carer for the elderly) than to the press reporters and television people who apparently pestered her for interviews in September 1993. Their broadcast allegedly led to an increase of stuff because people from other places would come to dump their own rubbish secretly at night. The article was decorated with drawings in Nemoto's brutalist style. On the whole, it was sympathetic to the woman portrayed.

Whereas these early reports used a vocabulary playing either on military metaphors (*yōsai*, 'rubbish fortress', or *shiro*, 'rubbish castle'), or, more ironically, on luxury (*goten*, 'rubbish palace'), the notion of the rubbish house became the standard form of reference around 2000. The notion of fortress or castle was usually invoked when describing the forbidding exterior of the houses, where only a small path leads to the entrance buttressed with towers of rubbish. Windows through which one could only dimly make out a wall of things on the inside reinforced the impression of impenetrability associated with military installations. The other popular term, 'rubbish palace', plays on the fact that most of these houses were freestanding buildings on privately owned ground, often with a sizeable garden. This in itself denotes privilege and luxury, which in this case is counter-caricatured by the abundance of rubbish in evidence.

These articles started a small boom in the reporting of similar phenomena, the pinnacle of which was reached in 1999/2000. Television coverage followed a similar pattern: once established as a phenomenon by the name of *gomi yashiki*, reports on *gomi yashiki* became part of the popular wideshow, an infotainment news genre that contains the less 'heavy' miscellanea. Such reports occurred several times a week during my first fieldwork period in 2006 and 2007. Added to the wideshow were formats closer to reality TV, where *geinōjin*, Japanese celebrities, would help clean up a rubbish house and interact with its inhabitants. Significantly, the standardization of use of the term 'gomi yashiki' also replaced the original link to a person (*gomi obasan*, 'rubbish aunt'), with a topos, a house full of rubbish.

The origin of the *gomi yashiki* in the yellow press and on 'human interest' television programmes has furthermore given the word an informal slant, and during my fieldwork there was no official denomination, either in the world of social services or in the language of the local authorities. Officials working for or with the local authorities were careful to distance themselves from the word 'gomi yashiki' and often referred to it indirectly using formulations such as 'what is known in the mass media as *gomi yashiki*'.

Gomi yashiki as the uncanny

The term 'gomi yashiki' also alludes to another, related semantic field: its closeness to the *obake yashiki*, the haunted house, is certainly not coincidental, as many neighbours I interviewed described gomi yashiki as *fushigi* (strange, otherworldly) or *bukimi* (uncanny). Sometimes, it is even implied that the cause of the accumulation of rubbish is supernatural. The neighbour interviewed in Nemoto's column mentioned above alludes to the possibility that the person living in the gomi yashiki is possessed; several informants living nearby cases of gomi yashiki during my fieldwork mentioned that maybe the inhabitants had turned into *yōkai* (spectres). Another article in the weekly *Shūkan Taishū* calls the inhabitants *kijinhenshin*, which, while not directly supernatural, translates as 'strange eccentrics'.²

The use of the term *fushigi* denotes something that is 'inexplicable, incredible, magical, miraculous' (Figal 1999: 223), something 'which cannot be grasped by thought' (M.D. Foster 2008: 17). It is widely used with reference to ghostly appearances, but broader than 'the supernatural'. Although Foster's work deals specifically with Japanese monster culture, his understanding of the *fushigi* applies equally well to the description of the gomi yashiki:

The transcendence of the everyday is critical here: rather than the supernatural, perhaps a more appropriate, though awkward, coinage would be supernormal. Whether manifest as an unexplainable experience or the appearance of a monster, a breach occurs in the predictable everyday fabric of life: something happens that is beyond normal – and therefore worth remarking upon (M.D. Foster 2008: 16).

This is precisely the rhetorical structure of most of the articles about gomi yashiki. In the midst of quotidian familiarity (everyday morning rubbish disposal) something that is deeply disturbing disrupts the taken-for-granted tranquility: this is, of course, Freud's definition of the uncanny, one of the possible ways to translate the term *fushigi*. In Freudian terms (2003 [1919]: 150), the experience of the uncanny is triggered by one of two things: either a blurring of the lines between reality and fantasy (although it would make more sense to say the blurring of lines between two different realities, as the blurring makes it difficult to tell which is real and which is fantasy); or through the return of that which has been repressed. Even if we do not accept all the premises of psychoanalysis, I argue that Freud's argument

2 'Gomi yashiki no shujin dono', *Shūkan Taishū*, 6 September 2000, pp. 45-6.

can be transposed from the psychic to the material: it is the matter that has been made absent through disposal that returns in its material excess. If the disposal of waste can be equated with the psychic act of forgetting/repressing, then the *gomi yashiki* is uncanny, because in it, the objects and things that are so familiar that they are no longer noticed return as strange and disturbing reminders. The blurring of the clear lines between realities and categories of things (such as personal possession/waste) appears as uncanny here because it implies reversibility: things that have become rubbish can return, suggesting a crossing of the boundary between life and death (even if it is 'only' things). The trope of the *gomi yashiki* is also uncanny because the otherworldly erupts in the home, the most familiar place usually associated with safety and shelter.

The *gomi yashiki* thus puts the spectator in a schizoid position: just as we note the familiarity of the objects that make up the accumulation, we conceive of the accumulation as somehow monstrous, and this contradiction is extended to whoever inhabits the *gomi yashiki*. The elderly woman who is interviewed by Nemoto keeps on eating food leftovers directly from the rubbish bags (which makes the journalist question her sanity in spite of her otherwise lucid answers). In Taguchi's short story 'Jamira', the possibly monstrous nature of the inhabitant is invoked by likening the *gomi yashiki* to a 'nest of aliens' (2004, discussed below), referring to Ridley Scott's film franchise of the same name. Entering a *gomi yashiki* is like entering a parallel world that has been created from the debris of the familiar, but is teeming with 'alien' life: cockroaches, rats, flies, and other insects. Similarly, the 'master' (*aruji*) of this other reality is someone deeply familiar (*obachan*) and yet someone who has changed (*bakeru* – to change means turning into something ghostly) into something quite different. In the distorting mirror of the *gomi yashiki*, the consumer and owner of things appears as monstrous. Or, as John Scanlan puts it in his book *On Garbage*, 'ultimately we are our leftovers [...], garbage – far from being spent or used-up – presents an alternative version of "reality"' (Scanlan 2005: 142-3).

This alternative reality uncomfortably straddles the critical discourse on the throw-away society of the late 1980s and the early rhetoric of recycling of the early 1990s. Can the *gomi yashiki* be interpreted as resistance against the rampant materialism (*butsuyoku*) of society? Is it best understood as an attempt to recycle (something that those I interviewed often mentioned they want to do)? Or is it part of the nascent environmental movement that later formed around the notion of *mottainai* ('What a waste', a phrase that my informants frequently used to keep me from throwing away their things)? It is interesting to note that almost all of the articles end with a

question, leaving the readers to make up their own minds. I am proposing that, in order to understand the salience of the *gomi yashiki*, we need to look at the transition from the last years of the bubble economy to the onset of the 'lost decade'. The remainder of this chapter discusses this shift in relation to three fields: consumption and time, recycling and waste disposal, and the more broader question of value.

Consuming the bubble

If he had gone and cheated on me, that would not be an especially big deal. But when I heard about the girl I ended up furious. 'She was amazing. In a suede skirt. The blouse was from Roberta, right?' Note: *In a suede skirt. The blouse was from Roberta, right?* From the description of her attire you can guess that she is a sensual girl (Tanaka 1980: 184).

The heyday of the bubble economy, from 1984 to 1989, is univocally represented and remembered as a period of exuberant consumption and decadence, when fashionable urbanites ate sushi topped with real gold foil (Miura 2014: 114); consumers consistently chose the more expensive version of a functionally equivalent product (Tobin 1992: 21); and it was not unusual for a middle-class couple to change their entire furniture every second year (Clammer 1997: 80). While the economic realities for a large part of the population were very different from this image of excess, the conspicuous consumption of the 1980s was the result of a shift of patterns from family-centred consumption to the indulgence of more personal desires that started to emerge after the oil shock of 1973. In the period of high growth after the war, companies could cater to the population as a whole and marketing was focused on the idea that consumption was a means of achieving happiness. One's own career and status were mirrored in being able to afford the 'one rank up' product (which assumes a fairly fixed value hierarchy both in terms of people and things). The baby boomer generation in Japan was the driving force behind mass consumption, and the standardization of the life course that Emiko Ochiai (1997) calls the 1955 system was also responsible for the notion of the homogeneous consumer with clear-cut desires and wants. The change that occurred in the 1970s is both historic and demographic: the oil crisis revealed the unsustainable and vacuous nature of high-growth ideology, while at the same time the offspring of the baby boomers, sometimes called the *shinjinrui* (new breed), were more interested in consumption as a means of self-expression (Havens 1994: 151-7). Tanaka Yasuo's catalogue

novel *Nan to naku kurisutaru* (Somehow crystal) – serialized in 1979 and published in 1980 – represented a new sensibility towards differentiation: the somewhat thin plot of the novel is supported by a massive apparatus of annotations on all the brand name goods that appear in the main text, with sometimes ironic comments as to their relative ranking. While the novel can be read as wry commentary on how it is impossible to express oneself with one's possessions (that others could always also acquire), the marketing gurus of the 1980s jumped on to the idea of 'differentiation'. Fujioka Wakao (1987) proclaimed the end of the mass in *Sayonara, taishū*, while Seibu marketing master Itoi Shigesato coined the now famous slogan '*Hoshii mono ga, hoshii wa*' ('I want something to want', the particle 'wa' at the end marking it as female speech). Miura, himself a sociology student-turned-marketing expert, calls this the 'age of amorphous desire' (2014: 101).

The advance of consumerism in Japan created its own ideology and its own attendant critique, much of it heavily influenced by French postmodern thinkers³ like Jean Baudrillard and sociologists like Bourdieu.⁴ Bourdieu's observations on consumption practices and distinction in France did not come as a surprise to the marketing experts who formed most of the audience of these writings. Many marketing experts came from the discipline of sociology and there is a large, grey zone between academic writing on consumer society and the prediction of social trends with catchy phrases and neologisms ('new breed', 'micro masses', and 'searching for the self' [*jibun sagashi*] all emerge from this murky twilight). Some of these are then turned into analytical terms by sociologists, sometimes without realizing their origin as marketing speech (everyone who claims there is a 'boom' happening in Japan is very likely to be unwittingly jumping on a marketing bandwagon). Baudrillard's darker pronouncements on overconsumption⁵

3 It is important not to overemphasize culture in the explanation of these complex historical developments: 'Hyper-consumption in contemporary Japanese cities is not a product of "post-modernism" so much as the logical outcome of thirty years of policies which have put economics (the economics of the individual as well as the economics of the nation) first and have promoted a pervasive depoliticization' (Clammer 1997: 54).

4 Baudrillard's work was translated into Japanese before Bourdieu's (although Bourdieu was an examiner on his dissertation) and his particular style of critique, with clever neologisms and snappy, slogan-like epigrams, ironically struck a chord with those interested in promoting consumption as a ludic, self-referential activity. Bourdieu's work, on the other hand, while dealing with consumption and stratification in a much more empirical way, was more problematic because of its emphasis on power differentials (Ogino 2013).

5 In a list of new experiences that the uneasy individual seeks out to create a sense of excitement in a consumer society, Baudrillard (1998: 80) mentions 'Christmas in the Canaries, eel in whiskey, the Prado, LSD', and, somewhat enigmatically, 'Japanese-style love-making'.

were recast in a much brighter light in the writings of Yamazaki Hirokazu, for example in his publication *Yawarakai kojinsugi no tanjō* (The birth of soft individualism), which emphasizes consumption as a process-oriented activity in which the enjoyment is extending the moment of ‘using up’ (1987: 205). ‘Soft selves’ as ‘consuming selves’ are self-created by consumer choice (in contrast to ‘producing selves’ [1987: 197]), through which they can tame capitalism. In a similar vein, Tobin (1992: 20) notes the difference between the pessimistic diagnoses of the consumer society in the West, where ‘the middle class hungrily appropriates the cultural capital and style of the old elite’ in a desperate attempt to paint over the meaninglessness of their existence, while in Japan ‘consumption often has the feeling of adolescent exuberance’ (ibid.), a kind of capitalist carnivalesque.

One of the reasons Baudrillard’s writings fell on fertile ground in Japan is that he was preoccupied with the symbolic dimension of consumption and its relation to social status, something that has a long, premodern tradition in Japan (especially in status-conscious locales such as Kyoto⁶):

[Y]ou never consume the object in itself (in its use-value); you are always manipulating objects (in the broadest sense) as signs which distinguish you either by affiliating you to your own group taken as an ideal reference or by marking you off from your group by reference to a group of higher status (Baudrillard 1998: 61).

Compare this to what the later chairman of the Parco group, Masuda Tsuji, told his staff in the mid-1980s:

What is consumption (*shōhi*) anyway? Look at the Chinese characters we use to write it. Kesu, ‘erase’. Tsuiyasu ‘use up’. But our consumers aren’t actually erasing or using up anything, right? Buying fashion at Parco, buying interior goods at Parco, that’s not the same as buying radishes at the supermarket. They are not just ‘consuming’, right? They are ‘creating’, *sō*. They’re consuming to create their own lifestyles. That’s why I say this isn’t *shōhi*; it’s *sōhi* (creative spending)’ (quoted in Miura 2014: 51-2).

Both quotes refer to the process of consumption, but the difference lies in the spin that is put on the result: while Baudrillard’s more negative

6 Baudrillard visited Kyoto for the first time in 1973 and returned several times. It was also in Japan in 1981 that he was given a camera, inspiring him to become a photographer (Zurbrugg 1998: 32).

evaluation of consumption suggests that consumer choice merely leads to conformity in the service of upward mobility, the same phenomenon in marketing speech is turned into an affirmation of (lifestyle) choice, and, therefore, of individual freedom. The two quotes also share the same blind spot: they both allude to the fact that things are not really used up in the process of consumption, but by focusing exclusively on the symbolic possibilities of commodities, they are oblivious to the material implications of this claim. Interestingly, recycling figures in Baudrillard only as cultural recycling, the reviving of retro trends on which consumer culture depends in the face of limited variation. Waste, on the other hand, is dismissed as a mere moral pseudo-problem:

The consumer society needs its objects in order to be. More precisely, it needs to destroy them. [...] It is in destruction that [consumption] acquires its meaning. [...] Only in destruction are objects there in excess and only then, in their disappearance, do they attest to wealth (Baudrillard 1998: 47).

Clearly inspired by Bataille's problematic interpretation of the potlatch, Baudrillard offers both a critique and an exaltation of consumer society by describing it in terms of sacrificial logic: by destroying wealth through consumption, society transforms goods into meaning and social status. While the sacrificial metaphor is useful to conceptualize signification, it reaches its limits when we turn our attention to the materiality of the objects. Again, the implicit assumption is that the transformation of goods into status also somehow liquidates the material nature of things.

Rather than an oversight, then, it is the very absence of the material dimension that underpins consumer society and makes it possible in the first place. The system of consumption/waste only works through material connections that have to remain hidden for them to function. Such a notion of consumption as sacrificial economy is prefigured in the way that Heian-period offerings (*sonaemono*) were floated on the Kamo River as tributes to the deities, but later picked out of the waters to be consumed by the 'underclasses' downriver in Fushimi. The link to the deity is created by making absent the offerings (the deities have consumed them); at the same time, the social and geographic structure of the Heian period emerges as a result of a material connection between consumption and waste. In essence, the system only works if the connection between the two parts (upstream imperial court and downstream underclasses) is obfuscated.

The exaltedness of the new

One of the hallmarks of consumerism is an appreciation of the new for newness's sake. In the same way the epithet 'new and improved' became a shorthand for progress in American post-war consumer culture, in Japan 'newly available' (*shin hatsubai*) and 'newly appearing' (*shin tōjō*) are staples of publicity, suggesting that the fact of newness of the product itself is part of its essence and allure. As Miura (2014: 206) puts it: 'One of the iron rules of consumer society for many years has been to persuade customers that the things they already own are boring and obsolete in order to get them to buy something new.'

In a Japanese context this modern valuation of the new is underpinned nicely by two cultural factors: an association of the new with purity and absence of pollution (Clammer 1997: 80), and the seasonal nature of consumption (Daniels 2009a). The former is usually not formulated as traditional concern with pollution,⁷ but more vaguely as disgust: when talking with informants who had lived through the height of the bubble economy they would often muse about the abundance of the new in those halcyon days. Mentioning second-hand goods would usually provoke a retrospective shudder: 'It simply was not done in those days. We would have considered it to be disgusting (*kimochi warui*),' one housewife told me. When probed as to the nature of the disgust, the answers were evasive, but pointing towards unknown others: while wearing and using hand-me-downs from relatives was common practice even before the 1990s, possessions of strangers were considered to be a source of a vague sense of pollution, veiled in a language of disgust.

Only the new provided a sense of purity, because those unknown others who had made and packaged it were removed from the imaginary trajectory. Commodities just magically appeared and were greeted with the opposite of disgust, or, as Baudrillard describes it: 'The period of newness is, in a sense, the sublime period of the object and may, in certain cases, attain the intensity, if not the quality, of the emotion of love' (Baudrillard 1998: 113).

If, as Baudrillard stresses, it is the symbolic value that defines the commodity, what is used up in the process of consumption? Social differentiation is a fairly stable social system into which consumption practices are transformed and in which symbolic value endures beyond the death of the thing. What actually is consumed and used up in the process, then, is newness itself: in other words, a temporal quality of the object (a quality

7 See Kirby 2011: 102-32 for an analysis of modern notions of purity and pollution.

the object loses as traces of use appear in the material). To own something that is the height of fashion means to partake in the elusive present. As Yamazaki has correctly diagnosed, bubble era consumption was a temporal process, in which the new was always superior to the old, yet to finally own the object of desire would also extinguish that desire. At the same time, established brands like Louis Vuitton were successful in the context of a relentless pursuit of the new, precisely because their brand stability satisfied a yearning for permanence.

Needless to say, this form of accelerated consumption of branded commodities led to an enormous increase of waste, as the 'life span' of consumer objects was decoupled from the object's durability and functionality:

Objects are also discarded much more rapidly in Japan than probably anywhere else. Perfectly functional but simply out-of-date equipment, fashions or furnishings will be replaced rapidly by those who can afford to do so; possession of the very latest enhances cultural capital like almost nothing else. Variety or originality is not the point: newness is (Clammer 1997: 24).

The novelty itself was being consumed, and the material remainder (often in mint condition) was barely more than rubbish to be thrown out. The imaginary trajectory of commodities was still a one-way system: something was produced and advertised, desired, bought, consumed, then discarded promiscuously with little ado for the next thing:

A certain day each month is 'heavy rubbish day' when unwanted large objects can be put out on the sidewalk for collection by the municipal rubbish collectors or by private contractors. The most astonishing variety and volume of things are discarded – furniture, TVs, bicycles, golf-clubs, all kinds of electrical appliances and just about everything else that a modern household might possess. Students and poorer people often furnish their dwellings with cast-offs of this kind, which is not a bad idea since the objects are often in almost mint condition. It is not uncommon for middle- and upper-middle-class households to change their furniture, appliances, curtains, even cutlery, every few years (ibid.: 79-80).

As Clammer shows, there was some degree of reuse of discarded things during the 1980s, but in the collective imagery this did not play any role. It was the absence of the old and obsolete that created the present moment and one's own relevance as individual qua consumer. Brand objects were

coveted possessions and, contrary to the many practices of redistribution and sharing that apply to gift economies (Rupp 2003), they were conceived of as singular things that had a singular relationship to the self.

Rendering absent

The rubbish problem emerges when the circulation of matter is obstructed and acyclic materials are used in people's lives. Matter is indestructible, if it does not circulate it will accumulate in nature and have a negative influence on human beings (Kumamoto 1995: 12).

In order to keep the consumption of new things going, enormous amounts of no longer new things must be made absent. As the material substrate remains after the newness has been consumed, to render absent was a question of removing the no longer desired objects from the gaze of those who once possessed them: namely, by sending them to the periphery of the city to be incinerated and then dumped in Tokyo Bay.

The large-scale rebuilding of Tokyo in the post-war era and the rapid expansion of the markets transformed Japan into the world's leading manufacturer of electronic consumer goods and led to an unprecedented rise in living standards. The amount of waste produced by mass consumption was accommodated by using the rubbish to retrieve land from Tokyo Bay. Yumenoshima, the 'island of dreams', became the main destination of Tokyo's waste in 1957.⁸ The annually increasing amounts led to a conflicted relationship between the residents of Kōtō ward (to which it belonged) and the affluent Western suburbs of Tokyo (whence much of the rubbish originated) – so much so that the mayor of Tokyo, Minobe Tatsukichi, declared a 'rubbish war' in 1971. The construction of incineration plants in each Tokyo ward was suggested to alleviate the burden placed on wards closer to Tokyo Bay, which comprised artificial landmasses, but local resistance in Suginami ward led to further exacerbation of the conflict. Both in 1972 and in 1973, local politicians and residents blocked rubbish trucks from Suginami ward from delivering their rubbish and sent them back. Only when the incineration plant in Suginami became active in 1983 did the tensions ease.

8 Yumenoshima originally was created from dredged sand and was reclaimed to accommodate a new airport for Tokyo. The war, however, interrupted the building process and after the war the island was designated to become the 'Hawaii of Tokyo', hence the name 'Island of Dreams' (Kawajiri 2013).

Tokyo in the 1980s was booming: fashion and trends came and went with increased speed, while circles of consumption were intense and short. A new lifestyle, felt to be modern and cosmopolitan, took hold among white-collar workers. Recycling was virtually unheard of when the bubble finally burst at the beginning of the 1990s. The perception of the life span of things changed rather dramatically in the first few years of the 1990s. The Tokyo stock market reached its peak on 31 December 1989, and began its downward spiral in January 1990 (Sand 2006: 104). The subsequent recession led to a slow transformation in the regime of value. While newness was still the main ingredient that made things attractive to customers, a whole secondary economy of 'recycle shops' and '100-yen shops' took hold and transformed many urban neighbourhoods in a way convenience stores had done in the post-war era. Recycling and the use of second-hand goods became standard practice.

As early as 1990 the word *junkangata shakai* (circulation-type society) was being used in Japan to indicate a society in which resources were recycled and things were used multiple times (Sakata 2005: 41). This was a clear break from the linear path that the trajectory of things was imagined to have during the bubble economy. The circular imagination of a society that recycled its refuse posed its own problems, however: for example, how to bring the abject stage from which things can be resurrected into view without also suggesting dirt and pollution? Howell (2013) describes the linguistic and discursive manoeuvres undertaken in the Edo period to rebrand human waste as fertilizer. Recycling must undergo a similar process in order to become socially acceptable. A process of melting down and re-forming the material, during which the matter undergoes purification by fire, is how recycling is promoted (with the obvious drawback that such a process consumes enormous amounts of energy, throwing serious doubts on its sustainability).

Secondhandedness and *mottainai*

Another, more eco-friendly way of recycling is through flea markets or bazaars, organized by schools and volunteer organizations, where things can be given away, swapped, or bought and sold at low prices. Although some flea markets such as the Tōji temple market in Kyoto pre-date the Edo period, there have been two waves of new flea markets: one following the oil shock in the 1970s and a larger one after the bubble burst in the early 1990s. These provide the observer with a scale on which to measure the degree to

which the reuse of items first becomes acceptable and then mainstream. This can in part be attributed to economic necessity, in part to a discourse of environmentalism that gains traction, but also to a re-evaluation of what is valuable and what is not.

Inge Daniels describes how at a bazaar in Kyoto all objects have a note from the previous owner attached to them, asking of the future owner to take care of the object by using it – in her case, a toaster that has not been used before (2009b: 396). This neatly illustrates how secondhandedness requires and opens up a social imaginary: where do things go once they were (or were not) used and disposed of (or given away)? Who are the others that receive them and what kind of relationship do such transactions entail? Daniels concludes that such instances show a Japanese sense of duty towards objects, but as her investigation focuses only on the ethnographic present, she does not take into account the massive shift in consumption practices of which such occurrences are a symptom. While a sensibility towards others mediated through objects may well be an enduring aspect of Japanese culture, the ways secondhandedness became normalized has a distinct millennial imprint that is connected to a rediscovery of cultural values in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Disposal only becomes a moral act once the trajectory of the object is imagined as including various others, from concrete persons to a generalized Other such as the environment or nature. This, in turn, changes the dynamics with which value, the core concept in making decisions about disposal, is understood.

Taking a more historical approach, Eiko Maruko Siniawer (2014: 166) describes how the notion of wastefulness (*mottainai*) acquires a new saliency as the economy stagnates:

While 'mottainai' had certainly made appearances in previous postwar decades, the values and emotions that it evoked were spelled out and discussed more explicitly, deliberately and visibly in millennial Japan than they had before. 'Mottainai' was said to capture not just the act of wasting, but principles and feelings associated with the consciousness of wastefulness, such as regret and shame for the loss of things, appreciation and respect for things as well as for those who made them, and empathy and compassion.

The notion of *mottainai* enables the shift from values (as embodied in objects) towards value as a moral category (Miller 2008). As a moral imperative, wastefulness regulates everyday consumption and how the flow of things is redirected towards others; as a rediscovered cultural value, it becomes part

of a marketable Japanese identity that distinguishes Japan from the rest of the world (then prime minister Koizumi was keen to promote Mottainai as an international movement under Japanese leadership).

'Mottainai' was also the main term my informants who lived in gomi yashiki used to explain to me why they did not want to get rid of the accumulated stuff. In a psychologically informed context this may appear as attachment and sentimentality. When considering it from the point of view of an ethics of disposal, however, it looks more like a refusal to make value judgements, as in a quickly changing economic environment such judgements seem increasingly arbitrary. Furthermore, it can be read as a refusal to engage with the real and imagined Others that disposal would entail. It is no surprise, then, that in an alienated, urban landscape, these others can appear as threatening. To illustrate this, the last part of this chapter provides a close reading of one of the first literary representations of the gomi yashiki.

'A complicated emotion': Taguchi's 'Jamira'

In 2004, the novelist Randy Taguchi published a collection of short stories under the title of *Fujisan*. The short stories vary widely in content, but they all refer to the sacred mountain in some way. 'Jamira' is set in a town in Shizuoka Prefecture over which Mount Fuji towers. In fact, the mountain is such a dominating presence that the narrator, a young man who works for the local authority after having dropped out of a remunerative but boring job at an investment bank, feels constantly observed by it. He was told as a child that Mount Fuji would see if he did something naughty and since then felt the watchful, all-penetrating eye of this looming 'observer' (Taguchi 2004: 142) on his back, even when it was shrouded in clouds. This narrator is sent by the local authority to investigate complaints about a gomi yashiki and to persuade the old woman living within to let them help her clean up the mess. Although everyone feels sorry for him for doing such a 'dirty' job after the prospect of having a high-flying career, the narrator is secretly glad to be dealing with such an interesting phenomenon. His task is to establish contact with the woman (whose family name is Kimura), but his attempts show no results initially. He calls her Jamira after a film monster (*kaijū*) in a TV series he watched as a child. His predecessor at the 'environment branch' of the local authority warns him that she is a *yōkai*, a kind of spectre. When he goes to have a preliminary look at her house, he is indeed reminded of the nest of the extraterrestrial life forms in the film *Alien*. Jamira is like

nothing he has ever seen: she seems barely human to him and yet fills him with a sense of awe. After the encounter with Jamira he has a dream:

In the back garden of my parents' house there is an open hole and I throw all kinds of things away into it. The hated chicken meat balls, the forgotten textbook of a classmate I hid to annoy him, an almost blank answer paper, the baby rabbit from the breeding shack that died when I stroked it, the library book I borrowed and failed to give back, all the inconvenient things that reflect badly on me, I stealthily dispose of them by throwing them into that hole. Peeping into the hole, I see that it is pitch black and apparently bottomless. When shouting 'Oi!' no echo comes back. I am reassured; I throw all kinds of things into the hole and feel relieved. The wank magazines that I secretly ordered by internet retail, the manga books that I stole, the woman who hated me although it was she who had an unpleasant body smell, the homeroom teacher with protruding nose hair. The hole swallows everything and is silent.

I think 'Where actually do the thrown away things go?' Well, never mind. Somewhere at the end of the world there might be a rubbish dumping ground. While wondering where this may be, it suddenly hits me. The rubbish house. I get it. The hole is connected to the rubbish house. All the things I have been throwing away are buried in that house (Taguchi 2004: 156).

The local authority, over which his father has considerable sway, passes a law that allows 'measures of beautification' to be taken and the environment branch enlists the services of a female clinical psychologist. The narrator, however, is not convinced, and when they start to bring Jamira a packed lunch every day to establish contact and the old woman starts to open up, he is secretly disappointed that she gives up her 'otherness' to human contact on such simple conditions as the provision of food. Jamira eventually gives in and moves to a home for the elderly for a few days while the local authority and neighbourhood volunteers make a concentrated effort to clean up the rubbish house. At first it seems as if more stuff is just erupting from the earth and the amount will not diminish in spite of the constant toing and froing of heavy rubbish disposal trucks. As the clean-up proceeds, everyone's astonishment at the amount of rubbish wanes and is replaced by something else:

But this rubbish was made up from what had formerly been their own possessions. From the mountain of rubbish emerged a large number of things that elicited cries of 'oh this was our son's bicycle' or 'ah, this was

our charcoal brazier'. The things they had believed they had thrown away came suddenly back and the neighbours felt a complicated emotion. Among them there were also those who picked the things up and took them back home again (Taguchi 2004: 202).

When the neighbours break out in shouts of relief at the end of their toil and the last of the rubbish vans leaves, Jamira suddenly appears. The chatter dies down. In the sinking sun she is only a silhouette. Her expression is indiscernible. Slowly, without looking at anyone, she walks past them, towards Mount Fuji, aglow in the evening sun, leaving everything behind her. In my interpretation, I wish to concentrate on the ways in which trajectories of things are imagined in this complex, multi-layered narrative.

The narrator is concerned with where things go once one has gotten rid of them. He is interested in the future of waste, so to speak. The act of throwing away is an act of disappearance: it can happen to humans as well as to things. It is the appearance of the hole in the backyard in his dream that makes him realize how this world works: only by making everything unpleasant disappear, one's own sins as well as the inconvenience and burden of others, can one live unobstructedly in the present. Everything seems meaningless to him because no action of ridding has any consequences. If something (human or object) has outlived its purpose as momentary distraction, it can simply be thrown away. The price he pays for the ease of a life with no memories is the possibility of being haunted by that which he throws away. This is why the unknown trajectory of objects and humans thrown into the hole bothers him: although the hole seems bottomless, matter must go somewhere. It either accumulates in a cul-de-sac or goes somewhere else, as in the dream, where everything that is thrown away appears again in the *gomi yashiki*. Jamira is only their temporary keeper, for those unpleasant things are bound to return. The hole is an exit that makes things disappear and the question as to where it leads is mirrored in the narrator's obsession with anal sex:

Only in the beginning do I have normal sex; what I am really interested in is the asshole. The other hole disgusts me. Would you thrust your penis into a hole if you do not know where it leads? [...] The mouth and the anus are connected. Whenever I think of that I feel relieved. Entrance and Exit. Where there is an entrance, there is always an exit (Taguchi 2004: 165).

It is not anal sex that appears 'dirty' to him, in spite of the bodily waste that passes through the same orifice; it is evacuated from the body and

disappears in a different kind of hole. When having anal sex he reverses this flow: in his imagination his penis re-emerges through the mouth of the woman and she is reduced to being meat on a skewer (*kushi*). The vagina, on the other hand, is seen as a one-way system: what gets in there reaches a place where things stagnate, and stagnation breeds monsters. Jamira becomes monstrous because she interrupts and redirects the flow of waste to end in her house: it is this stagnation of others' things put in her care that gives her power as a sort of gatekeeper. In the *gomi yashiki*, the two images of flows overlap: one connected further in an endless passing on of refuse, the other leading to an end point where things accumulate. The narrator feels safe as long as he throws everything unpleasant into the bottomless hole, because he imagines those things and persons to be passed on endlessly. Only when he dreams that everything leads to the *gomi yashiki* is he concerned with the possibility of their return, a haunting that would make everything present which he had so callously made absent. This possibility of haunting becomes very real to the neighbours when they clean up the *gomi yashiki* and many things surface that they had thrown away and trusted to be made absent eternally. The 'complicated emotion' they feel is both a shock of recognition and presumably a sense of shame. What they wanted to get rid of becomes publicly visible and shows them to have neglected their duty towards the things once in their care. In a sense, they are looking at the material trace of their own, albeit 'alternative', history.

Conclusion

This chapter attempted to situate the trope of the *gomi yashiki*, its definition, and its rise to media notoriety in a particular time and place. While it may very well be that it is 'just' a Japanese formulation of what in the United States is increasingly medicalized as hoarding (Frost and Steketee 2011), the discourses surrounding the *gomi yashiki* are highly specific. At the core of the discourse is the ambiguity of what is and what is not waste, and how arbitrary these decisions often are. In spite of the name 'rubbish house', the *gomi yashiki* complicates the category of rubbish and shows that things are made into rubbish and can return from this state. Like Appadurai's commodity state of an object, an object's rubbish state is not stable or terminal either. It brings to the fore the fact that matter does not die, but neither is there a smooth, circular flow of recycling. Instead, there are complicated eddies, currents, flows and counterflows, and stagnating pools where time becomes tangible and solid. This becomes

especially troubling when this instability in the meaning of matter erupts in domestic space and renders the home uncanny. Like the haunted house, with which it shares a linguistic similarity in Japanese, the rubbish house haunts both the throw-away society's imagination of a one-way system and the more environmentally conscious notion of a smooth circle of recycling and reuse.

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Robot Reincarnation

Rubbish, Artefacts, and Mortuary Rituals¹

Jennifer Robertson

Cwiertka, Katarzyna J. & Ewa Machotka (eds), *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan: A Transdisciplinary Perspective*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018

DOI: 10.5117/9789462980631/CH07

Abstract

Beginning with a discussion of ingenious, and artistic, methods of disposing of 3/11 debris, I offer working definitions of rubbish, art, and artefacts, and show how refuse can be selectively recycled, recirculated, and even reborn. In Japan, funerals for computers and robots represent a new type of memorial rite. The expansion of Buddhist funerary rituals to include flesh-and-blood animals and robotic pets, among other non-human entities and artefacts, has a long historical precedent in Japan. Religion and religious organizations are, in part, a service industry: they provide services that adapt and respond to specific human needs and desires. These services can focus on fairly esoteric and spiritual needs, or provide very tangible rewards and benefits, or they can do both.

Keywords: robots, Buddhism, funerals, memorials (*kuyō*), recycling, triple disaster

¹ This chapter is an expansion of a talk I presented at the workshop 'From Garbage to Art', Leiden University, Leiden, the Netherlands, 7 November 2014, organized by Ewa Machotka and Katarzyna Cwiertka. I owe them both sincere thanks for a most stimulating event, and for shepherding this edited volume to completion. I am also grateful for the helpful comments I received from the workshop participants and members of the audience. I would also like to thank Fabio Rambelli for sharing with me a relevant new manuscript of his. Some of this material appears in my book *Robo sapiens japonicus: Robots, Gender, Family, and the Japanese Nation* (2017). Research for this chapter was supported by a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship (2011-2012); an Abé Fellowship (Social Science Research Council, 2010-2012); and a Faculty Research Grant, Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan (2012).

Rubbish, art, and artefacts

How should we care for old robots? I wonder who would have ever imagined this kind of problem [with Sony's AIBO]? It's possible that the same dilemma will emerge ten or twenty years from now for Softbank's humanoid Pepper that debuted in June [2014].²

Rubbish is a human invention, a category of 'stuff' that is no longer useful. The stuff of rubbish consists of organic or inorganic substances and things that humans have made, consumed, and then discarded or destroyed in whole or in part. There are many synonyms for rubbish – trash, refuse, compost, junk, debris, litter, waste, scrap – all of which have differently inflected meanings, as well as associated actions and attached values. Thus, as an adjective, 'trash' as in 'trash talk', refers to offensive, insulting, boastful, and intimidating speech. 'Compost' suggests an ecological approach to disposing of organic matter, while 'litter' implies things that are carelessly discarded in places where they should not be. Natural forces can accelerate the production of rubbish, most recently evident in Japan in the mountains of debris following 3/11, the date notation for the 11 March 2011 trifold disaster (earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown).³ The word 'debris' thus implies the wreckage or destruction of a thing or building, the fragments of which constitute a particular kind of rubbish.

Rubbish disposal involves just as much ingenuity as the production of the stuff out of which rubbish is created. We might associate rubbish disposal with landfill or incineration, but disposed stuff can also be selectively recycled and recirculated. These processes are the livelihood of many groups of people around the world, such as the *catadores*, or rubbish-pickers, of Brazil, who are the subject of *Waste Land*, a 2010 film by Lucy Walker.⁴ Discarded

2 <http://matome.naver.jp/odai/2140655292741769801>, accessed 25 July 2015.

3 As of 2015, the data on the 11 March 2011 trifold disaster (earthquake, tsunami, meltdown) report 15,892 deaths, 6,152 injured, and 2,574 missing. Around 230,000 people have been relocated or are still living in temporary housing. See https://www.npa.go.jp/archive/keibi/biki/higaijokyo_e.pdf and <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2015/03/10/editorials/tohoku-slowly-on-the-mend/#.VcdxZKbTHVs>, accessed 25 July 2015.

4 Filmed over a period of several years, *Waste Land* follows artist Vik Muniz as he travels from his current home in Brooklyn to his native Brazil. On the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro is Jardim Gramacho, at 321 acres the world's largest rubbish dump, where Muniz photographs an eclectic band of *catadores* at work. He then projects the images onto the floor of a cavernous warehouse and, using the enlarged photographs as templates, works with the recyclers to create portraits from assorted rubbish, which he then photographs anew (<http://www.wastelandmovie.com/>, accessed 25 July 2015).

stuff is a desirable medium for many artists. 'Rubbish or rubbish art' is regarded as a sub-genre of 'found-object art', which originated from the French *objet trouvé*, describing artwork created from objects or commodities not normally considered 'art'. In this connection, one may recall the work of avant-garde artists Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), famous in part for signing and displaying as 'art' ready-made objects such as commodes and hat stands, and Nam June Paik (1932-2006), who refashioned ready-mades and discarded commodities into signed artworks, including robots. A recent iteration of 'rubbish art' by Japanese artists is exemplified by the late Tonoshiki Tadashi (1942-1992), who created what he called GOMI ART (sic), or 'rubbish art'. One of his largest installations of GOMI ART was included in the 2014 Yokohama Triennale. Titled *Yamaguchi-Nihonkai-Niinohama, Okonomiyaki: Complete Figure, Weight About 2 Tons* (1987), the piece is a gigantic compressed ball of generic rubbish and waste along with dirt and asphalt. Tonoshiki, who was born in Hiroshima and was indirectly exposed to radiation after the 1945 atomic bombing, sought to create art, including GOMI ART, that dealt with social issues, such as radiation disease and environmental damage.

In Japan, the removal and processing of rubbish and debris from 3/11 has proved to be especially vexing due to both legitimate and unfounded fears of contamination and toxic pollution. Even so, tsunami debris has become museum-worthy, as exemplified by the case of the Rias Ark Museum in Kesenuma, Miyagi Prefecture. Due to its elevated location the museum survived, untouched by the towering wall of black water that swallowed the neighbourhoods below; but it was damaged in the 9.0 earthquake that triggered the tsunami, and was forced to shut down for over a year. During this time the facility served as a refuge and distribution centre for suddenly homeless local residents. The museum staff set about documenting the disaster by taking hundreds of photographs and collecting found debris. A collection of these items, titled 'Records of the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake and the History of Tsunami Disaster', was added to the museum's permanent exhibition to tell the story of the disaster.⁵ Unlike Tonoshiki's balls of generic rubbish, this preserved collection of debris – newly excavated archaeological artefacts – memorializes the people and households of Kesenuma who had used these items in their everyday lives. They were things that had not been discarded by people, but that were violently wrested from them by the roiling tsunami. The Rias Ark Museum collection is thus a conjunction of the abstract and the concrete, the iconic and the indexical. In other words, each object both represents itself, and points to forces of destruction and

5 <http://rias-ark.sakura.ne.jp/2/>, accessed 25 July 2015.

to networks of family and community life that are usually invisible, in the sense of being taken for granted, until they are lost.

Tonoshiki's GOMI ART and the Rias Ark display of tsunami debris raise questions about the relationship between artefacts and art. Briefly, an artefact may be defined as an object that has been intentionally made or produced for a certain purpose. It thus follows that an artwork per se is characterized by its artefactuality – it is intentionally made for a purpose, usually its presentation and display to an art world public. Although a significant percentage of tsunami debris consists of artefacts, they were physically modified and dislocated by violent forces of nature. However, those on display were selected from among the extensive debris fields of Kesenuma and displayed by Rias Ark Museum curators who intentionally modified the tsunami artefacts, effectively turning them into objects of aesthetic appreciation that also served the purpose of memorialization.

Recently, professional and amateur artists alike have undertaken projects to utilize some of the 3/11 debris artefacts as an art medium and to create new art works. Among the former are Chim↑Pom, an artist collective of youthful social activists (one woman and five men) formed in 2005. The collective was among the 25 artists invited to participate in an exhibition on the triple disaster held from mid-October to early December 2012 at Mito Art Tower.⁶ Chim↑Pom contributed a ten-and-a-half minute video, *100 Kiai* (100 cheers), shot in Sōma, a small city in northeastern Fukushima Prefecture, about 28 miles from the nuclear reactors, that was inundated by the tsunami. The piece focused on empathic bonding and was not geared towards a critique of nuclear power, much less on the long reach of TEPCO's power and influence at all levels of Japanese society. As described by Chim↑Pom,

[w]e ad-libbed and cheered based on whatever we felt at the time, starting with 'Here we go!' to 'We're going to rebuild!', to there were things about radiation, to 'I want a girlfriend!' to 'I want a car!' Anything was OK.⁷

6 The collective's website is <http://chimpom.jp/>. The exhibition was titled *3/11 to âteisuto: Shinkōkei no kiroku* (3/11 and artists: Chronicle of progressive form). I attended on 17 October 2012 and, generally speaking, found the exhibition long on expressions of sympathy for victims and short on both critical realpolitik and ethical critiques of the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) whose corporate hubris and gross negligence was responsible for the tsunami-damage to the Fukushima Daiichi reactors and subsequent meltdown. Most recently, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts held a show (5 April–12 July 2015) titled *In the Wake: Japanese Photographers Respond to 3/11*.

7 <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/the-atomic-artists/art-cannot-be-powerless/>, accessed 25 July 2015.

Among the latter amateur artists is a group of children from Ishinomaki, a coastal city shredded by the tsunami, who took part in a project to create art objects out of tsunami debris (*gareki*). *Watanoha Smile* (2013), the catalogue of their work, makes an important distinction between things that are discarded by people because they are no longer needed, and things that remain very important to people but that were taken from them. The children collected household utensils, toys, tools, and equipment, and fashioned them into art objects as a way of restoring their value, meaningfulness, and agency. Two of the *gareki* art objects created by the children were identified as robots. An exercise in uplifting the hearts and minds of those whose lives were turned upside down in the fifteen minutes it took for the tsunami to turn houses into matchsticks, *Watanoha Smile* specifically avoided any mention of human culpability, much less corporate irresponsibility for the extent of the destruction.

Robots and rubbish: Consumption and disposal

Ironically, perhaps, these debris-art robots draw attention to the absence of robots at the damaged Fukushima reactors. Those robots that were later deployed inside the damaged reactors were rendered inoperable by the high levels of radiation and subsequently abandoned, or thrown away. At least one Japanese robot blog site discussed (in January 2013) the possibility of ‘building a tomb where the [Fukushima] robots that could not return would be memorialized (*kuyō suru*)’. We have ‘needle tombs’ and ‘needle *kuyō*’, the blogger rationalizes, ‘so I think it’s a good idea to have the same for [the Fukushima] robots’.⁸

As I read this entry, I was reminded of the battlefield robot Scooby Doo, who was named after the Great Dane in an American animated TV series (1969-present) about a family and its big dog. Scooby Doo was used extensively in Iraq and Afghanistan to defuse domestic bombs and the especially lethal IEDs (improvised explosive devices). Unfortunately, the little tank-like robot was destroyed when an IED it was defusing suddenly exploded. Scooby Doo was damaged beyond repair and its human companions were left feeling bereaved. However, soldiers today often give their robots names and personalities, and ‘promote them to titles such as Staff Sergeant, award them Purple Hearts, and even hold funerals for the destroyed devices that

8 <http://nobu-bookshelf.cocolog-nifty.com/random/2013/01/post-b916.html>, accessed 25 July 2015.

have assisted them on the frontline'.⁹ The remains of Scooby Doo are now on display at a museum in Bedford, Massachusetts, alongside a plaque dedicated to the robot.

When one googles the descriptors 'robots, trash and art', the vast majority of the vast number of links concern robots designed to serve as refuse collectors and recyclers. In this regard, the 2008 animated movie, *WALL-E*, comes to mind. The film stars a robot named WALL-E, who is one of a crew of identical robots designed to clean up an abandoned, rubbish-covered earth far in the future. The former human inhabitants long ago fled to an orbiting spaceship and their gluttonous and sedentary descendants are now morbidly obese. WALL-E, the lone remaining *catadore*-bot, has created a rubbish-art museum, where he preserves 'treasures' that bring him a little happiness amidst the ecological devastation left behind by the reckless consumerism of the former human residents.

An example of a real refuse-collecting robot is DustCart, an Italian humanoid that is a demographer, refuse collector, recycler, and pollution monitor all in one – and much quieter and cleaner than a diesel truck. This real-world, real-time WALL-E was introduced in 2010 to the hilltop Tuscan town of Peccoli, where the narrow, winding roads are difficult for refuse lorries to navigate. DustCart requests a personal ID number that identifies the user and tracks their household's rubbish as well as the type of rubbish being dumped: organic, recyclable, or waste. The *catadore*-bot can be summoned by a mobile phone or SMS to make a special pick up. Because it possesses artefactuality, in the sense described earlier, one could regard DustCart as a kind of mobile public art form with a practical purpose.¹⁰

There is a large body of literature available on fictional and actual rubbish-disposal and recycling robots and robotic equipment. Information about how robots themselves were disposed of, recycled, and transformed into art or other aesthetically endowed entities is more difficult to track down. But before I turn to an exploration of my main theme, robots and reincarnation, a short digression on the place and perception of robots in Japanese society today provides some necessary context.

Why robots, why now? The population, and labour force, of Japan is rapidly ageing and shrinking swiftly. The birth rate presently stands at about

9 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2081437/Soldiers-mourn-iRobot-PackBot-device-named-Scooby-Doo-defused-19-bombs.html>, accessed 25 July 2015. For detailed information on the fraternal and familial nature of soldier-robot relationships, see Carpenter 2013.

10 <http://www.treehugger.com/clean-technology/italys-trash-robot-is-a-real-life-wall-e.html>, accessed 25 July 2015.

1.3 children per married woman, and around 25 per cent of the population of roughly 127.3 million people (which includes about two million legal foreign residents) is over 65 years of age; that percentage is expected to increase by 2050 to over 40 per cent. The latest estimates produced by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (Kōsei Rōdōshō) project that the population will shrink to less than 111 million in 2035, and to less than 90 million in 2055. Briefly, women and men are postponing marriage until their late twenties and early thirties, and some are eschewing marriage – which is (still) the only socially sanctioned framework for procreation – altogether.¹¹ Even married couples are opting not to have children; today, house pets outnumber children, and companion robots sales are expected to take off. In June 2014, Son Masayoshi, founder and CEO of Softbank, the Japanese telecommunications and Internet corporation, unveiled Pepper, the ‘emotional’ humanoid robot in anticipation of a growing demand for personal robot companions.¹²

To cut a long story very short, the state is continuing the post-war trend of pursuing automation over replacement migration. Japan is neither an immigrant-friendly, nor an immigrant-dependent nation-state, despite an experiment in the 1980s to recruit South Americans of Japanese ancestry (Nikkeijin) into the labour force.¹³ Beginning several years ago, in connection with the economic slowdown associated with the persistent recession, Nikkei guest workers were paid to return to the continent. Ironically, the state is once again considering the recruitment of temporary guest workers, this time to assist with the considerable preparations for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

The corporate sector and government alike are banking on the robotics industry to reinvigorate the economy and to preserve the country’s much eulogized ethnic homogeneity. Although the population of Japan arguably is more outwardly (phenotypically) homogenous than that of the United States or Brazil, there are many cultural-minority and marginalized groups,

11 The vast majority of ‘single mothers’ in Japan are women who are divorced or widowed.

12 See http://www.softbank.jp/en/corp/group/sbm/news/press/2014/20140605_01/, accessed 25 July 2015. Official estimates put the pet population at 22 million or more, but there are only 16.6 million children under fifteen (Evans and Buerk 2012). Softbank’s Son Masayoshi has long been eager to enter the household robot market. Pepper retails for ¥198,000 (approx. €1,415). The robot is manufactured by Aldebaran Robotics, which has offices in France, China, Japan, and the US, and is 78.5 per cent owned by Softbank.

13 Brazil has the largest population of people of Japanese ancestry outside of Japan. The 1.5 million Japanese Brazilians are descendants of the mostly impoverished farm householders who immigrated to South America in the late nineteenth century with the support of the Japanese government. As of 2014, less than 2 per cent of Japan’s population consists of immigrants and migrant workers (<http://www.ipsnews.net/2014/04/japan-seeks-foreign-workers-uneasily/>, accessed 25 July 2015).

from the indigenous Ainu to ‘permanently residing’ (*zainichi*) Koreans and Chinese. Not only are robots imagined to replace the need for immigrants and migrant workers, humanoids are being designed to fulfil many roles, including the preservation of ‘unique’ Japanese customs and traditional performing-art forms.¹⁴

The premium placed by the government on robotics as a techno-utopian solution to problems facing Japanese society today is clearly evident in Innovation 25, the central government’s visionary blueprint for revitalizing Japanese society – and especially the household – by 2025. Since 2007, the Japanese state has actively and relentlessly promoted a robot-dependent society and lifestyle. In February 2007 then prime minister Abe Shinzō unveiled Innovation 25, a visionary blueprint for revitalizing the Japanese economy, civil society, and the ‘traditional’ household by 2025.¹⁵ A newly coiffed and rejuvenated Abe was re-elected prime minister in December 2012, after serving as prime minister for less than a year in his first attempt, and his plan to robotize Japan is back on the fast track.¹⁶ In June 2013, he announced that his administration is earmarking ¥2.28 billion (approx. €18 million) towards the development of urgently needed robots for nursing and care for the elderly.¹⁷ Robots are imagined to help stabilize the family and, by extension, the society, and to generate spin-off businesses that will reinvigorate the Japanese economy. Some of these emerging industries are optical and haptic devices, new synthetic and biocompatible materials, new types of batteries, software innovations, speech and face recognition technologies, telecommunications, and, very recently, weapons systems.

Thus far I have left self-evident the definition of ‘robot’. The image that most people have of robots and their abilities comes from science fiction stories and movies, and the word itself first appeared in Czech *littérateur*

14 Randerson 2007. See also <http://rt.com/art-and-culture/art-japanese-robot-calligrapher-585/>, accessed 25 July 2015.

15 For more information on Innovation 25 and its socio-political context, see Robertson 2007. This proposal is accessible on the Cabinet Office website (<http://www.cao.go.jp/innovation/>, accessed 25 July 2015).

16 Innovation 25 was supported by Mr Abe’s successors, although not as ardently. Political support for rescue and care robots has grown following the 3/11 disaster.

17 The robotic assistants will form an essential part of a plan to address the shortage of care workers in the country as well as nurturing new spin-off industries. Of course what is left unmentioned is why there is a shortage of care workers. Too few Japanese are interested in that low-paying occupation, and the government administers an unusually gruelling Japanese-language exam that has made it virtually impossible for well-trained foreign nurses and care workers (mostly from the Philippines and Indonesia) to pass and thereby find professional employment in Japan.

Karel Čapek's play *R.U.R., Rosumovi Univerzální Roboti* (Rossum's universal robots, 1920), which premiered in Prague in 1921. The Czech word *robota* means servitude or forced labour. *R.U.R* is about a factory in the near future where identical artificial humans are mass-produced as tireless labourers for export all over the world. To cut an even longer story shorter, newer model robots are provided with emotions, and, now able to experience anger at their exploitation, revolt en masse and kill all but one human, a traditional artisan who encourages one new-model couple to repopulate the world with their own kind! *R.U.R* was performed in Tokyo in 1924 under the title *Jinzōningen* (Artificial human). Čapek's graphic portrayal in *R.U.R.* of the end of bourgeois humanity at the hands of a violent robot-proletariat helped to shape Euro-American fears about robots that persist to this day. The dystopian play did not, however, compromise the largely favourable acceptance among Japanese of things mechanical, including robots, from the 1920s onwards. Since *R.U.R.*, the meaning of 'robot' has become closely associated with intelligent machines with biologically inspired shapes and functions, such as humanoids.

Actual robots are far less agile and far more fragile than their fictional counterparts. Of all the many definitions of 'robot' in circulation, I find the following one usefully comprehensive yet concise: a robot is an aggregation of different technologies – sensors, software, telecommunication tools, actuators, motors, and batteries – that make it capable of interacting with its environment with some human supervision, through teleoperation, or even completely autonomously. The different levels of robot autonomy influence the way that humans and robots interact with one another. To be called a humanoid, a robot must meet two criteria: it has to have a body that resembles a human (head, arms, torso, legs) and it has to perform in a human-like manner in environments designed for the capabilities of the human body, such as an office or a house. Some humanoids are so lifelike that they can actually pass as human beings; these are referred to as androids.¹⁸

Japan is the most robotized country in the world: not only do Japanese companies produce half of the global supply of robots, but they employ the biggest number (300,000) of the world's industrial robots.¹⁹ Over the

18 Unless noted, most of the background information on the robotization of Japanese society is drawn from Robertson 2007, 2010, and 2014.

19 According to the International Federation of Robotics (IFR) – whose secretariat is hosted by the VDMA, the German machinery association in Frankfurt, Germany – Japan was the second-largest market regarding annual sales, but it still has, by far, the highest number of industrial robots in operation: more than 300,000 units. It is the most automated country in the world. Japan is also the predominant robot-manufacturing country. In 2013, more than half of

past decade, increasingly sophisticated robotic appliances and carebots have been designed and enlisted to support the physical and social labour of Japan's shrinking nurse force, and also to help triage the care of senior citizens.

Unasked, however, is the question of what happens to ageing, damaged, defective, and inoperative robots. I came up with the topic and title of 'robot reincarnation' while contemplating what happens to defunct robots, especially personalized animaloids and humanoids, many of which today are equipped with advanced artificial intelligence. Is Scooby Doo an anomaly, or are robots on the battlefield and in Japan and elsewhere increasingly regarded as subjects of and for death rituals and memorials? In considering various methods of robot disposal, I will revisit the originary metaphor supplied by Astro Boy, arguably Japan's most famous and beloved cartoon robot.

When asked what inspired them to build robots, most Japanese roboticists cite the *Tetsuwan atomu* (Mighty atom, in English known as *Astro Boy*) manga and anime created by the late Tezuka Osamu (1928-1989). I also noticed that the roboticists I interviewed all had a picture or figurine of Astro Boy in their labs and offices. The story of Astro Boy provides several insights into my topic of robots and reincarnation, although my focus is on actual, and not fictional, robots. The boy-bot's story begins in the Ministry of Science (Kagakushō), headed by one Professor Tenma who has been trying to create a robot capable of human emotions. His son, Tobio, suggests that he build a boy robot. Ironically, Tenma's obsession with his quest keeps him from giving Tobio fatherly love. The son runs away from home and is killed in an automobile accident, whereupon the grieving professor creates a robot in Tobio's likeness. However, when Tenma realizes that the robot will never grow up, he develops an irrational aversion to him and sells the boy-bot to the cruel owner of a robot circus. Once the novelty-craving audience tires of Astro Boy, the circus owner throws the robot boy into a closet along with all the other discarded robots, where he is left to lose power and expire. Briefly, Astro Boy is rescued from the rubbish heap by another scientist, Professor Ochanomizu, who restores him to life. The professor later creates a robot family and dog for him. Astro Boy's new mission is to save Japan, the planet, the cosmos from criminals and other dangers.

the global supply of robots was produced by Japanese companies. See <http://www.ifr.org/news/ifr-press-release/global-robotics-industry-record-beats-record-621/>, accessed 25 July 2015 and <http://www.ifr.org/industrial-robots/statistics/>, accessed 25 July 2015.

Robot reincarnation

The disposal and reincarnation of Astro Boy parallels the fate of the robots created in the 1950s and 1960s by Aizawa Jirō (1903-1996), who was a close friend of Tezuka. Aizawa served as the first director of the Children's Institute for Cultural Activities (Nihon Jidō Bunka Kenkyūjo),²⁰ established in 1952 with the objective of making science fun for children. Dr Aizawa created 800 humanoid robot toys toward this end, and today, the Children's Institute sponsors various robot design competitions for young people. Aizawa's retro humanoid robots, built between 1950 and 1955, were showcased in the 1970 Osaka Expo, after which they were put into storage. They were restored to working condition by the Kanagawa Institute of Technology, Department of Robotics and Mechatronics (Kanagawa Kōka Daigaku, Robotto-Mekatoronikusugakka), and exhibited at the Japan Robot Festival (Japan Robotto Fesutibaru) 2009 in Toyama City, Toyama Prefecture. The restoration project used original parts where possible, though procuring working vacuum tubes among other dated components was a challenge. Fortunately, there are now many museums around the world that salvage, display, and sell old computers and robotic devices – again, demonstrating the overlap between artefacts and artworks. The retro-bots are now on tour, displayed in art galleries and museums around the country.²¹

In Japan, robot funerals, as a new type of memorial rite, have attracted attention. In 2014, a new web-based service was inaugurated that offers 'robot funerals' (*robottosō*). The splash page features an Aizawa-type robot. Advance notice of the service, distributed by AIBAOFFICE Global Communications Partner, emphasizes that the existence today of so many pet robots regarded as family members calls for a proper funeral when their time has come.²² The case of AIBO, Sony's robot dog that was on the market between 1999 and 2006, is instructive. In 2006, AIBO was inducted into Carnegie Mellon University's Robot Hall of Fame, and praised as 'the most sophisticated product ever offered in the consumer robot marketplace'.²³ Sony stopped producing replacement parts for the robot dog in March 2014. The human companions of AIBO in Japan and elsewhere are not happy, and given the reality of their robot dogs 'dying' – that is, becoming

20 <http://www.robot-foundation.com>, accessed 25 July 2015.

21 Curiously, in Japan, the Nagoya Robot Museum (Robotto Myūjiamu), which was open for only a year between 2006 and 2007, included an exhibit called 'Dr. Aizawa's Workshop'.

22 <http://robotsou.com/>, accessed 25 July 2015.

23 <http://www.robothalloffame.org/inductees/o6inductees/AIBO.html>, accessed 25 July 2015.

inoperable and unfixable – A-FUN, a Japanese company specializing in the repair of defunct electronic devices, has recruited retired Sony engineers to oversee the rehabilitation of damaged or malfunctioning AIBO.²⁴ Robot dogs beyond repair are treated as ‘organ donors’; 180 ‘hospitalized’ AIBO are on the waiting list for body parts. A supervisor at the company emphasizes that ‘[f]or those who keep AIBOs, they are nothing like home appliances. It’s obvious they think their (robotic pet) is a family member’ (Suzuki 2015). In January 2015, nineteen AIBO that could not be restored to health and whose ‘organs’ would be harvested were given a funeral at Kōfuku-ji, a 450-year-old Buddhist temple in Isumi City, Chiba Prefecture.²⁵ The officiating priest explained that the AIBO *kuyō* was an occasion on which ‘the robots’ souls could pass from their bodies’. He also remarked that he ‘was thrilled over the interesting mismatch of giving cutting-edge technology a memorial service in a very conventional manner’ (Suzuki 2015). Kōfuku-ji belongs to the Nichiren denomination of Buddhism that focuses on the *Lotus Sutra*, according to which all beings, humans and animals alike, have the potential to attain Buddhahood, a topic to which I return below. The event attracted international media coverage and will likely bring much-needed revenue to the temple in the form of people seeking memorial services for their robot pets and other cherished electronic possessions. However, the AIBO funeral at Kōfuku-ji was not the first such memorial service for robots; I will discuss a much-earlier precedent in the following pages.

Meanwhile, shortly after Sony closed its repair service, the website *freakingnews.com* staged an art contest, inviting AIBO family and friends to submit photo-shopped images illustrating some of the ways in which the 150,000 remaining robot pets might spend their ‘retirement years’. The 25 winning graphics range from the dignified and profound to the ironic and downright silly.²⁶ Even decommissioned industrial robots have been reimagined and reassembled as artworks. Earlier, I noted how robots were fashioned out of tsunami debris. By 2011, mothballed assembly-line robots were being redesigned and recommissioned as decorative ornaments for homes, businesses, and parks. For example, their toxic elements removed, ‘robotic arms used for welding can be used as lamp holders or as a coat

24 <http://a-fun.biz/case.html>, accessed 25 July 2015.

25 An image of the AIBO *kuyō* at Kōfuku-ji, held in January 2015, can be found at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2968691/Funerals-held-ROBOTIC-dogs-Japan-owners-believe-souls.html>, accessed 25 July 2015.

26 <http://www.freakingnews.com/AIBO-Pictures--914.asp>, accessed 25 July 2015.

rest'.²⁷ In Japan, as we shall see, Buddhism has figured prominently in the disposal of robots, especially those attached to individuals and families.²⁸

The expansion of Buddhist funerary rituals to include animal pets and valued objects and artefacts has a long historical precedent in Japan. Earlier, in the context of the Fukushima disaster, I quoted a blogger proposing memorial services, or *kuyō*, for the rescue robots abandoned in the radioactive reactors. Memorial services are staged for any number of people and things in Japan, from deceased relatives to 'inanimate objects that have been part of [people's] lives in some especially intimate way' (LaFleur 1992: 144), such as sewing needles, tea whisks, clocks, chopsticks, spectacles, dolls, calligraphy brushes, Buddhist household altars (*butsudan*), and even brassieres (La Fleur 1992: 145; Rambelli 2007: 212-16, 312 n3). Several decades ago, a cartoon in the *Asahi Shinbun*, one of the three largest daily newspapers, spoofed the 'memorial-mania' of the Japanese by showing a memorial service for lost golf balls (*bōru kuyō*) in progress at the edge of a lake (Satō 1985: 23). More profound are the memorial services for aborted or miscarried fetuses and stillborn infants (*mizuko*), characterized by a strong apologetic tone that does not necessarily translate into an anti-abortion position (Harrison and Igeta 1995: 90; LaFleur 1992: 146-50).

Since the beginning of the domestic pet boom in the 1990s, a growing number of Japanese pet owners consider their beloved pets family members during their lifetime and feel that they should hence be treated in death like a human. Increasingly, deceased pets are memorialized in Buddhist rituals. Cremation is now the preferred method of treatment and joint human-pet burials are gaining currency (Ambros 2010). Pet cemeteries, too, are becoming more visible in the urban landscape. One of the earliest and most famous pet graves in the sprawling Aoyama cemetery in central Tokyo is that of Hachikō (1923-1935), the loyal Akita. A bronze statue of Hachikō was erected in April 1934, but later melted down and recycled during the Second World War. Resculpted in 1948, the bronze dog is now a famous waiting spot in the southeast plaza of Shibuya Station.

The grouping of all of these objects and entities as worthy of ritualized memorial practices inheres in the absence, in Japanese religious traditions, of any ontological pressure to make distinctions between organic/inorganic,

27 <http://www.brightengineering.com/robotics/115664-dealing-with-decommissioned-industrial-robots/>, accessed 25 July 2015.

28 When industrial robots were first introduced in Japanese factories, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Shinto priests performed ritual consecrations of the new 'workers' (Schodt 1990 [1988]: 210).

animate/inanimate, and human/non-human forms. On the contrary, they are all linked to form a continuous network of beings (Kaplan 2004: 6; Mori 2005 [1981]: 32). Shinto, the native animistic belief system, holds that vital energies, deities, forces, or essences called *kami* are present in both organic and inorganic, and in naturally occurring and manufactured entities alike. Whether in trees, animals, mountains, or robots, these *kami* (or forces) can be mobilized.²⁹ Similarly, as roboticist and Buddhist scholar Masahiro Mori underscores in his thought-provoking book *The Buddha in the Robot*, not only are humans and machines ‘fused together in an interlocking entity’ but ‘robots have the Buddha-nature within them – that is, the potential for attaining Buddhahood’. Mori also invokes a Buddhistic robo-ethics, arguing that engineers who recognize that a Buddha-nature pervades them as well as their robots are able to design ‘good machines [...] for good and proper purposes’ and thereby ‘achieve harmony between humans and machines’ (Mori 2005 [1981]: 13, 179-80).

As Fabio Rambelli details in his book *Buddhist Materiality: A Cultural History of Objects in Japanese Buddhism* (2007), Buddhism has developed a sophisticated philosophy of materiality, addressing the status of material objects and their role in the quest for salvation. Briefly, the realm of material desires is not simply an obstacle for spiritual pursuits; materiality also provides a space for interplay in which human beings can give shape and expression to their deepest religious and spiritual ideas (Rambelli 2007: 268). Thus, memorial services, or *kuyō*, for non-human, non-animal entities and objects offer a powerful emotional and aesthetic experience of identification and affinity with intimately familiar things that are no longer functioning or useful, but that cannot simply be thrown away. This is certainly the case where the memorial service involves the on-site cremation of burnable objects. The fire ritual pacifies, purifies, and liberates the indwelling spirit (*kami*) of a given thing and insures its repose and its human guardian’s solace. However, robots and other high-tech electronic devices are manufactured from a wide array of materials that are either or both valuable in themselves and best salvaged – such as gold, silver, lead, and copper – or toxic, and would release poisonous gases if burned out in the open. Therefore, another type of memorial service is necessary for them.

In a precedent-setting move, Banshō-ji, a temple founded in the mid-sixteenth century, staged the first ‘computer *kuyō*’ in May 2002. The event was referred to as the *pasokon kuyō* (personal-computer memorial service)

29 An informative analysis of the relation between manufactured goods and *kami* is Swynedouw (1993:55-60).

and also as *dennō kuyō* ('electric brain' memorial service). Banshō-ji is located in the Ōsu electronics district of central Nagoya, and the media-savvy head priest is also the CEO of a software company. Significantly, one of the attractions of the temple is the daily performances of *karakuri ningyō*, or mechanical dolls, created in the Edo period (1603-1867). Described as Japan's earliest robots, the animated clockwork dolls are indicative of a historical cultural premium on technologies of 'infotainment', and, significantly, *karakuri* originally referred to wind-up devices created to delight and amaze audiences.³⁰

Banshō-ji's 2002 computer *kuyō* was televised. A diverse assortment of desktop computers, laptops, and printers had been stacked in a row across the main altar along with vases filled with tastefully arranged flowers identified by donor. A collective memorial tablet (*ihai*) stood in the middle of the altar flanked by offering trays stacked with oranges and packaged goods. Incense wafted from an urn placed in front of the altar.³¹

The 30-minute mortuary rite began at 1:00 p.m. with the priest intoning the names of all the owners whose equipment was being memorialized. Afterwards he chanted a sutra. Rambelli notes in this connection that, '[e]specially in contemporary Japan, [...] [t]he use of sutras is often considered simply as an activity defined as *arigatai*, a term meaning something valuable, blessed, edifying, uplifting – something to be appreciated and thankful for'. Like the staging of the computer *kuyō* itself, the chanting of sutras functions as a 'liturgical implement' employed to create a 'Buddhist' ambience (Rambelli 2015: 24).

Following the service, the ritually marked computers were removed by the Banshō-ji staff to a recycling centre, where their component parts were separated out. Two years earlier, Nagoya had instituted a very strict recycling programme that required homeowners to separate household waste into several categories. Computer and electronic devices were to be collected once a month, but persons wanting to dispose of them first needed to notify the city hall and obtain a certificate of permission. Many homeowners felt this to be an inconvenient system. Banshō-ji stepped in to provide discommoded residents a practical and pragmatic service in the form of mortuary rites for their electronic commodities. For a ¥1,000 (approx. €9) memorial fee, the temple staged a *kuyō*, obtained the permits, and oversaw

30 <http://www.allonrobots.com/karakuri-ningyo.html>, accessed 25 July 2015. The different functions performed by the dolls include archery and serving tea.

31 Images of the computer *kuyō* at Banshō-ji, held in May 2002, can be found at <http://pc.watch.impress.co.jp/docs/2002/0513/osu.htm>, accessed 25 July 2015.

the recycling process. Computer users were able to pay their respects to their 'electric brains', and Banshō-ji was able to underscore the resilience and relevance of Buddhist funerary rituals in a highly technologized society.³²

In a recent article, Rambelli demonstrates how Japanese Buddhism incorporates and promotes technological developments, such as the low-tech 'robot monk' of Hōtoku-ji (Kakogawa City, Hyōgo Prefecture) and the multilingual, multi-denominational 'robo-priest' at a Yokohama funeral chapel. Personal computers can also be used to register with websites, such as Netto Nōkotsudō (Internet Crypt), that provide users images of their household's ancestral memorial tablets (*ihai*) accompanied by recorded sutra chanting, and also slide shows of their deceased relatives (Rambelli 2015: 15-16). The intimate, familial, and otherworldly connections enabled by the personal computer have imbued that device – along with personal robots, most of which can access the Internet – with especially profound signification, thus warranting their own *ihai* and special funerary ritual and memorialization.

Compare Banshō-ji's and Kōfuku-ji's communitarian ceremony to the distinctly non-religious, non-aestheticized method of disposing Roomba, the vacuum cleaner robot made by iRobot, an American robotics firm. On its website, ProTech Robotics, a leading global supplier of parts and accessories for Roomba, the company posts the following instructions to individual owners:

How to 'Green' Ownership of a Roomba or a Scooba.

We all love our roombas and scoobas and would never consider going back to a[n] upright vacuum or a mop and wringer. So how do we live responsibly, green and own a robotic appliance? The average roomba/scooba uses 7-9 lbs of plastics, 1lb of various metals, holds approximately 60ft of wiring and runs on a rechargeable NiMH, NiCD or Li-ion battery cells pack. The batteries used in a roomba or scooba are usually nickel-cadmium (nicad), lithium ion, or nickel-metal-hydride (NiMH). Nicads are good batteries, but the cadmium in them is toxic. [...] Customers are welcome to ship in their old Roomba Scooba or Robotic Appliance to us for responsible disposal. We will recycle all the metals, copper and circuitry and dispose of the non-recyclable parts, components and materials in accordance with our local recycling laws and county ordinances.³³

32 <http://www.banshoji.or.jp/> and <http://pc.watch.impress.co.jp/docs/2002/0513/osu.htm>, accessed 25 July 2015.

33 https://www.protechrobotics.com/environmentally_friendly.php, accessed 25 July 2015.

One robotics company, Innvo Labs, a privately owned Chinese company based in Hong Kong and Nevada, has pursued the possibility of the reincarnation or re-embodiment of its robots. The robot in question is PLEO (Personal Life Enhancing Organism), a robo-dinosaur designed to emulate the appearance and (imagined) behaviour of a week-old baby *Camarasaurus*. The latest iteration, the PLEO rb (for 'reborn'), was released in December 2011. Like the original PLEO, the incarnated robo-dinosaur is popular in Japan, where it is distributed by Brulé, Inc.

PLEO rb is similar to the original PLEO: 48 centimetres long, 18 centimetres tall, and 1.6 kilograms in weight. However, no two of the reborn units are exactly alike. Each PLEO rb comes with randomly selected eyeballs, eyelids, and eye-shadow colours. Their skins are slightly different hues of green, although a special line of pink and blue PLEO rb were released in late 2012, ostensibly to target girls and boys (and in the process reinforce colour-based sexism). PLEO rb has more senses than its ancestor. It is animated by artificial intelligence, which enables the robo-dinosaur to learn from its human companions and from other PLEO over a life cycle ranging from birth to adolescence. Moreover, this information is remembered, allowing a given PLEO rb to develop a personality, guiding its future behaviour and interactions with its environment.

Innvo Labs employs the theme of reincarnation. Not only does PLEO rb represent the rebirth of an early model, but a malfunctioning PLEO rb can be reincarnated. The company instituted a new programme aimed at softening the blow of the loss of a beloved robo-dinosaur called the PLEO Reincarnation Program. If PLEO rb's human companions find that their robo-pet has developed a critical hardware problem after the 90-day warranty period, they can exchange it for another one at a reduced price. The unique part of the programme is that the PLEO rb's learnings will be uploaded into the new unit, effectively transporting the old robo-pet's personality into its body reincarnate.³⁴

The computer memorial service at Bānshō-ji and the AIBO funeral at Kōfuku-ji strongly underscore what scholars of Japanese Buddhism have pointed out: that religion and religious organizations are, in part, a service industry; they provide services that adapt and respond to specific human needs and desires. These services can focus on fairly esoteric and spiritual needs, or they can provide very tangible rewards and benefits, or all of the above. In the case of Bānshō-ji and Kōfuku-ji, persons who entered their

34 <http://xn--zcka2ggcajgi.com/articles/10>, accessed 25 July 2015; http://www.PLEOworld.com/PLEO_rb/eng/lifeform.php, accessed 25 July 2015.

personal computers and AIBO in the mass *kuyō* were able to eulogize and memorialize technological entities of profound personal significance *and* to take advantage of the associated recycling and, in the case of AIBO, ‘organ’ donation services. The temples gain income, media exposure along with an updated reputation, and a new clientele.

Another religious connection to recycling is suggested by the PLEO Reincarnation Program, although it has no explicit connection to religious practices. There is a large and complex body of literature on the concepts of rebirth and reincarnation in Japanese Buddhism, both folk and institutional, coverage of which is beyond the scope of this chapter. Many scholars point out key differences between reincarnation and rebirth. Reincarnation, which is central to Hinduism, refers to the transmigration of one’s eternal self or immortal soul to another body or fleshly host. The level of reincarnation, whether as a human or non-human animal, depends on the karma accumulated over the lifetime of the deceased. Buddhists refer instead to rebirth, defined as the continuity or consolidation into different forms of one’s physical and mental energies after death. The concept of reincarnation does not fit within the Buddhist Law of Impermanence, which teaches that one’s current self is transient and that there is no immortal soul that can transmigrate to another body.

However, as religion scholar Horie Norichika reports, based on his ethnographic research, since the 1980s many Japanese who identify as Buddhists express a belief in reincarnation as a means of continued individual or personal growth and improvement. They believe that reincarnation allows them to fulfil a mission not accomplished in this (or a single) lifetime. Such ideas are antithetical to the traditional Buddhist view of reincarnation as a source of egoistic suffering, and represent the emergence of a ‘new age’ Buddhism (Horie 2014). In this connection, anthropologist Fabienne Duteil-Ogata also documents how new technologies, such as ‘close-at-hand cinerary objects’ (*temoto kuyōhin*) consisting of small accessories made from the ashes of the cremated deceased, and environmentally friendly ‘virtual graves’ or ‘grave computers’ (*dennōhaka*, lit. ‘electric-brain graves’), have introduced funerary forms that focus on living individuals: ‘emotional bonds replace the rules of affiliation’ (Duteil-Ogata 2015: 234-41).

Mortuary rituals that commemorate and memorialize one’s personal belongings, including computers and robots, also highlight the tenacity of the animistic thinking central to Shinto coupled with the adaptability of Buddhist rituals. Exemplified by Kōfuku-ji’s AIBO *kuyō*, the latter includes the re-embodiment of robots and signals the emergence among Japanese of a post-humanist Buddhism in which reincarnation is understood as a means of extending the non-transient self or soul in order to complete a yet

unrealized mission in this life – a mission that, if Innovation 25 prevails, will be facilitated by robots of all stripes. It is not implausible to imagine that, in the not too distant future, human-robot burials will prove to be as popular as human-animal pet funerals are becoming today.

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Art and Consumption in Post-Bubble Japan

From Postmodern Irony to Shared Engagement

Gunhild Borggreen

Cwiertka, Katarzyna J. & Ewa Machotka (eds), *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan: A Transdisciplinary Perspective*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018

DOI: 10.5117/9789462980631/CH08

Abstract

This chapter examines visual art as a reflection of, or response to, socio-political issues in Japan. Departing from the notion of ‘the artist as ethnographer’, the chapter discusses a number of artworks and art projects created in Japan from the 1990s onwards, pointing out how they engage with consumption in everyday life from an ethnographic perspective. The examples illustrate how the transformation from the third to the fourth stage of consumer society, as suggested by the sociologist Miura Atsushi, is reflected in three different modes of consumption within contemporary art. The examples show how art may reflect overall tendencies concerning the way in which consumption contributes to the formation of social patterns and behaviour in contemporary Japanese society.

Keywords: consumer behaviour, art as commodity, artist as ethnographer, popular culture, artistic altruism, local communities

Introduction: Japan as consumer society

In the post-war era, much of Japan’s national identity has been characterized by how well the country did economically in the global arena. Since the 1960s, the Japanese economy developed with remarkable speed, becoming the world’s second-largest economy after the USA, and during the years of the economic boom, in the 1970s and 1980s, the Japanese population moved from being a nation of savers to a nation of spenders. The rapid expansion

of mass consumption in the post-war era brought about many social and cultural changes to Japanese society. While house prices in urban areas, especially around Tokyo, rocketed during the bubble economy, still more types of consumption emerged, exposing burgeoning affluence – from cars and electronics to luxury fashion design and brands, and overseas travel. Consumption and the act of spending money became an indicator of the nation's success, and mass consumption was sustained by other traits that characterized post-war Japan: a large domestic market and good infrastructure of communication, distribution, and information (Clammer 1997: 6). Even in the post-bubble period of economic recession, the domestic consumer market seemed to thrive as a means of keeping a dynamic economy going, despite the high rates of unemployment, the expanding gap between social stratifications in Japanese society, and the financial challenges confronting local communities in the northern part of Japan in the wake of the triple disaster of the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown in 2011.

Indeed, mass consumption has become such a significant trait of post-war Japan that a number of sociologists, anthropologists, and ethnographers focus in their research on the ways in which the manufacture, exchange, and consumption of material objects, as well as the cultural codes and values they embody, contribute to the formation of social patterns and behaviour in contemporary Japanese society. This includes giving attention to how Western consumer goods and lifestyles were domesticated by Japanese consumers as Japan moved from the periphery to the core of the world economy during the 1980s (Tobin 1992). Sociologists examine urbanization as a major force behind the development of mass consumption, as well as how consumption relates to social stratification, generational variations, and gender (Clammer 1997; McCreery 2000). Others explore the role of consumption in media and advertising practices in Japan as a part of individuals' self-reflection and identity formation, or investigate how consumption influences modes of body manipulation through dreams and desires created by fashion and beauty industries (Skov and Moeran 1995; Miller 2006). Mass consumption is often closely associated with popular culture and includes perspectives on commercialized fan culture and celebrity aspiration as well as studies of the impact of entertainment, leisure, and the tourism industries (Kelly 2004; Linhart and Frühstück 1998; Toyota 2009).

Lining up an overview of consumption patterns in Japanese society, sociologist Miura Atsushi (2014) identifies four stages of consumer society since the early twentieth century, each spanning about three decades. The first stage, from 1912 to 1942, signified the rise of modern consumer society in the wake of the Sino-Japanese war (1894-1895) and the Russo-Japanese war

(1904-1905), and the booming world economy following the First World War. This stage was characterized by a growing population in Japan's big cities, especially Tokyo, and the advent of modern, Westernized lifestyles, including clothes, food, and electrical appliances, as well as the development and growth of mass media (especially radio) and the entertainment industry. Miura defines the second-stage consumer society as lasting from 1945 to the mid-1970s, and it was characterized by the rise of the nuclear family in urban areas, which resulted in a boom in the housing industry, as well as in the production of other items that were advertised as improvements for modern family life. The third stage occurred around the time of the oil crisis in the early 1970s, and continued to around 2005. During this period, the annual economic growth rate decreased, even during the 'bubble' economy of the late 1980s, and Miura explains this as being the result of a general shift from family-oriented consumption to individual consumption. Many consumer products in the third stage no longer simply fulfilled the desire for bigger versions of the same products (larger cars, larger televisions), but catered to individuals with taste and sophistication by focusing on quality and luxury.

The 1980s saw a number of new concepts that signified social change: *shinjinrui*, 'the new people' or 'the new humans', had been born in the 1960s and would become adults at the time when political and activist movements in Japan had vanished, and the generation was directed instead towards consumerism (Miura 2014: 38). More importantly, consumption no longer took the form of mass consumption, where everyone sought the same type of products, but had become individualized and was thereby promoted as personalized, creative consumption, in which each consumer could create their own unique identity through the purchase of specific brands and luxury goods, particularly in fashion and design. The third-stage consumer society is characterized by an individualized pursuit of 'happiness' through consumption. The flipside of this was an increase in the number of people who felt isolated and alone; many people lost their jobs during the free-market policies, and 1998 was the year in which a surge in suicide numbers in Japan started (a surge that still continues) (*ibid.*: 19).

It is, in part, these contradictions between individualized luxury and excessive consumption on the one hand and a sense of loss and spiritual emptiness on the other that accelerated what Miura identifies as 'a new model of consumerism'. This new model, as a fourth stage of consumer society, focuses on reversing the individualistic tendencies and rebuilding connections among people (*ibid.*: 20). The disastrous events of the Kobe earthquake and the sarin gas attack in 1995, as well as those of the triple disaster of March 2011, spurred a wave of volunteer and NPO (non-profit

organization) engagement in helping victims and rebuilding local communities. Miura presents a number of significant changes that took place in Japanese society in the early years of the new millennium, which formed part of consumer society's transformation from the third stage to the fourth stage: luxury brand names were exchanged for the simple and the casual, and the craze for a Western, urban, and individualistic lifestyle shifted more towards a focus on the local, regional, and decentralized organization of everyday life. There is less emphasis on goods and more focus on services, and a general move from self-oriented and egoistic behaviour towards society-oriented and altruistic interaction. According to Miura, Japanese society in the first decade of the twenty-first century exhibits a general tendency away from possessiveness towards sharing (ibid.: 129).

Miura recognizes that the four stages of consumer behaviour do not replace each other, but rather make up additional layers of already existing patterns. For the same reason, it can also be doubted how widespread Miura's rather optimistic reading of a new model of consumerism in Japanese society actually is, or how effective it may be in terms of changing the economic structures of late-capitalist Japan. However, as the following analysis will show, there are a number of commonalities between tendencies on the art scene and Miura's overview of sociological trajectories. Many of the artists from the 1990s continue their aesthetic practices today, but a number of young artists have formulated alternative art forms and practices that align with Miura's observations concerning social-oriented behaviour and attitudes of sharing.

The artist as ethnographer

The reason for me to dwell somewhat on anthropological and sociological perspectives on consumption is that art is a part of the broader society and plays an important role in the realm of consumption. Not only are art objects produced and exchanged as consumer goods; more importantly, artworks and artistic practices can be seen as manifestations of ethnographic encounters. When artists address the topic of consumption, they do so because they themselves are part of a society of ubiquitous consumption, and because artists, as many other members of the community, have an interest in registering and interpreting phenomena that take place in the surrounding society. Artists have the skills to apply the aesthetic medium of art to communicate such interpretations to others. By doing so, the artist challenges the notion of *l'art pour l'art*, art for art's sake, in which a modernist understanding of aesthetic value comprises a closed circuit that refers

to art itself as the standard of aesthetic judgement. Many artists use art as a means to raise attention to socio-political issues in an everyday context, including those connected with consumption. As I will point out, the shift from individualized and brand-name consumption patterns towards community-based and shared lifestyles, as outlined by Miura Atsushi, is a tendency that can be observed within the contemporary art scene of Japan. Artworks and artistic practices reflect the changes in society and influence the way in which people live their everyday life.

The methodological framing of my approach is related to the crossover between art and everyday life that draws upon art theories related to anthropology. From the 1990s onwards, a number of artists and art critics on the international art scene have begun to theorize art as an ethnographic practice, in which artists' involvement with social issues provides not only new aesthetic approaches, but also new critical insights into the culture of everyday life. Discussions of the artist as ethnographer in contemporary art may be traced back to art theorist Hal Foster, who theorizes the complex interaction between anthropology and art in his *The Return of the Real* from 1996. According to Foster, the emergence of the ethnographic turn in contemporary art evolves around the issue of authenticity and reflexivity. Foster identifies a mutual state of 'envy' between anthropologists and artists from the 1980s onwards: the anthropologist longed to become a 'self-aware reader of *culture understood as text*', while artists began applying methods of fieldwork inspired by ethnographic practices (Foster 1996: 180; emphasis in original).

Korean American art critic Miwon Kwon identifies similar discussions concerning reflexivity in critical-art projects during the era of the 'politics of representation' in the 1990s. This was also a period in which contemporary art from regions outside of mainstream Western art circles, such as Japan, India, South Korea, and China, began receiving widespread interest and acclaim on the international art scene, and the ethnographic method of participant observation seemed to offer an opportunity for experience as well as interpretation for many artists (Kwon 2000: 75). In their article on art and ethnography, artist and ethnographer Larissa Hjorth and art historian Kristen Sharp describe contemporary art practices that focus upon socially engaged interventions and privilege collaboration and participation as an echo of the counter-artefact and political philosophies of many art movements in the 1960s. While collective art activities aim to engage local communities and non-artist participation, such public engagements primarily seek aesthetic and sociocultural reflection about the changing environment, and are not necessarily focused on a specific political outcome (Hjorth and Sharp 2014: 133).

Mapping the large number of artworks and art projects created in Japan from the 1990s onwards, one finds many examples of works that engage with consumption in everyday life from an ethnographic perspective. The artworks selected for this chapter have been chosen to highlight the three different ways in which consumption is reflected in contemporary art. These three modes follow the outlines of the transformation from the third to the fourth stage of consumer society as suggested by Miura above. The first mode contains artworks in which representations of consumer-related products, symbols, and configurations are central; the second mode features works that become consumer products themselves; and the third mode contains examples of art projects connected to altruism and engagement with the social concerns of local communities.

Representations of consumption

When the Japanese contemporary artist Morimura Yasumasa in 1991 produced the artwork *Elder Sister*, it became an instant success on the international art scene. The artwork displays the ideal Japanese luxury consumer of the late 1980s: an elegant, slender woman, probably in her thirties, posing in front of a bright blue backdrop. Her made-up face is shown in profile, and her hair is tied up. She is dressed in a Louis Vuitton suit and matching high-heeled shoes, and she wears multiple and excessive pearl necklaces and gold chains around her neck. She has a Gucci handbag on one shoulder, and is holding a Louis Vuitton umbrella, while the corner of a Hermès scarf flows from her handbag, flashing a glimpse of some of the most famous luxury fashion brands known to Japanese women in the late 1980s. The artwork *Elder Sister* is widely understood as a parody: the model in the photo is the artist Morimura Yasumasa himself, who is cross-dressed in an exaggerated display of luxury fashion brands and expensive jewellery, providing what Jennifer Robertson has called a binary construction of enigmatic presentism (Robertson 2009: 18). The female figure is not a 'real' woman, but an imaginary and constructed persona who carries signs of wealth that could be forgeries and cheap copies of designer clothes and jewellery, thus alluding to the notion of counterfeit goods as something produced in Asia. While the figure appears to be preoccupied by (or posing for) something outside of the frame, the plain blue background of the image offers no indication of space or context and seems to point to 'nowhere', in a thinly disguised, tongue-in-cheek, postmodernist ironic comment on the pursuit of 'happiness' through consumption.

Figure 8.1 Morimura Yasumasa, *Elder Sister* (1991)



Chromogenic print on canvas, 78 ¾ x 47 ¼ inches (200 x 120 cm). Collection San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Gift of Vicky and Ken Logan. Photograph by Katherine Du Tiel. Photograph courtesy of San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. © Morimura Yasumasa. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York

In her photographic work, the artist Yanagi Miwa features the female figure within the physical and architectural environments of consumption: the shopping arcade and the department store. Yanagi's large-scale photographs from the early and mid-1990s all depict the lift girl as the main character: the generic female figure who functions as an elevator guide or service provider in department stores. The figure of the elevator girl is highly symbolic of consumer society, because she is embedded through body and clothes in the brand and marketing strategies of corporate capitalism, and she literally points out the abundance of consumer goods to the customer. Moreover, in the midst of the halls of consumption, the elevator girl as a figure is herself an object of visual pleasure to be looked at and consumed. This is clear in the work *Annaijō no heya 1F* (Elevator girl house 1F) from the series 'Erebētā gāru' from 1997, in which some of the elevator girls are placed behind the glass of a showcase window as a literal representation of a display.¹

The environment depicted in Yanagi's photographic representation is strange and surreal, because the space is populated only by the elevator girls and devoid of other people. The spatial perspective is composed of an exaggerated vanishing point in each of the two parts, which leads the spectator's gaze into a void of either pitch-blackness or extreme light. Furthermore, the groups of women are strangely out of context as they stand in the showcase windows like mannequin dolls, or sit and lie on the floor of the moving walkway (Herbsreuth 2004: 17). There seems to be no interaction or communication among them, which also hints at the sentiments of social isolation and loneliness that became a significant element in Japanese society during the post-bubble years.

The female figures in the artworks of both Morimura and Yanagi are related to consumption in different ways, but they share the characteristics of elegant, sophisticated women who are at the same time connected to exaggeration or excess: too many pearls and golden necklaces, or too many flowers and clone-like women in a narrow, claustrophobic, and endless space. Such modes of representation may be understood as ironic or critical by the way in which the exaggerations highlight to the viewer things that are assumed to be ordinary.

The works also visualize a discourse identified by anthropologists Jan Bardsley and Hirakawa Hiroko concerning Japanese women's consumption habits (Bardsley and Hirakawa 2005). The discourse on styles of shopping links back to the ideal of a 'good wife, wise mother', who would practise frugality and sacrifice her own personal aspirations for the sake of the

1 An image of this work can be found at <http://www.ntticc.or.jp/en/archive/works/elevator-girl-house-1f/>, accessed 11 May 2017.

family economy. During the 1990s, this had changed, and Western fashion brands became part of an imagined space for creating a reassuring individualized identity as a global cosmopolitan woman with an upper-class, almost aristocratic, sophistication. In their analyses of 'bad girls' in luxury-brand clothing as represented in various television dramas, essayistic writing, and fashion guides during the 1990s, Bardsley and Hirakawa note a significant clash between the idea of the sophisticated and refined consumption of luxury brands as part of an elite lifestyle on the one hand, and the excessive and distasteful consumption practised by crowds of young 'spectacularly unqualified' shoppers on the other (ibid.: 116).

The notion of art objects as economic investments or as symbols of a luxury lifestyle coincided with international attention being paid to contemporary Japanese art in the 1990s, and many private collectors in Japan began investing in works by Japanese artists to supplement their collections of internationally acclaimed Western artists. In other words: for many artists in Japan, the theme of consumption was not only a topic for the content of their work, but also became an issue for their own personal economy. This leads us to the second mode of art practices that address the relationship between art and consumption, namely artists who in their work demonstrate how artworks become part of the consumption system itself.

Art as consumption

When the artist Murakami Takashi invented his character Mr DOB in the early 1990s, he was condensing a number of elements from popular culture and mass consumption. In one of the versions of Mr DOB, seen on the painting titled *And Then, And Then And Then And Then And Then* from 1996, the figure bears some resemblance to Disney's Mickey Mouse or the blue robot cat Doraemon.²

In other versions, where the figure has a three-dimensional form, Mr DOB resembles an anthropomorphized cartoon animal with a large head and large ears, a small, round, blue body with a red bowtie, and white hands and feet featuring three fingers or toes. The bodily proportions have baby-like characteristics (a large head and a small body); the face of Mr DOB has a

² Murakami Takashi's artwork *And Then, And Then And Then And Then And Then* (1996) is reproduced in Kaikai Kiki (2001: 33). The work was produced by Maeda Takeshi, Maeda Hiroshi, Hirata Yoshikazu, Fujiwara Izumi, and Doi Mayuko, and the materials used were acrylic on canvas mounted on board.

pair of eyes (sometimes small, at other times large), a small, round nose, and a small mouth, while the ears are large and round with the letters D and B printed in white on blue. The round face itself makes up the outlines of the letter O. Mr DOB aligns with a number of characters in the Japanese pop culture history, of which Hello Kitty is a familiar example for many. An anthropomorphized kitten with a round head, small eyes, and no mouth, invented by product company Sanrio in 1974, Hello Kitty epitomizes the notion of *kawaii* (cute) in consumerism in Japan.

Murakami Takashi is a member of the new generation of artists who grew up during the 1980s and were identified as part of the *shinjinrui*, 'the new people' or 'the new breed'. The notion of affluence among a growing middle class and the rise of mass consumption during the 1980s and 1990s are reflected in the rise of the Neo-Pop (*neopoppu*) movement, in which young generations of artists such as Nakahara Kōdai, Yanobe Kenji, and Murakami Takashi offered new perspectives on the relationship between art and consumption. The *shinjinrui* generation represents some of the sociocultural transformations of the period of the 1990s, in which society in general moved towards individualized consumerism and lack of political engagement. Mr DOB is only one of many characters developed by Murakami that transgresses the boundaries between fine art and mass-produced popular culture, not only through the visual references to manga and anime culture, but also in the style and distribution of the figure. Versions of Mr DOB exist in which he is depicted using thin black outlines and uniform areas of colour in the manner of the mass-produced graphic designs used in advertising, while other versions are available for use with silk screen technology, which allows many copies of the same image to be produced. Mr DOB is an example of convergence culture, where the same figure is transferred from one type of medium to another: from silk screen prints to one-of-a-kind *Nihonga* style painting, and further to a giant balloon or a three-dimensional sculpture made of FRP resin and fibreglass and painted with acrylic paint. As a member of the *otaku* (geek or nerd) youth culture, which provides the primary consumers of manga, anime, and game products, Murakami set out to challenge the conventions and cultural systems of *otaku* communities and *dōjinshi* (fan-driven magazines) environments, for example by modifying the aesthetics of the collectable, small-size figurines and creating life-size figures, thus positioning these characters as disturbingly similar to sex dolls (Murakami 2001: 138).

Not only did Murakami infiltrate the manga and anime fan communities with his art, he also managed to throw popular culture into the realms of fine art. While some of his activities are framed as provocations of the

otaku culture, most of Murakami's strategies do not poke fun at luxury consumption patterns in the same way as Morimura Yasumasa's *Elder Sister* discussed above. Murakami seems more attuned towards the specific art market. Art has always been an object of trade and economic exchange, and the importance of this to the professional artist as one of the pillars of the vocation should not be underestimated. The rise of private-art collectors and galleries, as well as public museums, in the late nineteenth century saw the development of a commercial art market with art fairs and auction houses, and an increasingly large number of professionals engaged in handling the art objects: art dealers, art consultants, art journalists, art critics, museum curators, art gallery directors, and many more. However, the somewhat romanticized notion that the artist should be detached from any commercial interest and be driven primarily by his or her personal aesthetic conceptions still prevails – as if economic interest somehow contaminates the 'pureness' of artistic expression.

Murakami Takashi challenged this notion by talking openly about his goal of obtaining economic as well as artistic success. Taking the concept from the 1960s' pop-art hero Andy Warhol, Murakami established an art factory in 1996 (first named Hiropon Factory and later refashioned as the multinational company Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd), which hires people to produce his artworks under careful guidance, and also to manage all business aspects of art production and sales, such as planning gallery shows and exhibitions, organizing promotion and advertising, copyright issues and translations, film and television production, and many other activities (Rothkopf 2007: 149). In line with the individualized pursuit of pleasure through consumption of luxury and high-fashion items, Murakami Takashi developed collaborations with fashion brands such as Louis Vuitton and Issey Miyake, and exhibited his artworks in places engulfed in myths of affluence and luxury such as the Versailles palace in France (2010) and Qatar Museums in Doha in Qatar (2012). As art critic Scott Rothkopf argues, capitalism's absorption of art makes it increasingly difficult to define the ontological status of art by morally judging its position in the art/commerce divide. In his words, 'Murakami has managed to develop a practice that cannot be comfortably accommodated within art's otherwise infinitely elastic frame' (ibid.: 157). Considering the crossover between art and consumption, Murakami Takashi demonstrates more than anyone the way in which art can be co-opted for branding purposes and how the art market succumbs to broader economic systems with regard to investment strategies and sponsorships (ibid.: 145).

Numerous art critics are sceptical towards Murakami's blurring of artistic and commercial interests in his entrepreneurship, and even the artist

himself admits there's a danger of compromising his reputation as an artist (Frederick 2003: 60). However, Murakami is not the only contemporary artist to benefit from selling merchandise licensed with the signature figure or style of the artist. Many other contemporary artists in Japan (and elsewhere) have collaborated with brand names in fashion, communications, and other consumer goods companies to enhance their cultural as well as their economic value. One notable example is Kusama Yayoi, an artist who has been active since the late 1950s, and who has recently ventured into artistic collaborations with companies such as Louis Vuitton, Coca Cola, and the Japanese telecompany KDDI (Jørgensen, Laurberg, and Holm 2015: 112-13). In 2012, the flagship store of Louis Vuitton on Fifth Avenue in New York covered the entire surface of the building with black polka dots (Kusama's signature theme), and featured a window display of organic-looking, red-coloured oblong protuberances covered in white polka dots. In the midst of this entanglement was an exact copy of Kusama herself, complete with polka-dot dress, orange wig, and sun glasses, carrying a Louis Vuitton handbag with Kusama polka-dot design.

In many ways, Kusama preceded Murakami Takashi in terms of commercial activities, although her practices have often been interpreted within the realm of avant-garde critique, as when she addressed the issue of the commodification of art by selling mirror balls for US\$2 (approx. €2.07) each during her intervention *Narcissus Garden* at the Venice International Art Biennale in 1966 (Munroe 1989: 28). Kusama had not received an official invitation to exhibit at the Biennale, but brought more than a thousand plastic balls covered with silver foil and spread them out in an outdoor space between the pavilions. Kusama herself was dressed in a golden kimono, and she interacted with the people passing by and handed over mirror balls to those who wanted to buy one. The silver foil had a mirror effect, meaning that individuals would see a distorted reflection of themselves on the surface of the ball. Together, all the balls in this *Narcissus Garden* became a symbol of the strong, self-perpetuating powers of the commercial art market, as they all reflected and referred to each other.

Art historian Midori Yoshimoto argues that Kusama's happening aimed to undermine the power structures of the art market at the Venice Biennale, and that her project highlighted 'the narcissism that lies in the act of art collecting, equating it with money, one of the symbols of vanity' (Yoshimoto 2005: 68). Ultimately, the Biennale authorities asked Kusama to pack up her remaining mirror balls and leave the Biennale, but at that point she had already made headlines in the art media that covered the Biennale events (Yoshimoto 2005: 69).

Figure 8.2 Kusama hands a mirror ball to a member of the audienceKusama Yayoi, *Narcissus Garden* (1966), 33th Venice Biennale, Italy. © YAYOI KUSAMA

Community-based consumption

If art practices of artists such as Murakami Takashi and Kusama Yayoi epitomize the consumerist tendencies of possessiveness and self-oriented lifestyles that emerged during the 1990s, new forms of art projects and aesthetic strategies appeared around the turn of the millennium that are more society-oriented and altruistic in nature. An example of this is the Kansai-based artist Date Nobuaki, who engages in aspects of consumption on many levels.

His artwork *Terayamake ukurere* (The Terayama house ukulele) from 2000 is a ukulele constructed by Date in close collaboration with Mr Terayama, who was to demolish the house in which he grew up in the city of Nagaokakyō in Kyoto Prefecture, and to build a new one instead.³ The ukulele looks like an ordinary ukulele in its shape and function, but the material from which it is constructed differs from that used in a conventional musical instrument: it is made of wood retrieved from Mr Terayama's house, which was demolished due to old age. During dialogues between the artist and the house owner, it was decided to use the *hashira* (pillar) in

3 This artwork was reproduced in Date (2004, no pagination), Catalogue no. 3. The artist used wood from pillars in Mr Terayama's former house.

the living room of the old house to create the front and back of the body of the ukulele. Mr Terayama recounts how, as a child, he used to put stickers on the pillar next to the TV, and drew and scribbled on it, and that the stickers reflected the popular culture of the early 1970s. For example, the vertical sticker of a comic character named Gakubei on the right-hand side of the front of the ukulele was part of a collection of 100 different stickers that were included in the Morinaga Chocobei chocolate bar packages in 1974. The ukulele made by Date thus comes to embody the material of a vanished building as well as the memory of the childhood cultural practice of collecting stickers with funny characters in chocolate packages. For Date, the building itself is 'a vessel filled with people's lives', and the process of what he calls 'ukulele-ization' (*ukurere-ka*) 'is just an act of transforming the figure of the vessel' (Date 2004).

After its completion, the ukulele was presented to the former house owner with the traces and residue of everyday life inscribed within the actual materiality of the musical instrument. The ukulele seems to have induced a performative as well as a sonic experience, because the receiver of Date's ukulele reports that he has taken up learning to play the ukulele and, in addition, a famous Hawaiian ukulele player, Mr Ōta, has autographed the front of the instrument (*ibid.*). The ukulele as a material object has visual and sensuous references to a specific place, and the creation of the ukulele represents both a shared process of production as well as an altruistic act on the part of the artist.

This is only one of many ukuleles that Date Nobuaki has created since he began the project in 2000. In several cases, the ukuleles are made of materials derived from private homes, and in other cases the artist collects material from public buildings, such as schools, a welfare house, a bar, or a *sentō* (communal bath house). The ukulele becomes an object to preserve memories from buildings that are to be torn down, and thereby points to issues related to gentrification processes in urban areas and consumption in the real-estate market, because many houses in Japan are not made to last for more than one generation. Many of the public institutions housed in demolished buildings have played important roles in the local community, such as the communal bath house or the school, and people who see the ukulele later on report that they remember the physical space of these sites as well as the social interactions that took place within them. The production of ukuleles is a process of sharing narratives and memories from specific sites in local communities, and the consumption system is based on an exchange of material objects and services between the artist and his audience: wood, textile, wall paper, and other objects from the demolished

house in return for a ukulele. Materials that are considered waste – and thus worthless in economic terms – are turned into cultural artefacts in the hands of the artist, and the act of handing the material back to the local community is an act of altruism.

Date's art project is an example of how some art practices follow the model of a fourth-stage consumer society by moving away from a strictly economy-based and self-centred form of consumption to a society-oriented exchange of other types of valuables, such as memory and a sense of community in the local neighbourhood. It is a kind of artistic altruism, because the project is a means to create appreciation and satisfaction among individuals and groups who have histories and memories linked to the site and the materiality involved.

The artist Nishiko ventured into a similar altruistic art project in 2011. Titled *Jishin o naosu purojekuto* (Repairing earthquake project), the project includes many processes and interactions, and can be divided into different phases. Nishiko was living in The Hague in Holland at the time of the 11 March earthquake and subsequent tsunami, and apparently felt an urge to return to Japan and engage in the recovery process (Takehisa 2012). In September 2011, Nishiko travelled to areas in the Tōhoku region, such as Higashi-Matsushima, Watari, and Ishinomaki, which had been affected by the tsunami, and undertook the task of finding objects that had been lost in the waves of water. Nishiko talked with inhabitants of the neighbourhood and listened to their stories about what they experienced during the tsunami, and initiated other activities that established personal relationships between the artist and people from the local community (Nishiko 2012). During this phase of creating relationships, Nishiko began to collect items in the debris that were broken, making sure that she only collected objects that were not claimed by others, and paying no attention to whether the object could be repaired or not. Nishiko established workshops at two different art events: the first workshop took place at the Arcus Project Ibaraki as a satellite studio programme related to the Yokohama Triennale 2011; a second workshop was held at the Contemporary Art Center (Mito Geijutsukan Gendai Bijutsu Sentā) at Art Tower Mito in 2012. At the second workshop, Nishiko set up an open studio in which she repaired some of the many objects she had collected. Having no prior experience of how to repair things made of different types of material, she received advice on such matters from visitors to the studio or from people she had met in the disaster areas. In the photo from Phase Two, parts of a broken, blue-and-white porcelain plate are visibly glued together, and missing fragments replaced by a white material.

Figure 8.3 Nishiko, *Jishin o naosu purojekuto* (Repairing earthquake project) (2012), object no. 201104



Photograph by Yamamoto Yūki. Photograph courtesy of Nishiko. © Nishiko

Thus, the signs of disaster are not erased or ignored, but treated as part of an everyday reality that needs mending. Similar to the ukuleles of Date Nobuaki's project, the objects of Nishiko's earthquake repair project become artefacts that embody memories of everyday experience and practical, tangible matters in ways that seem to be devoid of commercial interest.

With the help of photographer Yamamoto Yūki, Nishiko has created a photographic archive in which she records the objects on a neutral, grey background. This type of neutral registration of objects provides a sense of detachment that stands in contrast to the many emotional narratives of the tsunami catastrophe of 2011. More importantly, the photos and the objects lose their specific historical context and come to resemble an archive of archaeological remains that could have originated from any time, any place. This contradicts the notion of singularity concerning the 2011 disaster – not as a way of ignoring the significance of this specific event, but as a way of highlighting how 'disaster' is defined in the first place, and by whom. The 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami have been embraced as a form of 'consumption of the spectacle' through the enormous media coverage of it, and the way in which politicians and government institutions have capitalized on the emotional rhetoric of words such as *kizuna* (bound)

and *tsunagu* (to connect) as a way to promote national recovery (Samuels 2013). Nishiko's somewhat detached relationship to the artefacts of disaster, visualized in the aesthetic property of the photographic documentation, reflects her ethical concern of showing respect for those who live in the afflicted areas (Takehisa 2012: 128).

There are other examples of artists who engage in local communities through different types of values exchanges that defy conventional capitalist systems. For instance, the artist Katō Tsubasa built a large-scale 'lighthouse' construction from tsunami debris in the town of Iwaki and got the local inhabitants to help raise the structure by pulling on the ropes (*hiki-okosu*). In addition, there is also the artists' group Nadegata Instant Party, which organizes local festivals for volunteer supporters (Hattori 2015).

Another type of sharing can be seen in the recent formations of collective art groups in Japan. The artist collective as a social and aesthetic construction is not a new phenomenon, as testified by many examples, such as the avant-garde group MAVO, which was active in the 1920s, as well as artist groups such as Gutai, Neo Dadaism Organizers (Neo Dadaizumu Oruganaizāzu), Hi-Red Centre (Haireddo Sentā), and many others from the 1950s and 1960s. Recent groups, such as the Tokyo-based Chim↑Pom, formed in 2005, take up many of the aesthetic strategies of the avant-garde by organizing happenings in public spaces, as when Chim↑Pom performed the artistic intervention of adding an extra panel to the large mural painting by Okamoto Tarō at Shibuya station as a comment on the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant meltdown in 2011. Another group of young artists is Me, formed in 2012, and active in creating site-specific installations of great complexity at the leading art festivals in Japan, such as the Setouchi Art Triennale (Setouchi Kokusai Geijutsusai) in 2013 and the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale (Echigo-Tsumari Āto Toriennāre) in 2015. Creating and exploring new art forms as collective groups rather than individual artists challenges the ego-centred art production of the post-bubble era, in which artists such as Murakami Takashi and Kusama Yayoi became synonymous with brand names within art consumption. Sharing the authorship of artwork is another way of transforming the system of consumption from that of an individualized lifestyle to that of community-oriented, altruistic, and shared engagements.

Conclusion

The examples of artworks and artistic practices outlined above are in no way an exhaustive list of the variety of aesthetic approaches in the Japanese

contemporary art scene. The few examples are nevertheless significant, because they reflect some of the overall tendencies concerning the way in which consumption contributes to the formation of social patterns and behaviour in contemporary Japanese society. Artworks and artistic practices represent and reproduce the production, exchange, and consumption of material objects, and they reveal how exchange systems of economic and cultural values are closely connected and challenge the conventional distinction between 'pure art' and commercial interest.

Some of the artworks included in this chapter may have been motivated by political concerns or by a critical engagement with the way in which consumption affects society and everyday life. Others may not be addressing political change as such, but their artworks may still be seen as a mirror of consumption patterns and behaviour in the sociocultural realm. The point is that the artist acts as a kind of ethnographer, who observes and takes note of issues in everyday life, including those practices and representations that are connected to consumerism as one of the major paradigms in Japanese post-war society.

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The Fate of Landscape in Post-War Japanese Art and Visual Culture

Hayashi Michio

Cwiertka, Katarzyna J. & Ewa Machotka (eds), *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan: A Transdisciplinary Perspective*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018

DOI: 10.5117/9789462980631/CH09

Abstract

This chapter analyses the interconnections between three incidents that occurred almost simultaneously in the realm of contemporary art and visual culture around 1970: 1) the production of *A.K.A. Serial Killer*; 2) the rise of the Mono-ha movement in contemporary art practices; and 3) the innovative movement in photography, epitomized by *PROVOKE* magazine. In subsequent decades, these newly developed ways of artistic expression were effectively co-opted by consumer culture. The author argues that the high economic growth increasingly resulted in the commodification of the landscape. In the process, the landscape as an artistic genre began to exist as a symbol of itself, a simulacrum, onto which the viewer projected her/his nostalgic yearning for 'the real'.

Keywords: landscape (*fukei*), *PROVOKE*, Discover Japan campaign, Lee U-fan, Mono-ha movement, Karatani Kōjin, Sugimoto Hiroshi

A.K.A. Serial Killer and the extinction of landscape

In 1971, at the critical juncture in the history of post-war Japan when revolutionary political fervour began to lose its grip on the collective psyche, a left-wing movie director and theorist, Matsuda Masao, published an anthology of his essays, *Fūkei no shimetsu* (The extinction of landscape), whose title can alternatively be translated as 'the death of landscape'.¹ Several essays in

¹ A new edition of the book, with two additional essays by Matsuda and an extended commentary by Hirasawa Gō, was recently published by Kōshisha in 2013.

this anthology were inspired by his experience of making the film *A.K.A. Serial Killer*, which followed the story of a serial killer, Nagayama Norio, who was arrested by the police on 7 April 1969 after murdering four people, one by one, in four different cities in Japan: Tokyo, Kyoto, Hakodate, and Nagoya. To make the film, Matsuda and two other co-producers, Adachi Masao and Sasaki Mamoru, carefully traced Nagayama's path from Hokkaido to Tokyo – from his birthplace to the place of his arrest – with several unexpected detours en route; they then created a sequential montage of the footage taken in those locations – where he had lived, stayed, worked, or simply passed time – in order to recreate the story of his life.² By doing so, the producers tried to capture the clues to understand, even if only partially, the history and environment that had nurtured the infamous serial killer.

After travelling and filming extensively across Japan for the production of this film, Matsuda came to the curious conclusion that *fūkei* (landscape) in Japan – or, at least, what had been traditionally associated with the concept of *fūkei* – was now extinct. The film, in fact, eloquently testifies to the monotony or flatness of the landscapes that Nagayama witnessed in his life before carrying out his abominable acts. Reflecting on what they encountered, Matsuda stated:

Whether in the metropolitan area or the provinces, in 'Tokyo' or the 'hometown', there is now nothing but a homogenous landscape. In this way, we were unable to discover the 'hometown' that would have nurtured Nagayama Norio. What we saw was merely a little 'Tokyo' (Matsuda 1971: 12).

Matsuda's disillusionment in finding a 'little Tokyo' instead of Nagayama's 'hometown', or *furusato*, might be interpreted as a sign of the failure to find a causal connection between his actions and the environment in which he grew up. On the contrary, however, this failure to find Nagayama's 'hometown' inspired Matsuda to understand the situation from the inside out; that is, to find the cause/origin of the event in the very *absence* of the 'hometown' and, instead, in the 'homogenous landscape'. He suggests that this homogenization of the landscape in Japan proceeded steadily during the period of high economic

2 The exact roles that these co-producers played in relation to each other are not clear, but Adachi Masao is usually credited as its director while all three are credited as its producers. Judging from Matsuda's writing, however, they all travelled together to trace the footsteps of Nagayama and worked as a team, conceptually as well as practically, throughout the production of this film.

growth, as the network of the capital extended its reach to every corner of the country, and that the accelerated force of the capital systematically eradicated traditional semantics and physiognomies particular to the local landscape.

In other words, it is this flattening of the landscape or, simply put, the standardization of commodification, this steady wave of Tokyo-ization across the entire country, rather than the singular characteristics of his hometown, that Matsuda identified as a symptomatic manifestation of what underlies the Nagayama incident, and also what might be called the socio-political unconscious of the whole nation. Although singular in nature, Nagayama's personal history – growing up in a severely dysfunctional family with abusive siblings; constantly drifting from one place to another; repeated acts of theft in various places (the last of which was the theft of a pistol and bullets from the US base in Yokosuka); an attempted suicide, and so on – was not seen as a marker of the very uniqueness of his case, but rather as a sort of monadic channel through which structural problems of post-war Japanese society allegorically or twistedly expressed themselves. In Matsuda's interpretation, Nagayama's action was a symbolic, although terribly misdirected, attempt to break free from the suffocating (of course, liberating in some aspects) infiltration of the capital that had transformed not only the physical appearance, but also the collective mentality of the entire nation.

Matsuda's reading coincides well with the actual process by which Japan achieved its economic miracle in the post-war years. As Uchida Ryūzō (2002) demonstrated in his *Kokudo ron* (Theory of national land), the entire scheme of economic rejuvenation during those years centred on various development projects led by the government. Whether it be a civil-engineering project, an industrial development along the metropolitan coastlines, or a housing development in the suburbs, the land as real estate was always the foundational base, and therefore became the object of ardent speculations. Intensified by Japan's physical limitation of land, its price became the most stable index of the steady growth of the national economy and began to even acquire a mythical status; as the phrase *tochi shinwa* (land myth) plainly suggests, 'land' became the most dependable asset in Japan's volatile and erratic market. And as the banking system progressively began to rely on the anticipated increase of this asset, the entire national economy began to revolve around the land price as its ultimate risk hedge. In hindsight, this mythical status of land – as real estate – played a significant role in causing what would later become known as the 'bubble economy' of the late 1980s to the early 1990s. The bubble economy eventually burst and then shattered the collective confidence in the land price into pieces. However, during the period of high economic growth, real estate, as the most stable

commodity, was indeed the master driver of the Japanese economy and, as such, became the area in which the power of the capital and local cultural traditions bluntly collided with each other. The rapid transformation of the landscape Matsuda saw everywhere in Japan was nothing but an expression of this collision and the eventual victory of the force of the capital.

What most symbolized this total capitalization of the land during the period of high economic growth was the enormous, nationwide development plan that Tanaka Kakuei published in 1972, immediately before he became prime minister. This bestseller, *Nihon rettō kaizō ron* (Remodelling the Japanese archipelago), was a condensed manifesto of Tanaka's ideology and policy, which were themselves derived from the conventional policies of the Liberal Democratic Party (Jiyū Minshutō; hereafter LDP) during the post-war years, whose origin goes back at least to the National Overall Development Plan (Zenkoku Sōgō Kaihatsu Keikaku) of 1962 (Tanaka 1972; Uchida 2002: 188). Building upon the LDP's consistent emphasis on public-sector development projects, Tanaka first published a blueprint of his plan in 1968 in *Bungei Shunjū*, a large part of which was quickly integrated into the New Comprehensive National Development Plan (Shin Zenkoku Sōgō Kaihatsu Keikaku) announced by the government in the following year, when Tanaka served as the secretary-general of the LDP (Tanaka 1968; Uchida 2002: 190). In these publications, Tanaka adamantly insisted on the necessity to establish nationwide networks of high-speed railways and highways, so that the whole nation could function as an extended metropolis, organically connected as one large industrial-consumerist machine, as it were. By promoting this policy, Tanaka promised to minimize the economic disparity between the provinces and the urban centres and thereby, at the same time, to solve the problem of the over-congestion of people, goods, and information in cities such as Tokyo and Osaka. Needless to say, although Tanaka's ambitious plan was never fully completed as originally planned, this politico-economic scheme led to the rapid suburbanization, or 'Tokyo-ization', to borrow Matsuda's term, of the entire nation, and wiped out local cultural traditions in favour of a flat network of characterless landscapes.

***PROVOKE* and the Discover Japan campaign**

If Nagayama's serial shootings can be understood in line with Matsuda's reading as an allegorical manifestation of the internal contradiction of Japanese society at the time – its pursuit of economic prosperity and the concurrent destruction of the local-cultural landscape and its rich memories

– there existed a group of contemporary photographers and critics who also tried to tear the suffocating membrane of the capital through their own ‘shootings’. This group consisted of Nakahira Takuma (critic/photographer), Okada Takahiko (critic/poet), Takanashi Yutaka (photographer), Taki Kōji (critic/philosopher), and Moriyama Daidō (photographer) and operated around the short-lived, but now legendary, *PROVOKE* magazine that they published from 1968 to 1969. Through the aggressive, dynamic, and grainy images on the pages of this magazine, together with vigorously critical texts, they informed their readership of contemporary theories of representation, and outspokenly challenged the dominant style and ideology of photographic art of the time. For instance, they consistently tried to restore the sense of immediacy of the photographer’s contact with the world by accentuating, in print, the palpable traces of his existential presence and movement behind the camera. They pursued this effect of immediacy not only in the register of photographic style that was typically represented by their blurry, coarse, out-of-focus images (famously named *are-bure-boke* in Japanese), but also in the mode of distribution exemplified by the aggressive layout on the magazine’s pages – full-page spreads with no margins, high-contrast printing, and so on, which forced the reader to ‘touch’ the images with their own fingers. Behind this yearning for direct contact with reality lay anxiety about the wholesale transformation of ‘reality’ into simulated reality, or spectacle, forced by the capital and the process of commodification. In other words, as the keyword of Moriyama’s theory, *sakka* (fissure), suggests, by indexing the fragments of the unassimilated reality – be it an abject corner of a red-light district, or the barren no-man’s land of an undeveloped rural area, or the recently created landfills which were to be transformed into an industrial zone – they tried to puncture or breach the simulated seamlessness of the capitalist membrane with their photographic ‘shots’ and expose the logic of exclusion and oppression inherent in the capitalist system.

It is important to note in this regard that the *PROVOKE* aesthetics emerged in parallel with, or counter to, the increasing dominance of advertising agencies in the Japanese industry. The epoch-making advertising campaign in the history of post-war Japan was indeed staged by Dentsū (the largest agency in Japan, both then and now) around 1970 to promote the then financially struggling Japanese National Railways (Nihon Kokuyū Tetsudō). Ironically titled ‘Discover Japan’, this campaign primarily targeted young, single, female workers in urban centres, who were seen as potentially influenceable and influential consumers, empowered with the means to fulfil their curiosities. In order to appeal to this new consumer group and

cultivate their dormant desire for independence from traditional social institutions such as the family and corporate culture, this campaign indeed extensively used the photographic image of (a) young, female consumer(s), travelling alone in a rural area, 'discovering' and enjoying the forgotten corners of Japanese landscapes. Parallel to this campaign, two newly established women's fashion magazines, *an-an* (1970-) and *non-no* (1971-), also eagerly promoted the image of young, female travellers by staged photographs or snapshots, often accompanied by personalized travel essays by female writers. Partly as a result of these strategically synchronized mass media advertising campaigns, the number of female travellers skyrocketed around this time; they were soon to be labelled as *annonzoku*, or 'an-non tribe'.

Although we may still need to be cautious in evaluating the impact of this rise of young, female consumers in Japan in terms of its ambivalent contribution to the development of feminist thought and practice, there is no question that this new campaign for the rediscovery of the Japanese landscape was seen by many left-wing critics and artists, including those associated with *PROVOKE*, as a symbolic instance of the increasing commodification (that is, the death) of local landscapes as described by Matsuda (1971). What was even more disturbing and upsetting for the *PROVOKE* photographers was that their coarse, dynamic, or 'materialist' style – employed to challenge the easily consumable, picturesque images typically used by the tourist industry – was itself immediately appropriated by the Discover Japan campaign. Whether the creators of this campaign directly and deliberately borrowed the *PROVOKE* style or not remains an open question. However, Nakahira, the main voice for the magazine, considered this probable appropriation a serious blow to their aesthetic ideology and openly criticized the campaign (see, for instance, Nakahira 1972).

But given the gradual and ever-expanding capacity of the capital to appropriate any style, and thus undermine its critical possibilities (just like the once-rebellious jeans soon became a commonplace or luxury fashion item), it is easy to imagine that Nakahira's struggle to free himself from the imprisonment of commodification was confronted with more and more difficulties. In fact, already in 1973, only a couple of years after the end of the *PROVOKE* period (1968-1969), Nakahira published an essay, titled 'Naze shokubutsu zukan ka?' (Why an illustrated botanical dictionary?), to declare a surprising departure from his commitment to the evocative *PROVOKE* style. Calmly describing the previous style as 'art' and 'expression' and not transparent or neutral (or neutered) enough, he now propagated the idea that photography has to reject 'all nuances and emotions' in order to

confront ‘the world as it is’.³ Instead of further pursuing stylistic originality, which was destined to be co-opted by the capitalist system, Nakahira turned his back on the idea of originality itself in order to immerse himself in the world of the most banal and mundane, as exemplified by the illustrations in a botanical dictionary.

Lee U-fan’s aesthetics: Phenomenology and structuralism

What is notable here is that the idea of ‘the world as it is’, as emphasized by Nakahira in his essay of 1973, resonated with a similar idea advocated around 1970 by the artist Lee U-fan and others who were part of the so-called Mono-ha movement. In fact, the original Japanese phrase *aru ga mama* (as it is) that Nakahira used already appeared extensively in Lee’s first published essay in 1969, titled ‘Sonzai to mu o koete’ (Beyond being and nothingness), on his fellow artist Sekine Nobuo, and remained the central concept for the Mono-ha aesthetics (Lee 1969a: 51-3). Lee introduced this concept as an antidote to the domination of ‘images’ in the increasingly industrialized consumer society. The idea of a media-saturated society was elucidated by thinkers such as Marshall McLuhan and Daniel Boorstin, whose analyses of it, together with the belated introduction in Japan (but earlier than the Anglo-American reception) of Walter Benjamin’s thoughts, largely influenced the art discourse in 1960s’ Japan.

In short, the concept of ‘as it is’ was advocated by Lee as a way out of the world of images and representations in general and, as such, was envisaged as a sign of one’s renewed encounter with the world-as-such – just as Nakahira and the other *PROVOKE* photographers tried to cleave open the membrane of conventional photographic representations by emphasizing the bodily dimension of their encounter with the world. The parallels between *PROVOKE* (and Nakahira’s radicalization of its aesthetics) and Mono-ha are hardly coincidental since, according to Lee himself, Nakahira and Lee knew each other well and were exchanging ideas about the critical possibilities of their art practices against the capitalist colonization of daily life around 1970.⁴ They shared, in other words, a deep sense of the crisis of ‘reality’ – or ‘landscape’ – being irrevocably replaced or erased by the secondary images

3 Nakahira 1973. An abridged English translation of the article is included in Chong et al. 2012: 265-9.

4 The relationship between Lee and Nakahira was confirmed by Lee himself in a conversation with the author on 6 August 2012 in Lee’s studio in Kamakura.

produced in the ever-expanding commodity culture. Both Mono-ha works and *PROVOKE* photographs emphasized the importance of a kind of tactile 'encounter' (another keyword for Lee) with the world in preference to the spectacular visuality of technologically mediated images; this, as well as the fact that they therefore often preferred sombre, black-and-white materiality over colourful superficiality, was a logical outcome of their shared aesthetic ideology. In the meantime, the Expo '70, held in Osaka from March to September and attracting over 60 million visitors during that period, represented the powerful drive of the entire nation, accelerated already by the Tokyo Olympics in 1964, towards the production and consumption of these new, technologically mediated 'images', or objects-as-images, which were typically sugar-coated with shiny, synthetic colours.

One may describe their attempt at restoring direct contact with 'reality', which had become lost behind the veil of representation, as Heideggerian in its implicit claim for a phenomenological authenticity and totality, and may critique it, as the artist-theorist Hikosaka Naoyoshi did in 1970, as ahistorical and reactionary. Partly inspired by the thinkers of the Frankfurt School, Hikosaka sensed some mythical-nostalgic, or simply escapist, yearning in Lee's claim for an ontological transcendence and criticized it from the viewpoint of dialectical materialism (Hikosaka 1970). He also suggested that Lee's inclination towards ontological epiphany reduced the critical possibilities of art praxis back to the individualist ideology of modernism, rather than opening it up to the critical reflection from inter-subjective as well as social-institutional perspectives. It seems to me that Hikosaka's critique of Lee's theory, which resembles Heidegger's notion of ontological 'clearing' or the poetic revelation of Being, is valid with regard to Lee's explanatory rhetoric. But if we pay attention to the actual works that Mono-ha artists produced around 1970, we can see that the story is more complicated than that. Their sculptural or environmental pieces invariably suggest that they needed to aggressively intervene with an already existing environment, rather than simply acknowledging or pointing to its presence, in order to let the desired experience of 'encounter' emerge. Sekine's *Phase-Mother Earth* of 1968 is a paradigmatic example in that regard, because he literally dug a large hole in 'Mother Earth' in order to make it appear anew as a place of ontological revelation. Their works, in other words, testify to the fact that the experience of the 'encounter' is a function of differential intervention and therefore can never be a simple encounter with the given world. It is to say, as it were, that nature has to be de-natured, or damaged, in order to be experienced as 'nature.' And this epistemological paradox is reflected in the confusing and conflicting reference to both Maurice Merleau-Ponty and

Michel Foucault, or phenomenology and structuralism, without theoretical mediation in Lee's writings.⁵

In crude terms, it is this structuralist side of Mono-ha works – their reliance on differential effects and their awareness about the system of producing such effects – that opens up the possibility of undermining the authenticity of their alleged phenomenological pursuit and invites an investigation of their works from the viewpoint of simulacra. Seen from this perspective, recent reinterpretations of Mono-ha aesthetics in terms of their initial, somewhat inflected, connection to the *Torikkusu ando bijon* (Tricks and vision; hereafter *Tricks and Vision*) exhibition in 1968, where the mechanism of our perception was examined from a scientific or cognitive standpoint by a wide variety of works, begin to acquire special significance.⁶ In other words, Lee's advocacy of the return to the world 'as it is' cannot be taken at face value. If the effect of 'as it is' is produced through a carefully contrived intervention into the existing environment, the alleged invocation of the primordial Being cannot be equivalent to the naive affirmation of the world as it lies in front of us. The naive dualism between representation and reality (prior to representation) that Hikosaka sensed in Lee's discourse therefore has to be reformulated. What historically makes more sense in light of this ambivalence is to see the emergence of Mono-ha aesthetics as a symptom of a larger epistemological shift (or crisis) that created a curious twist, at this particular historical juncture of around 1970, where two incommensurable systems of representation – one disappearing, the other emerging – collided with each other. To me, this anxious coexistence seems to correspond to the contrast we saw between *PROVOKE* and the Discover Japan campaign. This epistemological shift made it impossible to separate the 'as it is' of the world from that of the representation (or sign), and the desire to retrieve the primordial dimension of Being, it became increasingly clear, had to remain an unattainable dream. The discordant relationship between Lee's phenomenological rhetoric and the structuralist practice as visible in many of the Mono-ha works is a sign of this contorted transition. If, on the one hand, the figure of man who perceives the world was erased 'like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea', as Foucault argued famously at the end of *The Order of Things*, the world to be perceived as it is, on the other hand, was also erased from the horizon of encounter.

5 See, for example, Lee U-fan 1969b and 1969c.

6 See, for example, the catalogue of the exhibition *Mono-ha saikō* (A reconsideration of Mono-ha), which was held in 2005 at the National Museum of Art, Osaka. Honnami Kiyoshi (2010) also discusses the relationship between the *Tricks and Vision* exhibition and Mono-ha.

Kawabata Yasunari and his Hawai'i lecture

What is curious in this regard is the fact that Mono-ha and the Discover Japan campaign shared a suggestive reference, a sort of nodal point where seemingly two incongruous aesthetic ideologies intersected with each other. That is, both resorted to the ideas of the writer Kawabata Yasunari, who had recently (in 1968) been awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. Moreover, the way they referred to his ideas and words was not simply for the sake of rhetorical decoration, but was deeply related to the essential claim of their respective ideologies.

In arguably the most well-known article by Lee U-fan, 'Deai o motomete' (In search of the encounter) (1970), the author cited an episode from Kawabata's lecture delivered at the University of Hawai'i in 1969.⁷ It was about Kawabata's 'encounter' with a large number of table glasses glittering in the morning sunlight on the terrace of a restaurant in the hotel where he was staying. He described it as an unexpected aesthetic revelation, and connected it to the old idea of *ichigo ichie*, which roughly translates as 'one chance, one encounter (which never recurs)'. The writer, in other words, saw it as a kind of phenomenological epiphany and also as an impetus of the 'beginning of literature' conceived as a challenge to the existing system of representation. No wonder that Lee quoted this episode as a model for his idea of 'encounter' through which he wished that the 'world' (re-)emerge anew for the experiencing subject as that which transcends the conventional system of representation. Furthermore, that this Kawabata episode was central to the Mono-ha aesthetics is clear from the fact that another critic, Ishiko Junzō, who in 1968 had co-organized the *Tricks and Vision* exhibition with Nakahara Yūsuke, quoted the exact same passage in his 1969 article in order to support the works of Lee and Sekine (Ishiko 1970).

On the other hand, the relationship between Kawabata and the Discover Japan campaign was more direct and obvious. A simple comparison between the title of the writer's acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize and the main catch copy of the advertising campaign will suffice: 'Utsukushii Nihon no watashi' (Kawabata) and 'Utsukushii Nihon to watashi' (Discover Japan), whose literal translations would be 'Myself of beautiful Japan' and 'Myself and beautiful Japan'.⁸ The only difference is between the Japanese particles⁹ *no* (of)

7 Kawabata 2015: 50-84 (originally delivered on 16 May 1969 at the University of Hawai'i, Hilo).

8 The English title of Kawabata's speech, 'Japan, the Beautiful, and Myself', translated by Edward G. Seidensticker, does not reflect the nuance of *no* in Japanese. Although it is probably a smoother English title, the 'and' in it corresponds closer to the particle *to* in Japanese. See Kawabata 1969.

9 Particles are small words indicating the relationship between words within a sentence, whose function can somewhat be compared to English prepositions.

and *to* (and). According to Fujioka Wakao, who was the chief director of the Discover Japan campaign at Dentsū, this was a deliberate choice.¹⁰ However, when Fujioka realized that the title of the campaign he had chosen was almost identical to the title of the recently published Nobel laureate's speech (Fujioka's explanation is ambiguous as to whether he intentionally borrowed the phrase or not), he visited the writer to get permission to use the only slightly different campaign title. The reason why Kawabata granted him permission is not clear, but apparently his response was positive, if not enthusiastic, since the writer took a brush on the spot and hand-wrote the catch phrase on more than ten sheets of traditional Japanese paper and gave them to Fujioka.¹¹

In light of the aesthetic conviction and sincerity one finds in Kawabata's acceptance speech, this carefree attitude towards the nationwide advertising campaign remains an enigma. It may be the case that the writer was simply disinterested in what was happening in the world of advertisement or business; or he might have been enthralled by his new status as an influential public figure after receiving the Nobel Prize. The latter might be closer to the correct answer, given the fact that Kawabata became politically active, rather awkwardly, in the last two years of his life between his acceptance of the Nobel Prize and his suicide.¹² But nobody knows. What is important for us is the curious fate befallen on the idea of beauty that the writer had pursued in his literature and elaborated in his acceptance speech. Its supposedly authentic connection to the tradition of Japanese literature was transformed by the Discover Japan campaign into a secondary sign of itself, which added surplus value to consumer tourism. The 'myself' who was imagined to be *of* the tradition, as indicated by the particle *no*, was turned into a subject through the use of the connective *to* (and), standing outside,

10 See Fujioka's interview on the following web page of *PHP Online*: <http://shuchi.php.co.jp/article/123>, accessed 6 October 2016. What is more interesting is the fact that Kawabata himself originally had the idea of using *to* (and) in the title of his speech. That original idea was 'Nihon no bi to watashi, sono hashigaki' (Japan's beauty and myself: An introduction), which still remains visible on the draft of his speech. The writer apparently crossed it out shortly before the speech and changed it to the present title, in which *no* (of) is used. According to Ōkubo Takaki (2004: 4-5), the reason for this last-minute change was probably that Kawabata wanted to emphasize his sense of belonging (of-ness) to Japanese tradition.

11 See Waga's dialogue with the writer Arai Man on the following archival website: <http://web.archive.org/web/20101227025252/http://voiceplus-php.jp/archive/detail.jsp?id=355&nif=false&pageStart=0>, accessed 6 October 2016. The dialogue was originally published on *Voice +*, in the issue of 27 December 2010.

12 It is well known that Kawabata, for example, in 1971, publicly supported and made campaign speeches for Hatano Akira, who was running for Governor of Tokyo Metropolitan Prefecture. (Hatano eventually lost to the more liberal and widely popular candidate Minobe Ryōkichi by a wide margin.)

or being alienated from, the tradition; the only access route that remained between them was the route of consumption. Coincidentally, as if to verify the significance of the historical shift implied by this seemingly unimportant instance of linguistic appropriation, Kawabata suddenly experienced writer's block and could no longer produce a notable masterpiece after the Nobel Prize. He ended his own life abruptly in 1972, following the suicide in 1970 of his friend, writer Mishima Yukio, who, like Kawabata, continually lamented the loss of the authentic cultural tradition in Japan.

The Discover Japan campaign's appropriation of Kawabata's speech is consistent with its appropriation of the *PROVOKE* style; integrated with each other, they unabashedly signify the capital's irrevocable encroachment on the authentic experience of the landscape, or the world at large, and as such resonate deeply with the 'extinction of landscape' that Matsuda discussed in his writings. The deaths of Kawabata and Mishima seem to support the idea that the extended era of modernism (in which the notion of 'authentic tradition' accompanied it like a mirror image) was coming to an end around 1970. The fact that Lee's invocation of the ontological encounter was, through his reference to Kawabata, connected to, and undermined by, the Discover Japan campaign also seems to imply that Mono-ha's aesthetics was destined to fall short of accomplishing its declared objective of foregrounding the world 'as it is'. We have already seen that their practices contained structural aspects that contradicted and undermined their proclaimed aesthetic ideology. In short, the odd but symbolic intertwinement of these instances – *A.K.A. Serial Killer, PROVOKE, Mono-ha, the Discover Japan campaign, and Kawabata Yasunari* – attests to the fact that the concept of the extinction of landscape resonated widely with various representational practices of the time and thereby pointed to a seismic epistemic shift, which happened around 1970.

Karatani Kōjin's theory of landscape

To borrow from Jean Baudrillard's vocabulary, this shift could be described as that into the age of simulacra, where 'reality' is gradually and irrevocably replaced by a network of signs. In this regard, the landscape, in the word's traditional sense, indeed died. But that is only half of the story, since this death, or extinction, can also be interpreted as a sign of rebirth from the perspective of the simulated landscape. Landscape in that sense survived by becoming its own image, just as the *PROVOKE* style survived as a 'style', even though it lost its initial power of provocation after the 1970s. Ultimately, the driving force behind this tidal shift is the capital, whose power to colonize

every corner of our life reached a critical point where the differential network of image-signs became the foundation for their exchange value as a commodity, overshadowing their use value and its direct connection to reality. The fact that the so-called tertiary industries – which make profits not by producing actual objects but by distributing them (for instance, retail or food service industries), by providing images for existing products or companies (for instance, advertising agencies), or by investing in the monetary market (for instance, financial firms) – came to occupy the largest share of Japan's GDP around 1972 explains well this weight shift towards intangible image-signs from the tangible products.

Seen from a larger historical viewpoint, this coming of the age of simulacra can be interpreted as a result, or completion, of the long process of 'modernization' whose history goes at least back to the Meiji period. If our discussion began with the 'death of the landscape', we are also obliged to look back at the 'birth of the landscape' – and this brings us to Karatani Kōjin's argument as developed in his *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*. In this book, Karatani argued that the modern concept of *fūkei* emerged in Japanese literature in the 1880s, with works by such writers as Kunikida Doppo, and that it appeared as distinctly different from traditional concepts such as *meisho* (famous places) because *fūkei* no longer referred to symbolic places frequently cited in the literary tradition. Instead, it increasingly encompassed an arbitrary and anonymous corner of nature discovered by, and as such specific to, an experiencing subject. Furthermore, to be more precise, like an impressionist painter encountering his 'motif' in nature by chance, Karatani thought that protagonists in the literature of the 1880s appeared as 'modern' precisely because they were able to find *fūkei* in any random corner of nature as a marker of their own individual existence. *Fūkei*, in other words, emerged as a screen onto which a modern subject can project her/his own interior reality to apprehend itself; the *fūkei* and their sense of self became a mutually dependent pair, just like a child and his reflection in Jacques Lacan's 'mirror stage'.

In sum: on the one hand, this discovery of the landscape was evidence, and a medium, of the perceiving subject's liberation from the traditional code of representation and, thus, a sign of their modernity. On the other hand, this aesthetic democratization of landscape and its potentially endless discovery, one can argue, opened it up, ironically, to an entropic process of disintegration. For if any corner of the world can be a 'landscape', the concept itself loses its symbolic value and turns into an empty signifier. In other words, the individuation/atomization of landscape by a 'modern' subject led to the relativist coexistence of an infinite number of landscapes, while the various social conditions that sustained the landscape as a

communal entity steadily vanished. The only binding force that remains powerful in this entropic process is, as we have seen above, none other than the capital. Landscape thus becomes a network of images and information, whose contours are arbitrarily determined, developed, and shifted by its translatability to monetary value. Of course, a wide range of cultural and ecological rhetoric continues to be employed to endorse its value, but these are no longer able to function independently from their involvement in the production of surplus value.

In this sense, it seems reasonable to argue that the birth of the autonomous modern subject associated with the birth of the landscape by Karatani was, from the beginning, compromised by its susceptibility to, or defencelessness against, the random connectivity to the flow of the capital and the increasing commodification of its territory of experience. The atomized subject, seen from a different angle, functioned as the most important agent through which the capital could extend its reach to every perceivable part of the world (just as the *PROVOKE* photographers' radical engagement with the landscape was quickly co-opted by the system). This 'collaboration' of the modern subject, who sees their own reflection in the landscape, and the capitalist machine, which by definition has to constantly integrate new landscapes into its orbit of marketability, no doubt accelerated during the high economic growth, when the exchange value of land became, as mentioned at the beginning of this essay, the foundational engine of the national economy. And if the period around 1970 marked 'the death of the landscape', or the beginning of the new era of its simulacra, one can assume that the mirroring relationship between the landscape and the modern subject that originated in the 1880s came to an end around that time as a logical development of the mutually accelerating and auto-destructive collaboration. Ultimately, instead of the landscape, whose symbolic weight had been gradually neutered, a random combination of world-as-images began to occupy the projection screen of one's 'identity', whose contours can be performatively altered in response to the constantly shifting combination of those images.

Philosophically speaking, this, I argue, was the critical moment when the 'modernist' or 'phenomenological' construction of the subject, based on the transcendental-ontological 'home' (in the sense of Heidegger's *Heim*), became something like an object of nostalgia and was replaced by the 'semiotic' or 'structuralist' model, in which the transcendental ground of one's subjectivity became nothing but an object of simulation or negative theology. Furthermore, this loss of 'home', as a matter of course, coincided with the loss of 'destination' – that is, the loss of the revolutionary imagination that

Lyotard (1984) once described as the end of the grand narrative. The death of the landscape and the death of revolutionary politics, in other words, came as a complementary pair to mark this historical turning point. What remained in this void was an infinite expanse of consumable objects-as-signs, while one's subjectivity, as Ueno Chizuko (1987) once argued, became that which was to be established, confirmed, and possibly transformed by what one selects from a wide range of commodities, including natural substances. Even water, which had always been there as a natural resource, began to be sold in supermarkets as bottled merchandise in the 1970s, as Yoshimoto Takaaki (1994) pointed out. The natural was taken over by the simulated 'natural'.

Thus, if landscape as a concept carried with it an aura of totality or a world view, as George Simmel (2007) argued in his essay on landscape, and if, as I believe, the Japanese equivalent of *fūkei* also carried the same connotation, the death of landscape or the birth of its simulacra around 1970, I would argue, irrevocably destroyed this traditional sense of totality. For although the flatness or the grid of consumable signs that has enveloped the entire world seems to demand the title of 'world view' in its own right, this flatness is never able to give us a sense of ontological plenitude and totality. Rather, whatever relationship we are able to establish with it, it always ends up being haunted by the mark of contingency, uprooted-ness, and impermanence. It is total in the sense that there is no way out, but not graspable as a totality because of its infinite extension and directionality beyond one's cognitive capacity. It is almost like the Kantian sublime, in that sense, especially the mathematical one whose infinity can only be thought but never be perceived, represented, or even imagined as an ontological entity. This is the moment when the modern, autonomous subject, whose origin Karatani located in the literary works of the 1880s, was unseated from the driver's seat of our philosophical vehicle and replaced by a fragile, fragmentary, and makeshift subject-formation. Concomitantly, the grand narrative of the revolution was gradually and decisively replaced by the micro narrative of identity formation – discover yourself! – as the dominant mode and site of political imagination.

Long epilogue: Sugimoto Hiroshi and the notion of post-landscape

My attempt to delineate the moment of the epistemic shift around 1970 through an analysis of several simultaneous events in contemporary art

and visual culture ends here. But in the form of an epilogue, I would like to touch upon a series of images produced by a later artist, Sugimoto Hiroshi, whose career began in the mid-1970s and who made his way to stardom in the world of contemporary art in the 1980s. The reason is simple: his works, especially the seascape series (1974-), seem to indicate either the fate of landscape after its own death or a particular way in which it survived its own extinction.

The seascape as a visual motif occupies a privileged place in the iconography of modernism. Starting with the era of romanticism, it was recurrently taken up by numerous artists and writers: in the field of painting, for example, names such as Turner, Friedrich, Courbet, Manet, Cézanne, and Mondrian immediately come to mind. In the field of literature, too, we can recall numerous examples in which the sea appears as the symbolic topos of literary imagination: Coleridge, Conrad, Poe, Melville, Hemingway, and so on. Of course, this history harks back to the world of myth in the ancient time exemplified by Homer's *Odyssey* and is not limited to the era of modernism. But there is something special about the sea in modern art, for it embraced more layers of semantic as well as structural functions than it did in previous periods.

In addition to the way in which the sea has always (and across cultural boundaries) played a mythical role on the primordial matrix as the place where beings originated and ended, the image of its nameless expanse in modern art seems to have played at least two more roles: first, to simultaneously represent both the sublime spirituality (or nothingness) and the concrete material reality (or plenitude of water); and second, to provide the stage where its extensive horizontal plane can be, at the next instant, tilted vertically to become one with the pictorial surface, as in Cézanne's *L'Estaque*s series and Mondrian's early seascapes. More than that, the sea is ultimately believed to be the site where culture-specific signs are wiped out in favour of the purity and universality of vision per se. In front of the seascape, in other words, the act of vision is folded back onto its own activity because it is deprived of the very object of focus. This transcendental aspect of the seascape and its affinity to the modernist aesthetics of purity and self-referentiality are the reasons why it was consistently seen as being immune to historico-cultural or geographical determinations and, as such, was invoked repeatedly as a primordial or archetypical model of landscape in general. That is precisely why, I would argue, it remained or emerged as the last resort of the concept of landscape around the time of its death around 1970.

Nakahira Takuma, the photographer/critic of *PROVOKE*, for example, produced memorable images of the inhuman sea, together with the desolate

landfills of Tokyo Bay, as if they were an allegory of the death and the entropic dissolution of the traditional landscape. In the world of literature, in contrast, Mishima Yukio nostalgically glorified the image of the sea as the last vestige of the lost tradition and the possible horizon of spiritual transcendence. The most typical of the many instances in which Mishima used the sea as a symbolic topos of his vision is the last scene of *Runaway Horses*, the second volume of the *Sea of Fertility* tetralogy, in which the protagonist Inuma takes his own life by *seppuku* (hara-kiri, or ritual suicide by disembowelment) on top of the mountain, facing the sea with the sun rising from beyond the horizon (Mishima 1973). In this scene, the vastness of the sea in front of him functions as the vanishing point of his life and the site of possible regeneration (hence, the 'sea of fertility'). This image prefigured the author's own death on 25 November 1970, which marked the end of his quest for the revival of what he believed to be the authentic Japanese cultural tradition that had been lost in post-war Japanese society. Both images of the sea – the desolate flatness of nothingness and the matrix of transcendence or regeneration – seem to correspond, in their contrasting ways, with the extinction of landscape that Matsuda lamented on in his essays. The seascape also reached its liminal point, where the only way out of its simulated membrane was either nothingness or metaphysical transcendence.

Thus, it is unavoidable that artists who adopted the theme of the seascape after 1970 have had to face the fundamental question of the 'post-ness' of their subject unless they are ignorant of the history of this topic. For the 'landscape' or 'post-landscape' they photographed, filmed, or painted had to take into account, one way or another, that inevitable belatedness vis-à-vis earlier images of the seascape, just as the *PROVOKE* aesthetics no longer remained a viable option after its appropriation by the Discover Japan campaign. Thus, Sugimoto's heavy aesthetic investment in seascapes and his repetitive invocation of Japanese traditional culture cannot be taken at face value, at least not without a sense of irony or suspicion. The mythical rhetoric or references to thinkers such as Orikuchi Shinobu, which the artist uses to describe the seascapes, are a dangerous conceptual trap into which many readers (and possibly the artist himself) can easily fall (Sugimoto 2012). His rhetoric seems to me to be a diluted version of that of Mishima, whose writing already displayed something of a kitsch sensibility with its carefully (almost mathematically) crafted, but intensely theatricalized rhetoric.

Furthermore, Sugimoto's seascapes and textual supplements are not only a repetition of the Mishima-esque imagery, which makes his images twice

as kitsch (despite their pristine, authentic appearance); they also internalize the repetition into their own serial structure. If repetition and difference is the logical requirement of a sign that functions as a sign, Sugimoto's serial production and the necessity of it seem to indicate that very requirement which undermines both the transcendence and immanence of any seascape he produces. As a result, what plays a crucial role in his seascapes is not the pure sensation of vision, but rather a differential perception and a strategic scheme of significations. The viewer is therefore constantly alerted to the interdependence of the illusion of transcendence and the manipulation of differential image-signs. The fact that Sugimoto started out his career with the *Diorama* series and continuously engaged himself with the theme of simulated reality throughout his career endorses this interpretation. How can his approach to nature be exempted? His works should also be critically viewed from this angle precisely because their seemingly contemplative appearance easily tricks us into considering them in the traditional Orientalist-Japanesque discourse. Rather than a submersion *into* the sea, the intention of his seascapes, after all, seems to be a detachment *from* the sea; they tell us more about the condition of being a spectator before the industrially fabricated image than about experiencing the sea as the ontological foundation of our being. This may be the only way in which his seascapes can become critically valuable in the context of contemporary art. Perhaps against the artist's wish to be considered otherwise, his seascapes thus exemplify the simulacral status of 'post-landscape' on whose surface one (a seduced viewer) can arbitrarily project one's own ontological nostalgia.

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Consuming Eco-Art

Satoyama at the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale 2012

Ewa Machotka

Cwiertka, Katarzyna J. & Ewa Machotka (eds), *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan: A Transdisciplinary Perspective*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018

DOI: 10.5117/9789462980631/CH10

Abstract

Ecological movements commonly view consumer capitalism as the ultimate evil, responsible for global environmental degradation. In this context, the development of an environmental consciousness is usually linked to the emergence of countercultures responding to socio-economic crises. Guided by a pro-ecological ideology related to *satoyama* (lit. 'village mountain'), which emphasizes harmonious relationships between humans and nature, the Echigo-Tsumari Art Field (ETAF) in Niigata Prefecture can be seen as an example of this phenomenon. The relationships between *satoyama*, contemporary environmental art, and the concept of the international biennale are, however, far from straightforward. This chapter explores the exhibiting practices involved in the (re)production of the concept of *satoyama* at the ETAF and the various political, social, and economic agendas they serve.

Keywords: eco-art, Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale, consumption, *satoyama*

[N]ature is one of the most sophisticated arenas for the production of ideology.

– Mark Dion¹

Introduction

Ecological movements commonly view consumer capitalism as the ultimate evil responsible for global environmental degradation. In this context, the development of an environmental consciousness is usually linked to

1 Statement made by Dion in Graziose, Kwon, and Bryson 1997: 9.

the emergence of countercultures responding to socio-economic crises (Weintraub 2012: 3). As such, the bursting of the economic bubble in the 1990s, in the aftermath of the high levels of economic growth in Japan from the 1960s to the 1980s, is seen as the trigger for a chain of socio-political and cultural processes that boosted the development of an environmental consciousness in Japan – from grass-roots environmentalism and political activism to ecological art (Avenell 2013). Guided by a pro-ecological ideology emphasizing harmonious relationships between humans and nature, the Echigo-Tsumari Art Field (Echigo-Tsumari Daichi no Geijutsusai no Sato; hereafter ETAF) has been seen as an example of this phenomenon.

The ETAF is one of the most internationally visible art initiatives in Japan. It was established in 2000 by Kitagawa Fram (b. 1946) and the Art Front Gallery (Āto Furonto Gyārārī) from Tokyo, and since then has hosted the highly popular Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale (Echigo-Tsumari Āto Toriennāre; hereafter ETAT), which boasts approximately 160 participating artists and draws hundred of thousands of visitors to the remote areas of Niigata Prefecture in the northwestern part of Japan (Kitagawa 2015). In his contribution to the catalogue celebrating the fifth triennale, held in the summer of 2012, Kitagawa Fram (2012: 8) observes: ‘Today, activities in the Echigo-Tsumari Art Field are being linked to various government measures related to education, culture, welfare, tourism, the local economy, employment, agriculture and infrastructure.’

Paradoxically, although it owes its existence to art, the role and operation of the ETAF as an art initiative is played down. This attitude is compatible with the recent ‘ethical turn’ in the humanities, which emphasizes sociological approaches to the arts and culture. One of a wide array of related phenomena is the concept of socially engaged art. This is commonly perceived as a critical response to the passive consumption of art, which is perpetuated by ‘the society of the spectacle’ formed by repressive capitalism (Debord 1994).² However, as pointed out by Jacques Rancière (2008: 7), the ‘critique of the spectacle’, which remains the alpha and the omega of the ‘politics of art’, cannot be seen as a privileged political medium, nor can it function as a universal solution for social problems. Building on Rancière’s theory, Claire Bishop (2012) critiques the notion of the social turn in art and advocates the need to return to an analysis of the conceptual and affective complexity of artwork. Following this recommendation this chapter studies the complex relationship between art and the socio-ecological mission of

2 The book first appeared in 1967 in French.

the ETAF based on the concept of satoyama, which evokes a harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.

Since its establishment the ETAF has been guided by a particular philosophy, which is explained in the mission statement on its bilingual website. The statement begins with the telling heading 'Humans are part of nature' (*Ningen wa shizen ni naihō sareru*), and reads:

As our civilization reaches a critical juncture, the rich nature of the satoyama existence in Echigo-Tsumari can impel us to review our attitude to the environment, calling into question the modern paradigm which has caused such environmental destruction. This is the origin of the concept 'humans are part of nature', which has become the overarching concept for every program taking place in the Echigo-Tsumari Art Field.³

The statement brings into focus the concept of satoyama (lit. 'village mountain'), or 'liveable mountain', a type of socio-ecological production landscape⁴ that has become the new buzzword in environmental activism worldwide (Takeuchi et al. 2003). Since its growth in popularity in the 1980s and 1990s, satoyama has been advocated by publications, conferences, forums, research, and more than 500 active non-profit organizations and governmental policies promoting sustainable agriculture and the protection of the environment and its biodiversity. As stated on the website of the Satoyama Initiative, a non-profit organization that recognizes and supports this type of production landscape worldwide, satoyama is 'a dynamic mosaic of managed socio-ecological systems producing a bundle of ecosystem services for human well-being'.⁵ It also encompasses the idea of 'the woods close to the village[,] which was a source of such resources as fuel-wood and edible wild plants, and with which people traditionally had a high level of interaction' (Knight 2010: 422).⁶ The notion of 'interaction' is key to understanding satoyama. It refers to social relationships (Klien 2010) as well as links between human and non-human elements. This 'interaction' ensures the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature. Satoyama has become a guiding principle for the artistic practices of the ETAF, where it has been associated with ecological art – art that 'strive[s] to ensure the

3 <http://www.echigo-tsumari.jp/eng/about/>, accessed 28 July 2015.

4 As defined by the International Partnership for the Satoyama Initiative (IPSI); see <http://satoyama-initiative.org/en/about/>, accessed 28 July 2015.

5 <http://satoyama-initiative.org/en/about/>, accessed 28 July 2015.

6 Knight's translation of a quotation by Matsumura Akira; see Matsumura 2002: 1030.

vitality of Earth's ecosystems' as defined by Linda Weintraub (2012: 6) in her recent survey of contemporary eco-art. Consequently, satoyama art has been charged with ensuring the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature.

But the recent catastrophic events of the powerful earthquake, gigantic tsunami, and terrifying nuclear meltdown at the Fukushima power plant brought satoyama art into sharp focus and tested the concept of the event. This chapter charts the fifth ETAT, which followed the triple disaster of March 2011.

Satoyama and sustainable art

In 2012, the ETAT ran for 51 days, hosting 367 artworks and projects from 44 countries across 760 square kilometres and 200 villages. In the catalogue of the 2012 festival edition, guided by the affirmative motto 'Reconstruction from disaster' (*Saigai fukkyū*), Sekiguchi Yoshifumi, mayor of Tōkamachi City and chairman of the Echigo-Tsumari Executive Committee (Daichi no Geijutsusai Jikkō Iinchō), emphasizes the ETAT's pro-ecological agenda: "The sense that "human beings are part of nature" has always been the basic concept of the Triennale, but this notion had never reverberated so acutely as at this fifth event, where we felt compelled to reflect especially soberly on these issues' (Sekiguchi 2012: 4). Interestingly, in this context Mr Sekiguchi's contribution also singled out *Australia House*, which was rebuilt after the original facility was destroyed in an aftershock of the March 2011 earthquake (Sekiguchi 2012: 4). The new *Australia House* (Fig. 10.1) was designed by Andrew Burns (b. 1979) and built with the support of several high-profile organizations, including the Tōkamachi City government, the Australia-Japan Foundation, the International Culture Appreciation and Interchange Society, and the Australian Embassy in Tokyo. The official website of the institution proclaims that *Australia House* 'has a steep pointed roof to withstand the heavy snowfall in the Niigata Prefecture and stained cedar cladding'.⁷ Its form refers to the mountainous landscape of the area, 'taking into account environmental sustainability and protection from natural disasters'.⁸ Clearly, the building 'represents' the Niigata topography and climate.

The website of Andrew Burns Architects emphasizes the same points: 'During winter, the site can experience 1.5 m of snow during one day, and this was a key consideration in the design, with the roof pitching steeply'.⁹ The

7 http://australia.or.jp/_projects/echigo2011/en/reconstruction, accessed 28 July 2015.

8 Ibid.

9 <http://andrewburns.net.au/Australia-House-Japan>, accessed 28 July 2015.

Figure 10.1 Andrew Burns Architects, *Australia House* (2012)

Photograph by Osamu Nakamura. Photograph courtesy of Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale Executive Committee. © Andrew Burns Architects

description also explains the function of the building: “The interiors form a large “perception device”, heightening views of the surrounding landscape and creating opportunities for art installation[s].”¹⁰ The notion of ‘perception device’ is especially telling when considered from the perspective of the representation of ‘nature’ on which the modern concept of *fūkei* (landscape) is based. The term *fūkei* became extremely popular in late-nineteenth-century art, when Japan’s visual culture appropriated Euro-American art systems (Matsumoto 1994: 64). Importantly, modern artistic conventions such as linear perspective and realism located the subjective viewer of a landscape *outside* the picture. At the same time, they gave the observer the power to control the landscape from an omnipotent, central position and to observe with ‘scientific’ objectivity. The concept of ‘the gazing eye’ encoded in *fūkei* obviously imposes unequal relationships of power on the human and the non-human realms. *Australia House*, constructed as a ‘perception device’ from which to view the Japanese countryside, subscribes to these concepts. As such, it stands in sharp contrast with the participatory notion of *satoyama* that invites people to interact with ‘nature’ directly and on equal terms.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Another issue is of a technological nature. *Australia House*'s use of 'natural' materials, including cedar, misses the fact that this fast-growing tree is one of the major threats to forest biodiversity in Japan. The monoculture of cedars endangers the very concept of satoyama that it is supposed to represent. Despite its use of natural materials, *Australia House* does not seem to fully embrace the paradigms of ecological sustainability.

Although the notion of the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature embedded in the concept of satoyama does not seem to be directly relevant to the *Australia House*, this does not mean that the project is not capable of eliciting an aesthetic response in the viewer that could increase environmental consciousness. As *Australia House* acts through its materiality, each encounter with it involves individual, bodily perceptions influenced by multiple internal and external factors that form the aesthetic experience of the viewer. Architect Andrew Burns describes his goals as follows: "Throughout, we have sought to establish a dialogue between the visitor, the building, the artwork and its site, so that each person takes away from it a different experience."¹¹ Through its clever design, *Australia House* has the potential to dynamically engage the viewer. Its triangular form blurs the lines between sculpture, architecture, artwork, gallery space, and rural dwelling. The building is flexible and can alter the physical experience of the viewer by shifting walls, repositioning artworks, etc. Large windows overlooking the rural landscape offer views of the ever-changing spectacle of the seasons. All these elements result in a piece of art open to multiple reflections and reinterpretations, possibly related, but not necessarily limited, to issues of environmental sustainability. Not surprisingly, since its construction, *Australia House* has been one of the most popular destinations at the ETAF and has also been celebrated in the world of architecture, receiving the 2013 Jørn Utzon Award for International Architecture.

Interestingly, while the present building celebrates new and high-end architecture, the original *Australia House* reused local resources (an abandoned farmhouse) and seemed to subscribe to the eco-friendly agenda of the ETAF. However, one question arises: can the use of pre-existing objects, or *objets trouvés*, be considered synonymous with recycling guided by environmental concerns? Found objects have been used in art since the cubists, long before the birth of modern environmentalism. The 2012 ETAT featured several projects that used abandoned, pre-existing objects or their

11 <http://www.dezeen.com/2012/08/08/australia-house-gallery-and-studio-by-andrew-burns/>, accessed 28 July 2015.

Figure 10.2 Mikan + Sogabe Lab, *Gejō kayabuki no tō* (Gejō thatch tower) (2012)



Photograph by Osamu Nakamura. Photograph courtesy of Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale Executive Committee. © Mikan + Sogabe Lab

parts as creative material. But how were the projects linked to the concept of *satoyama*?

One of these projects is the *Gejō kayabuki no tō* (Gejō thatch tower), designed by MIKAN + Sogabe Lab (Mikan + Kanagawa Daigaku Sogabe Kenkyūshitsu), Kanagawa University, and constructed at the Gejō railway station in Tōkamachi (Fig. 10.2). Its significance for the festival is underlined by the fact that its photo decorates the cover of the ETAT's catalogue.

The tower is constructed from organic materials (thatch, wood), and fittings, furniture, and tools found in local farmhouses. According to the catalogue, the work functions as a 'micro-ethnographic museum', emphasizing its role in the memorialization of the local culture (Sekiguchi 2012: 34). Abandoned objects are also used in several other works, two of them located at the Echigo-Tsumari Satoyama Museum of Contemporary Art (Echigo Tsumari Satoyama Gendai Bijutsukan Kināre) in Tōkamachi City. *Lost #6*, by Kuwakubo Ryōta (b. 1971), consists of a model train that runs around a collection of locally found textile-factory parts arranged in a darkened room

Figure 10.3 Kuwakubo Ryōta, *Lost #6* (2012)



Photograph by Osamu Nakamura. Photograph courtesy of Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale Executive Committee. © Kuwakubo Ryōta

(Fig. 10.3). The train is equipped with a bright lamp that casts artificial landscape silhouettes onto the gallery walls.

Abandoned objects, best described as rubbish, are also transformed into a material of artistic expression in *GHOST SATELLITES* (Fig. 10.4), created by Gerda Steiner (b. 1967) and Jörg Lenzlinger (b. 1964). This work, consisting of mobiles hanging from a ceiling, also made use of local materials and unwanted objects found in the area, reflecting the idea of ghost satellites that circle the earth long after the people who produced them and sent them into space have vanished. Similar concerns are also evident in the work of Mutō Akiko (b. 1975) titled *Omoide no niwa T+S+U+M+A+R+I* (Garden of memories T+S+U+M+A+R+I), which features a large, colourful textile tree constructed from scraps of clothing collected from the local community and displayed in Tōkamachi City (Fig. 10.5).

All of these works of art seem to function as time machines that, through the reuse of abandoned objects found in the area, are capable of retrieving worlds and people who are no longer there. They bring back 'lost' cultures and the 'ghosts' of those who have left or died, and evoke the idea of 'memory gardens' where these disowned memories are reconstructed and celebrated. Even if on the level of art production and technology the

Figure 10.4 Gerda Steiner & Jörg Lenzlinger, *GHOST SATELLITES* (2012)



Photograph by Osamu Nakamura. Photograph courtesy of Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale Executive Committee. © Gerda Steiner & Jörg Lenzlinger

Figure 10.5 Mutō Akiko, *Omoide no niwa T+S+U+M+A+R+I* (Garden of memories T+S+U+M+A+R+I) (2012)



Photograph by Osamu Nakamura. Photograph courtesy of Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale Executive Committee. © Mutō Akiko

Figure 10.6 Christian Boltanski, *No Man's Land* (2012)



Photograph by Osamu Nakamura. Photograph courtesy of Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale Executive Committee. © Christian Boltanski

artists are 'recycling' ready-made materials, environmental issues related to sustainability and the responsible use of natural resources do not have to be a primary concern here.

Unwanted and abandoned objects also feature in the most powerful work installed at the 2012 ETAT, *No Man's Land* by Christian Boltanski (b. 1944) (Fig. 10.6). The work consisted of a nine-metre high, twenty-tonne mound of used clothing, which was continually picked up, lifted, and dropped by the claws of a mechanical crane. The effects produced were not only visual. The installation was accompanied by the sound of a beating human heart and the smell of damp clothes, intensifying the embodied impact of the work. *No Man's Land*, which was shown previously in Paris and New York, comments on mortality and the loss of human identity, individuality, and memories, symbolized by discarded clothing. Boltanski's oeuvre is notorious for focusing on these concerns. In one of his interviews, following the show in New York in 2010, the artist explained: "The crane is a little like the finger of God, or like destiny. It moves a bit like it's choosing someone, but it really

moves at random. It grabs a handful of clothing, lifts it into the air and drops the clothing back onto the pile."¹²

Boltanski's *No Man's Land* is especially potent in eliciting human responses in the context of both the current critical situation and the human condition in general. Its affective potential is clear, as evidenced by the fact that the installation is capable of triggering different reactions in different exhibition contexts. The work's proximity to the March 2011 events enhanced and expanded Boltanski's commentary. But rather than being a cry for 'reconstruction', the installation evokes 'deconstruction', the lack of connection between agent and object, and the hopeless lack of control of the objects being tossed and manipulated in a random and unpredictable manner.

Importantly, while the work employs rubbish as a medium of artistic expression, it does not feature recycling; rather, it evokes the idea of the utter uselessness of objects. This resonates more directly with the image of post-disaster landscapes – wastelands filled with destroyed and abandoned objects that will never be reused or revived. The concept of satoyama as a model of coexistence between humans and nature does not seem to be directly relevant here, other than as a cry for change.

Significantly, none of the works discussed above directly addresses the issue of the development of 'human-influenced natural environments for the benefit of biodiversity and human well-being', as advocated by the Satoyama Initiative.¹³ Only if it was considered as a broad metaphor pertaining to preoccupations with nature that are not necessarily ecological could it be applicable to the diverse range of works presented at the ETAT.

This observation leads to the question of the relationship between the concept of satoyama and sustainable art. The ETAT's appropriation of satoyama seems to facilitate the concept's association with ecological art (Weintraub 2012). The precise nature of this connection still remains unclear, however. One reason for this lack of clarity is the conceptual ambiguity of ecological art itself. Despite its currency in contemporary discourses of both art and environmentalism (or, perhaps, precisely due to this duality), the definition lacks clarity. The term 'ecological art' has been used to refer to distinct phenomena, including earthwork, slow food, recycled art, and bio-art (Kastner and Wallis 2010), or to any art that is concerned with the well-being of ecosystems. As it is even more difficult to explain what

12 <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/news/christian-boltanski-no-mans-land/>, accessed 28 July 2015.

13 <http://satoyama-initiative.org>, accessed 28 July 2015.

satoyama art implies, the connection is based on a rather simple, paralogical formula presupposing that if the term 'satoyama' concerns the ecological agenda, then art associated with satoyama must be ecological and its impact would lead to the development of a green society. The problem is that the precise nature of its environmentalism and its impact are still not clear. This does not mean, though, that the works produced at the 2012 ETAT within the framework of satoyama are not aesthetically successful.

Even if satoyama functions as a romantic trope that remains powerless in the face of extreme social and ecological crises, such as those experienced by the northwest of Japan in 2011, the affective potential of the art created for the ETAT remains undiminished.¹⁴ As Suzy Gablik (1998) observed: '[V]ision is not defined by the disembodied eye, as we have been trained to believe. Vision is a social practice that is rooted in the whole of the being.' As the relationship between work and viewer is inherently performative and time- and situation-based, the work is not a static, fixed container of meanings; rather, these meanings are produced in each interaction. Hence, considering the particular temporal and geographical frame of visitors' interactions with these artworks in 2012, they could have successfully operated in the context of the triple disaster. But this does not mean that they are not open to different interpretations based on different bodily perceptions in changing temporal contexts. This only shows the ineffectiveness of the application of sociological approaches to the study of art that deny art's performativity and force it into a framework to 'represent' certain social issues and concepts, such as satoyama. The 2012 ETAT made this perfectly clear.

What, then, is the function of the concept of satoyama at the ETAF? Did the festival adopt the ecological buzzword for the purpose of solving the socio-economic problems of the region? Is satoyama simply 'co-opted' or 'consumed' by the ETAF as a component of the marketing industry that has been engineered to revitalize the region?

Satoyama art and 'the festivalization of culture'

As an international contemporary art initiative, the ETAF contributes to a fervently debated 'biennial boom' that started in the 1990s and has spread around the globe.¹⁵ Caroline Jones suggests that the 'festivalization' of art

14 For a discussion on affect, please refer to Massumi 2002.

15 There are currently more than sixty biennials and triennials around the world, all building on the archetypical Exposition Universelle in Paris (1889) and the first Venice Biennale (1889).

plays a major role in these developments. A recent book on the festivalization of culture observes that today festivals are no longer merely ritualistic, recurrent short-term events affirming social, religious, ethnic, national, or historical bonds (Bennett, Taylor and Woodward 2014: 1), but also function as sites for the consumption of experiences that involve capitalist markets, sets of social relations, and flows of commodities (Zukin 2010). The accumulation of events not necessarily related to art contributes to the circulation of art through international festivals and transforms it into a spectacle. This corroborates the thesis presented by Guy Debord (1994: 1) in his seminal and heatedly debated book *Society of the Spectacle*: 'The whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that once was directly lived has become mere representation.' There is little doubt that biennales are entangled in the festivalization of art. They also play a vital role in the process of enhancing the cultural capital and economic value of the locations in which they take place.

As an art festival, the ETAF contributes to the economy of the Echigo-Tsumari region on two levels. First, the economic success of the ETAF is the result of a particular set-up of the triennale. The festival differs from other biennales, which are guided by what Edouard Glissant called the 'fly in fly out' mentality, an approach criticized by Hans-Ulrich Obrist, himself a 'transnational' curator (Obrist 2014). Apart from organizing a temporary exhibition every three years, the ETAF also receives works contributed by approximately 160 artists, including such celebrities as Marina Abramovic, Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, Joseph Kosuth, Kusama Yayoi, and Cai Guo Qiang. Over two thirds of the projects are commissioned on a permanent basis. The ETAF also boasts a permanent art museum, the Echigo-Tsumari Sato-yama Museum of Contemporary Art, designed by renowned architect Hara Hiroshi (b. 1936) and established in 2003. Instead of deconstructing the objecthood of art (Fried 1998), the objects are vital to the operation and success of the ETAF as they endow the area with an important cultural and economic legacy. Thus, when viewed from this perspective, the ETAF's operations are based on a solid, material-oriented foundation. This legacy contributes to the realization of the socio-economical goals of the project. Sekiguchi says: 'The aim of our festival is to reinvigorate the local community' (Sekiguchi 2012: 5).

Second, this set-up is exploited by different groups: local communities, local governments, and art establishments, as well as by the growing number of tourists who visit the festival. It needs to be noted that tourism is one of the largest sectors in the Japanese economy. It is fast becoming a key

focus of Japan's economic policy and has been growing steadily, despite the international crisis in 2009 and the Fukushima disaster in 2011.¹⁶ According to the *OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2014*, internal tourism consumption in Japan in 2011 was estimated to be ¥21.5 trillion (approx. €184 billion), including about ¥1 trillion (approx. €8.6 billion) from international visitors (OECD 2014). According to the Tourism Satellite Accounts, the direct and indirect contribution of tourism to Japan's GDP in 2011 was ¥46.4 trillion (approx. €397 billion), or 5 per cent of the total GDP, generating four million jobs (6.2 per cent of total employment). Moreover, the most lucrative and fastest developing segment of the tourism industry today is ecotourism (Kaynak and Herbig 1998). Obviously, the Echigo-Tsumari region, which is mainly known for its agricultural produce (especially rice), cannot offer visitors experiences of unique natural environments and wildlife. Instead, through the concept of satoyama it has promoted sustainable relationships between nature and humans, an idea even more relevant in today's world. As a space where the two realms fuse, the ETAF builds on the myth of the Japanese 'love of nature' and the nostalgic concept of *furusato*, meaning 'one's hometown'.

The notion of the Japanese 'love of nature' that pervades common perceptions of culture is rooted in the Shintoist idea of unity between human and non-human elements. Edwin Reischauer and Marius Jansen observe that '[t]he Japanese love of nature and sense of closeness to it also derive strongly from Shinto concepts' (Reischauer and Jansen 1995: 212). Scholars such as Pamela Asquith and Arne Kalland (1996), Julia Adeney Thomas (2002), and Haruo Shirane (2012) have only recently begun to deconstruct the myth of Japan's 'inherent affinity with nature'. Nevertheless, this myth has played a major role in the modern era, serving various agendas ranging from Japanese imperialism, which perceived nature as the home of the national spirit, to ecotourism.¹⁷

The idea of travelling to nature and discovering the countryside has also been employed in the concept of *furusato*. *Furusato* can be translated as 'hometown', 'birthplace', or 'native place' and encapsulates the idea of the landscape of a mountain village encircled by domesticated nature, where people can experience a sense of belonging or 'insularity'. But, as argued by Jennifer Robertson (1994: 16),

16 The promotion of international tourism is part of the 'Abenomics' policy, which sees the Summer Olympics as an ideal opportunity to boost tourism. The new target is to attract twenty million international visitors by 2030.

17 This trend is exemplified in Shiga's *Nihon fūkeiron*, published in 1894.

with the rapid urbanization of the countryside since the postwar period, the Japanese ‘can’t go home again’ [...] There is no particular place to ‘go home’ to; consequently, there is no particular place to feel nostalgic toward.

Robertson concludes that *furusato* represents a ‘nostalgia for nostalgia’. In the 1970s, the Japanese National Railways (Nihon Kokuyū Tetsudō), before they were privatized and renamed Japan Railways (JR), ran a Discover Japan campaign, which was replaced in the 1980s by the Exotic Japan campaign. This change marked a demographic and cultural shift between those Japanese who had experienced rural life and those for whom visiting the countryside was an entirely unfamiliar, exotic adventure (Ivy 2005). These shifts only intensified after the bursting of the economic bubble in the early 1990s, as this challenged existing socio-cultural models and invited the population to reconsider its values and return to its (imagined) cultural roots.

The links between *furusato* and *satoyama* are structured on both an internal and an external level. First, the supporters of the ETAF are invited to pay a small contribution called *furusato nōsei*, or ‘hometown tax’, an initiative praised in 2009 by Fukutake Soichirō, the general producer of the ETAF and chairman of Benesse Holdings, which manages the Setouchi Triennale (Fukutake 2009: 7). Second, these links are even more significant when considered from an external perspective, in the context of the ETAF being awarded the *Furusato Event Award* and the *Chiikizukuri Commendation* by the Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications (Sōmu daijin) (Matsumoto, Sasajima and Koizumi 2010: 1-7).

Both *furusato* and *satoyama* idealize village life and the agrarian community. They revolve around a nostalgia for ‘the good old days’, when the Japanese maintained a healthy relationship with nature. Although *satoyama* focuses more on the ecological dimension than on belonging and identification, unlike *furusato*, it is possible to find the term guilty of the similar offence of sentimentalizing ‘nature’ and emptiness (‘nostalgia for nostalgia’; Robertson 1988: 495). Through its associations with the ideology of *furusato* the concept of *satoyama* is also entwined with the global politics of identification. *Satoyama* has been promoted as a ‘unique’ Japanese response to global ecological issues. This furnishes the concept with a particular political agenda related to the narration of national identification.

Building on this conceptual ancestry, the ETAF differentiates itself from mass tourism and offers visitors a complex web of experiences, including participating in a hip, international art festival, reviving the agricultural past of Japan, being close to nature, and travelling slowly. Kitagawa Fram emphasizes the ‘inefficiency’ of travelling involved in visiting the Art Field,

which is spread over a large area of 760 square kilometres: 'Since time immemorial, travelling has entailed taking a trip through time as well as space, and the Art Triennale has reminded the Japanese people of this precious experience' (Kitagawa 2012: 7-8). The ETAF is easily reached from Tokyo by a fast and efficient railway system but visiting the art sites, spread around 200 villages, certainly requires time. In order to enhance the efficiency, in 2012, 58.2 per cent of visitors of the ETAF got there by car (not a very sustainable travel choice).

As specified in the overview of the 2012 ETAT, the number of visitors has been growing steadily since 2000, when the ETAT was visited by 162,800 people. In 2003, the festival was visited by 205,100 people; in 2006, by 348,997 people; in 2009, by 375,311 people; and in 2012, by approximately 488,848 people – a record for the event (Sakai et al. 2012: 135). The growing ecological footprint of this eco/art tourism does not seem to be an issue, however. The festival is especially popular among women (61.5 per cent) in their twenties and thirties (29.2 and 25.9 per cent, respectively) who travel from neighbouring provinces, especially the Kantō region (68.5 per cent), and spend one or two days there (35.2 and 27.4 per cent respectively). The surveys show that the ETAT's primary audience consists of young, female urbanites. Significantly, the same social group can be identified as the advocates/consumers of environmentalism.¹⁸ This fact has considerable socio-economic consequences.

Thus, in a paradoxical tour de force, the ETAF has appropriated the pro-ecological and post-developmental concept of *satoyama*, which has served as an attractive conceptual reference for artists and visitors, keeping the event alive and thriving, and contributing to the economic revitalization of the area.

Conclusions

The development of an environmental consciousness has frequently been linked to the emergence of countercultures that are responding to critical situations. It is not a coincidence that environmentalism became a mass social movement during the 1960s, a time marked by widespread social tensions that triggered civil-rights and anti-war movements. As such, the bursting of Japan's economic bubble has been seen as the trigger for a chain

18 These connections between women and environmentalism are not limited to ecofeminism. As discussed by Carolyn Merchant (1996), women as scientists and activists are actively involved in green movements.

of socio-political and cultural processes that boosted the development of an environmental consciousness in Japan.

Satoyama emerged as one of the most powerful symbols of green movements in the 1980s and 1990s. Its potential as a driving force of post-bubble countercultures has been employed in a variety of pro-ecological initiatives, including critical art practices such as those displayed at the ETAF, where the concept has been used to frame its operation. In the words of Karp and Lavine (1991: 14): 'If [an exhibition] can aid or impede our understanding of what artists intend and how art means, then its subtle messages can serve masters other than the aesthetic and cultural interests of the producers and appreciators of art.' The power of the displayed objects extends beyond their formal boundaries to the wider world where they were produced.¹⁹ This is especially true in the case of exhibitions representing objects produced by more than one artist. They facilitate generalizations used in the construction of larger narratives.

As a potent symbol representing anti-consumerist attitudes, the concept of satoyama has been appropriated by diverse institutions, ranging from the Japanese state to NPOs serving different political, social, and economic agendas. Kitagawa's triennale is one such institution. The '*tsumari* approach', conceived as the ETAF's philosophical background that links art, people, and 'nature' with environmental protection, implied that community building formed part of the regional revitalization programmes. Sedimentary art practices and growing tourism have played a major role in the increasing cultural capital and economic value of the Echigo-Tsumari region. But does this mean that the ETAF should be perceived as a large satoyama Disneyland, consuming post-developmental countercultures and reinforcing a capitalist ethos?

First, it is not surprising that, although it is often overlooked or looked down upon, ecological art is closely entwined with exchange and consumption. This is grounded in the nature of art itself and its relationships with reality. Culture and art are inseparable from their production context and they are not autonomous but an integral part of society. If capitalism structures certain societies, in a society where 'commodification is dominant, everything that is external to this commodification becomes marginal, liable to be socially irrelevant or merely yet-to-be-commodified'.²⁰ Thus,

19 Stephen Greenblatt (1991: 42) refers to this power as '[t]he power of the displayed object to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic forces from which it has emerged and for which it may be taken by a viewer to stand'.
20 http://www.academia.edu/11919255/artwork_as_commodity, accessed 28 July 2015. See also Walker 1987.

consumption cannot tarnish 'pure ecological art', as both are products of the same socio-cultural, political, and economic conditions.

Second, art framed within the discourse on sustainability does not automatically produce anti-consumption attitudes.²¹ Just as the relationship between art and society is not based on cause and effect, ecological art does not have a causal relationship with a green society. It may contribute to increasing environmental awareness, but the responses emerging from the embodied interactions with art's materiality cannot be pre-programmed. Importantly, these issues pertain to the ongoing, larger debate on socially engaged art and its operation. Although socially engaged art is not a complete novelty, its importance has been growing since the 1990s, when it became central to art discourse. This repositioning was motivated by the desire to change the way conventional modes of artistic production and consumption operated under capitalism, as they had been identified with the 'society of the spectacle' (Debord 1994). The concept of relational art, which emphasizes the production of social relations rather than objects/artworks to be consumed individually, played an important role in this process (Bourriaud 2002). In effect, some art historians advocated a new way of analysing art that reaches out to methodologies and concepts related to the social sciences, such as community, society, empowerment, and agency (Kester 2004). But, as pointed out by philosopher Jacques Rancière (2002: 150), 'the aesthetic regime of art' is based on tension and conflict between the autonomy and the heteronomy of art, or negotiations between art and non-art. A work of art is not autonomous in the sense that it is removed from life, but because it is mediated through the autonomy of our experience of art. Consequently, Claire Bishop (2012: 8) advocates: 'There is an urgent need to restore attention to the modes of conceptual and affective complexity generated by socially oriented art projects.'

Participatory art is not a privileged political medium and it is not a ready-made solution to the society of the spectacle formed by capitalism (Rancière 2008: 7). The power of works of art lays 'not so much in their ideological effects, but in their ability to create affective resonances independent of content or meaning' (Shouse 2005). As the relationship between art and life is not linear but mediated, the satoyama art at the ETAF does not necessarily need to produce a positive socio-ecological impact.

Third, the ETAF could show how the culture industry's consumption of countercultures is a component of the process of the 'festivalization' of art, which transforms art into a spectacle. But we need to acknowledge

21 The relationships between eco-art and society are discussed in detail in Miles 2014.

the transient character of these spectacles and the endless possibilities of commodity pathway diversion, or an object's ability to move in and out of the 'commodity state' over the course of its social life (Appadurai 1986: 17). This brings into focus the role of subjectivity and human agency. An object can be removed from its commodity pathway and can be replaced on it. This 'aesthetics of decontextualization' (Kopytoff 1986: 64) transforms the ontological status of an object. The operation of the ETAF, guided by a multiplex programme that includes art, ecology, economy, and a social agenda, exposes these intricacies.

Hence, it is clear that the complex conceptual roots and diverse agendas shaping the ETAF cannot produce coherent outcomes that either celebrate its pro-ecological programme or condemn its consumption. Only through an account of the performative properties of art is it possible to understand the co-existence of the various positions that emerge through individual, embodied interactions with satoyama art at the ETAF. As 'commodity' is not an object but the state of an object, art is able to exercise its performative powers freely.

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Artistic Recycling in Japan Today

A Curator's Perspective

Kasuya Akiko

Cwiertka, Katarzyna J. & Ewa Machotka (eds), *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan: A Transdisciplinary Perspective*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018

DOI: 10.5117/9789462980631/CH11

Abstract

Recently, many artists have produced works that transcend the boundaries of art and infiltrate every aspect of daily life by recycling everyday items. Such works have found a home in an increasing number of venues and an appreciative audience. Often, these works are not confined to galleries and museums, but unfold in public spaces and interact with everyday life. They react to current events and attempt to blur the boundaries between art and non-art, artist and non-artist. Discussing this phenomenon in relation to the Tatsuno Art Project and two exhibitions, I argue that these new approaches can be seen as unique interventions into contemporary social life and commentaries on its troublesome relationships with objects and their consumption and recycling.

Keywords: contemporary art, art projects, installations, everyday life, memory, displacement

Introduction

Since 2011, with support from the Agency for Cultural Affairs of Japan (Bunkachō), the Tatsuno Art Project: Arts and Memories (Tatsuno Āto Purojekuto: Toki no Kioku) has taken place annually in Tatsuno, a town that was known in centuries past as the 'little Kyoto' of Harima Province (now the south-western part of Hyogo Prefecture). The project aims to present exciting, contemporary art to people from across Japan and around the globe; capitalize on the region's unique cultural heritage; and create opportunities for people across the nation and the world to communicate

with local residents in order to make Tatsuno a more dynamic and popular place to visit.

Recently, a number of artists have aimed to engage directly with society, producing works that transcend the boundaries of art and infiltrate every aspect of daily life by way of recycling everyday items. Such works have found a home in an increasing number of venues and an appreciative audience. In this chapter, I would like to discuss this phenomenon and explore the role and potential of contemporary art. I will do so mainly through the examples provided by the Tatsuno Art Project, as well as by looking at two art exhibitions, titled *Sonzai e no apurōchi – kurayami, eien, nichijō* (An approach to being – Darkness, infinity, everyday life; hereafter *An Approach to Being*) and *Tenchi* (Displacement; hereafter *Displacement*).

As examples of Japanese artists who recycle rubbish from everyday life one could cite Yodogawa Technique, a group that collects rubbish from the Yodo River and turns it into art; Ōtake Shinrō, who also collects material from everyday life and recycles it into art, and who exhibited at the 13th Documenta in 2012 and the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013; and Tanaka Kōki, who represented Japan at the 55th Venice Biennale. These artists are internationally active and widely recognized. They try to express clear social messages through their everyday actions in order to construct a variety of narratives, also related to consumption and human relationships with objects. In this chapter, however, I would like to discuss a number of more modest artworks that are slowly changing our way of thinking in a radical and profound way by infiltrating our minds and memories.

'Arts and Memories': Imamura Ryōsuke and Kotani Shinsuke

Imamura Ryōsuke (b. 1982), who lives and works in Kyoto, was invited to join the 2013 Tatsuno Art Project¹ and exhibited his works in the European-style building that formerly housed the Hyogo Shinkin Bank (Hyōgo Shinyō Kinko). He is highly skilled at making small interventions in ordinary situations in order to generate a subtle difference that prompts the viewer to see the world from a new perspective. His work plays on memories that all people share yet are rarely consciously aware of – unobtrusive sensations, such as the sound of rain beginning to fall outside one's house, or of someone singing far away – and scoops up fragments of the extraordinary from the flow of mundane interactions with the world. For the project, Imamura

1 <http://www.tatsuno-art-project.com/>, accessed 30 September 2015.

Figure 11.1 Imamura Ryōsuke, *Amaoto to heya* (*Rain and Room*) (2013)



Photograph by Kasuya Akiko. © Imamura Ryōsuke

created the installation *Amaoto to heya* (English title: *Rain and Room*) in a Japanese-style room on the second floor of the former bank, which included a plethora of everyday objects from an old house in Tatsuno, such as a kettle, a medicine chest, a sofa, a grandfather clock, and a rotary telephone (Fig. 11.1).

A small hammer was mounted on each object, and the hammers rose and fell in cycles of varying duration, each time triggering a ‘plunk’ sound. The hammers were also mounted on architectural elements, such as the windows, floor, and transoms overhead, linking the work on display with the backdrop against which it was exhibited, and adeptly expressing those moments when our everyday surroundings and our own relationship with them are suddenly transformed in a fresh and revelatory fashion. If one listened carefully, the ‘plunk, plunk, plunk’ sounds came from all around, and began to sound just like the pitter-patter of raindrops when rain is starting to fall or tapering off. The realization that these sounds were emanating from the nostalgic utensils, evocative of mid-twentieth-century Japan, made it seem to the viewer as if time was flowing backwards, and suggested that perhaps the rain in one’s memory and the rain that fell when these objects were in their prime were one and the same. Imamura’s *Kairō to tōdai* (Hallway and beacons) was exhibited on the second floor of the same building. A mezzanine level runs around the second floor, encircling the wide space that was once a working

bank, and the artist attached small beacons to the handrails and light fixtures suspended from the ceiling, effecting a subtle transformation of the areas around the beacons and altering the perception of the space as a whole.

Imamura was also invited to take part in the 2012 Tatsuno Art Project and exhibited in the former factory of the Higashimaru Soy Sauce Company (Higashimaru Shōyu Kabushikigaisha), where soy sauce was once brewed. Here, he installed small LED lights and hammers at random, which respectively lit up or punched the barrels from time to time. Imamura also showed two video pieces in the annex of the Tatsuno Soy Sauce Museum (Usukuchi Tatsuno Shōyu Shiryōkan). One of the videos showed a cup containing soda water, a clock, and a blind. The wind blew and the blind flapped, the clock moved, and the soda water bubbled. Each movement had its own rhythm, stopping and starting separately. In everyday life we experience such ordinary things and remember them without knowing why. Imamura often uses these feelings as the key to his works. They do not contain a special meaning in themselves, but provide a comforting feeling. Imamura participated in another group exhibition last year, at the Mizunoki Museum (Mizunoki Bijutsukan) in the town of Kameoka, in Kyoto Prefecture. For this installation he placed a flowerpot containing a daphne plant in the basement when the museum was closed; during the day, he moved it into the storeroom and left only a few petals on the floor of the basement and stairs, and in front of the storeroom. The visitors could smell the daphne but they could not see it, because it was behind the door of the storeroom.

The second artist who was invited to participate in the 2013 Tatsuno Art Project was Kotani Shinsuke (b. 1980), who was born in the town of Himeji, near Tatsuno, and lives and works in Tatsuno. He produced an installation titled *Haiburiddo sāfin* (Hybrid surfing) in the salt-dissolving facility (Fig. 11.2). This installation employed contrasts of light and shade, forming an overall spatial composition from diverse materials that created a singular world of its own. As well as producing multimedia pieces incorporating video, objects, drawings, and other media, Kotani also paints. Many of his paintings feature intense, almost fluorescent colouration, and the seemingly jarring or threatening air of his work is balanced by a lightness of touch. In recent years, he has effectively deployed multiple media, making active use of light and sound effects, and creating highly lauded installations that expand the bizarre, proliferating microcosms of his paintings into three dimensions. Kotani applies his keen and unique linguistic sense to the creation of strange and evocative titles for his pieces and exhibitions, and draws the viewer irresistibly towards the realm of the unconscious. Brimming with Kotani's peculiar imagery, this latest installation was festooned with numerous LED tube lights and featured linear

Figure 11.2 Kotani Shinsuke, *Haiburiddo sāfin* (Hybrid surfing) (2013), detail



Photograph by Tanabe Mari. Photograph courtesy of Tatsuno Art Project. © Kotani Shinsuke

shadow pictures made with monochromatic projections. Meanwhile, objects made of chenille crossed regularly in front of the projector, casting additional shadows. Screens were made by sewing together pieces of fabric originally used in the process of making soy sauce, which bore stains and repairs from that time. In this environment, with its many constituent elements, viewers felt as if they were floating in an unearthly landscape reminiscent of a day-dream. This garden-like wonderland continually generated vivid, new images that contrasted with the sombre and imposing historic venue it inhabited.

The installations shown in Tatsuno can be interpreted in various ways and give us the opportunity to experience the charm of the place, which exists in quiet harmony with its old architecture. It could be said that these installations are not only recycling rubbish, but also the places, architecture, and memories that have been abandoned and almost forgotten there. In a way, they also provide a unique commentary on the rapid changes in Japanese society that have been prompted by the accelerating consumption of objects.

Eternal flow: Mirosław Bałka and Kamoji Kōji

The third artist invited to join the 2013 Tatsuno Art Project was Mirosław Bałka (b. 1958), who lives and works in Warsaw and Otwock, Poland. In the

Figure 11.3 Miroslaw Bałka, *The Fall* (2001)



Photograph by Kasuya Akiko. © Miroslaw Bałka

back of a raw-materials storehouse (in the north wing), Bałka's *The Fall* was exhibited (Fig. 11.3). The video, projected directly onto an exposed earthen wall, created the striking illusion that earth was crumbling away from the wall itself. This work was originally a dynamic video reminiscent of a Creation myth, in which the heavens fall down and form the earth below, evoking the aphorism 'everything flows' that is attributed to the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus. Displayed in this environment, this dynamism seemed to relate to the renewal and restoration of the old soy sauce factory and the revitalization of the community of Tatsuno, which is, of course, one of the goals of the Tatsuno Art Project itself. In the silent, black-and-white film fine particles flowed down to the ground and created a new, ever-shifting landscape in a process that promised to stretch on for all eternity. Standing in the stillness and gloom of the former soy sauce factory, which was once full of noise and activity, viewers were invited to sense the vast flow of time and enter a meditative state.

Bałka's *Otw.* was displayed on a monitor placed on a *tatami* mat floor facing the shady garden at Shūentei, formerly the residence of the lord of the Tatsuno estate. It was a video, shot at night, of the artist's family house in Otwock, Poland, which he has transformed into a studio. Because it was filmed with

Figure 11.4 Kamoji Kōji, *Seibutsu (Still life)* (2013)

Photograph by Kasuya Akiko. © Kamoji Kōji

a handheld camera, the image shakes and wobbles with the movements of the cameraperson's body, rendering the scene of the dark studio even more ominous. While, for Bałka, the place is familiar and mundane, and the scene no doubt ordinary, presented in this way it probably takes on an alien air, even for the artist. All of us are prone to the illusion that what we see around us is all there is to reality, but, in fact, what we know is merely the tip of the iceberg. *Otw.* reminds us of how most of reality lies submerged in unknowable darkness, sending us spooky signals from time to time. At the same time, the place where the piece was exhibited was once the home of a regional lord, but is now open to the public, while the piece itself presented the *Otwock* studio that was once the artist's home. This synergy of work and venue bound Japan and Poland in a web of echoes across time and space. The space started to become alive once again thanks to the impact of the artwork.

The exhibition *An Approach to Being²* encapsulated the essence of Polish art following the Second World War, and offered an insight into its unique contribution to the international art world through the work of

2 The exhibition was held from 7 to 23 December 2013 at the Kyoto City University of Arts Art Gallery (Kyoto Shiritsu Geijutsu Daigaku Gallery) @KCUA; see <http://contemporarilynx.co.uk/archives/2218>, accessed 30 September 2015.

thirteen artists. Mirosław Bałka was among these artists, and the work of Kamoji Kōji, a Japanese artist who has lived and worked in Poland since 1959, was also introduced at it – for virtually the first time in Japan. Kamoji continues the international avant-garde movement that began at the start of the twentieth century in Łódź or Warsaw, and connects East and West by combining constructive and intellectual elements with philosophical concepts. His work is simple in style and uses accessible materials, such as Japanese paper, stones, water, and aluminium (Fig. 11.4). By arranging the stones or water in a particular way, he creates a dialogue between time and space, as if he is forming a connection to an eternal existence. This approach is reminiscent of Bałka and Imamura's work with glass.

Bałka exhibited *GPS Free* at this exhibition. In this video piece, one sees a rotating white sheet of paper accompanied by the irregular sound of a wind-up mechanism. The object moves in reverse, its mantra-like repetition intended to induce a cosmic dimension related to the 'search for the absolute'. That which is absent, is present. One senses the eternal flow of time in this very simple structure with its white, rotating paper. The title *GPS Free*, derived from the term 'global positioning system', might also mean no navigation, no travelling, and 'no Gypsies' – the eternal wanderers.

Bałka is highly active on the international art scene. While he began his career in the mid-1980s as a sculptor, he has produced an increasing amount of video work in recent years, and uses a wide range of media to transform private memory into public memory and to transmute the mundane world into something fresh and unfamiliar. This invites reflection on human relationships with the world and the role everyday objects play in it.

***Displacement* – Chaos and reorder: Morisue Yumiko, Terada Shūko, and Nohara Kenji**

Featuring artists who have recently graduated from, or completed their studies at, the Kyoto City University of Arts (Kyōto Shiritsu Geijutsu Daigaku), I curated the show *Displacement*³ as the second part of the *Transmit Program* group exhibition.⁴ The title of this exhibition suggests the altering of a

3 The *Displacement* exhibition ran from 9 April to 22 March 2011 at the Kyoto City University of Arts Art Gallery @KCUA; see http://gallery.kcua.ac.jp/exhibitions/20110409_id=871#en, accessed 30 September 2015.

4 The *Transmit Program* exhibition began with an event called 'Kyō-sei', which was held to commemorate the opening of @KCUA in 2010.

position (transposition) or the replacement of something (substitution). In addition to connoting the reordering of materials or matters to bring about change in the present, in psychoanalysis 'displacement' was originally used to describe the mental act of eliminating dissatisfaction and anxiety by changing one's attitude or emotions regarding a certain thing and re-focusing them on something else. The word also indicates the transplanted state of a person who is not originally from a particular area. Such shifts in position disturb one's sensibilities, simultaneously creating the feeling that something is familiar and foreign, chaotic and reordered. You could say that these feelings are the very basis for the act of 'recycling'.

One of the participating artists, Morisue Yumiko, studied in the Print Department of the Kyoto City University of Arts. She initially made silk-screen pieces, but after developing an interest in the height of overlapping layers of ink, moved from planar to three-dimensional expression by repeatedly printing over objects, such as plasters. In the past, she has meticulously altered familiar items such as books, toothbrushes, salt cellars, strainers, and tea whisks, and turned them into works of art. In some of her pieces, one part of an object has been lengthened; for example, the bristles of a toothbrush or the bumps that prevent slipping on the palms of a pair of work gloves. In other works, Morisue rubs out parts of books and creates contour lines through the stratum-like edges of the overlapping pages. In another example, she perfectly reproduced paperback book covers as sand paintings on a sheet of glass. In all of her work, she very slightly alters an everyday item in a meticulous operation. With a winning sense of humour, this odd divergence from reality quickly captures the viewer's heart. Morisue says that instead of 'depicting something directly with the hand based on [her] own will', she opted for an 'indirect method' of working based on the rules and special characteristics of each individual thing. She manages to maintain this indirectness by using ready-made objects. In this exhibition, Morisue displayed a series of pieces based on the printed word, and another group in which she partially altered common, everyday objects, such as work gloves and deck brushes, to convey the essence of each thing (Fig. 11.5). Among the former are the reproduction of a receipt made out of beads; a certificate of merit recreated as a sand painting; a nameplate with leaves sprouting out of the letters; letters and notes created in coloured salt within a salt cellar; and a book whose contents have been partially rubbed out. By rubbing out the text of a book and emphasizing its contours, the outline of the book changes, but the viewer is still able to identify the object as a book; by exploring this extremely narrow boundary, the original meaning is stripped from the object. To what degree is it possible to remove the contents

Figure 11.5 Morisue Yumiko, *Dekki burashi* (Deck brush) (2011)



Photograph by Kasuya Akiko. © Morisue Yumiko

of a book and still identify words as words? The viewer cannot clearly make out the writing, but they can still sense the presence of the words – it is the limit of our recognition that Morisue sets out to test. By aiming to rid an object of its ‘meaning’, the artist does her best to eliminate any kind of preconceptions, and by closely observing things, she gives all of the elements equal value. The pieces that result from Morisue’s tenacious efforts extract the object’s ultimate essence (becoming, for example, the prototypical book or work gloves). The slight disparity creates a sense of surprise, and the work also charms the viewer with its quiet humour and unique wit.

Another participant, Terada Shūko, was also a student in the Print Department, and although she usually makes copperplate prints, she selected sculpture as her main focus. Terada says that coming into contact with a variety of materials has provided her with a wide range of options.⁵ Even when exhibiting her copperplate prints, she creates a heavy steel frame for the pieces. At times, she also displays the corroded copperplate rather than the print itself, or places it in a Petri dish. Terada is particularly

5 Interview with the artist, conducted at the artist’s studio in Hirakata on 8 March 2011.

attached to transparent materials and by making use of unremarkable, small objects such as mirrors, pieces of glass, clear-coloured buttons, and marbles she integrates the pieces on display into their surroundings to produce a tension-filled space. The floating sensation that the transparent objects create has a way of liberating the viewer from gravity, and the slight fluctuations escort us to another world. For the exhibition, Terada created an installation that incorporates a material that faintly glows with sections of fluorescent colour. The installation was inspired by a children's book that she read as a child, which centred on a little girl from a poor family who discovers a shop that sells lights. The girl buys a small orange light that she takes home and enjoys with her mother.⁶ In the piece, the drawer of an old desk is open and is lined with a particular type of beads. The space is somewhat dark and the lamp that hangs from the ceiling illuminates the desk and the viewer. When peering into the drawer, one's shadow falls across the beads, and one is surprised to discover a rainbow around it. It is as if the shadow is glowing. Though the change is so subtle that it would go unnoticed unless the viewer stared intently at the piece, once one discovers it, the world truly seems to have changed. Around the work, with its quiet transparency, the air seems to solidify and time passes in a different way. Terada's work is inspired by day-to-day life. For example, as she is walking, she might look up at the sky and notice a faint rainbow around the edge of a cloud (but the rainbow is so small that other people probably do not notice it). Though Terada's works at first seem tranquil, upon careful observation they provide the viewer with a variety of discoveries that stem from an accumulation of the artist's experiences, such as her interest in a scene or the light reflected in a puddle on the street. Her work addresses the viewer in intimate ways (Fig. 11.6).

Nohara Kenji, who also participated in the *Displacement* exhibition, majored in oil painting and studied at Marseille's School of Fine Arts (École supérieure des beaux-arts de Marseille). He carries a digital camera around with him every day and takes pictures of things that catch his eye. Nohara also keeps a notebook to sketch his ideas and practise drawing; he cuts out pictures that he likes and pastes them inside, and fills the pages with sketches. When something interests him in a familiar landscape, he extracts

6 When Terada was in about the second grade, she became interested in reading the complete version of Ogawa Mimei's *Akai rōsoku to ningyō* (The red candle and the mermaid), a section of which was included in one of her school textbooks. After asking her mother for the story, her mother bought her an anthology of children's literature. This story was also in the book, but Terada cannot remember its title or author.

Figure 11.6 Terada Shūko, *Orenji ni tomoru kage* (Shadow in orange colour) (2011), detail



Photograph by Kasuya Akiko. © Terada Shūko

that section and depicts it in a wonderful way, eventually assembling a series of these elements. For *Displacement* Nohara reproduced one of these scenes based on an accumulation of images; his imagination expands outward from the piece. Modifying the landscapes that he had gathered by cutting out each element and shifting these elements around, the artist arrived at a poetic vision of displacement. According to Nohara, his work is a 'progressive stage set that emerges out of the gaps'.⁷ The fantastic scene, consisting of a canopy with one section cut out of it – the last vestige of a now closed shop – and the surprising presence of an exterior wall and small windows, was something that actually existed in Nohara's neighbourhood. Was the hole in the disused canopy cut out to allow light in, or for some other reason? And what form did the rear of the structure take? Whatever the answers, the 'mysterious small room that appeared in this gap of ordinary space' was created in the gallery. While continuing to imagine the mysterious room and an old computer shop that had gone out of business, Nohara says he

7 Personal communication via email, 1 February 2011.

Figure 11.7 Nohara Kenji, *Nakkuri: Nukeana to nari daibingu* (KnuckLie – Dive into the loophole) (2011), detail



Photograph by Kasuya Akiko. © Nohara Kenji

decided to use the canopy design in his drawing. Along with this, his latest sketchbook (the eleventh, in which he still regularly sketches) was displayed at the back of the exhibition area. He also set up two monitors in the small room, with video games on their screens (each showed a motorcycle speeding away from the viewer) (Fig. 11.7). The flickering light of the monitors was visible outside the room through a worn window pane. The flow of time, dislocated meanings, and absence of an owner of these useless things with vague applications (a sun-bleached canopy, a clothes airer, old video games, weathered glass, a broken traffic cone, and a gas meter lined with mirrors) conversely allowed the viewer to catch sight of human forms and fragments of memory, which strengthened the presence of the objects in the faint light that flickered between the gaps in our awareness. By viewing this piece, time and space became dissimilated, and though viewers were in the here and now, they gained a sense of being nowhere at all, and continually moved back and forth as they experienced a definite reaction to the moment. In other words, the piece created ‘a strange open space in the middle of a town’, and as viewers enjoyed looking at this disparate landscape, they

took in the scene of a particular story that seems to be familiar and normal, but was actually entirely suggested by a series of fragments with no clear application.⁸

Among the similarities shared by these three artists is the restoration of the narrative in the wake of postmodernism – or perhaps this is another, entirely different world, one with the qualities of a displaced realm, which was summoned at the end of the modern world and in which new stories can be told. The code used for the stories previously told is no longer valid, and now, as the foundations of every genre are being shaken, artists are free to make use of a variety of elements, artificial and natural, often found in everyday life, such as physicality and memory. By creating new meanings after the old ones have been stripped away, the artists have in effect returned to ground zero, and in their modest yet confident endeavours to construct a new world, one could say they are ‘displaced’. In this way, they have returned to the origins of the creative act, and are now able to reassess the radical, interactive relationship between individuals, society, objects, and artistic creation.

Conclusion

By focusing on the ordinary things that we can find in everyday life and by recycling objects, memories, and places which seem to be abandoned and forgotten, the artists discussed in this chapter are trying to show us the meaning of existence through their artistic practices. They take items from everyday life and alter their meanings. To do this, they use a simple, visual language, taken from their surroundings; instead of using heroic elements, they utilize things that are small and trivial. These pieces utilize memories and can profoundly change our way of thinking. In doing so, they challenge the definition and the role of art, which is no longer a static object to be viewed, but something active that invites us to create a connection to the world in a dynamic way and helps us to understand and redesign our lives. These artists try to change the meaning of everyday life through their recycling of everyday items. In this way these artists might be able to open the door to a completely new understanding of consumption in the post-bubble (and post-Fukushima) era.

After the (spiritual and economic) confusion of the 1980s had passed, Japan entered the post-bubble era, during which people started to re-examine

8 Interview with the artist, conducted at the artist's studio in Neyagawa on 16 March 2011.

their lives and seemingly tried to reform their values and find order in chaos. In these circumstances, while attention was redirected to everyday things and familiar and simple events, art changed as well, responding to an increasing momentum to reuse things. Interestingly, this tendency was not limited to younger people, but could be observed across the generations. In other words, a common approach to creation in the post-bubble era was achieving the psychological goal of finding the eternal in the familiar. However, rather than this being a newly developed trend, this tendency had existed previously – but as social conditions changed, it was reaffirmed and its value came to be rediscovered.

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Notes on Contributors

Stephanie Assmann (assmann@imc.hokudai.ac.jp) is a specially appointed professor in the Research Faculty of Media and Communication, Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan. She holds a PhD in the sociology of Japan from the University of Hamburg, Germany. She is the author of *Wertewandel und soziale Schichtung in Japan. Differenzierungsprozesse im Konsumentenverhalten japanischer Frauen* (Value change and social stratification in Japan: Aspects of women's consumer behaviour) (Institute for Asian Affairs Hamburg, 2005) and the editor of *Sustainability in Contemporary Rural Japan. Challenges and Opportunities* (Routledge, 2015). Her research interests include the study of consumer behaviour with a focus on foodways and fashion as well as gender and social stratification.

Gunhild Borggreen (gunhild@hum.ku.dk) is associate professor in art history and visual culture in the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, University of Copenhagen. Focusing on gender, nationhood, and performance in contemporary Japanese art and visual culture, Borggreen has published in journals such as *Performance Review* and *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, and co-edited, and contributed to, *Performing Archives / Archives of Performance* (Museum Tusulanum Press, 2013). She contributed a chapter on Japanese documentary manga to the volume *Comics & Power* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), and on Japanese popular culture to *Social Aesthetics* (Brill, 2015). Borggreen is the co-founder and project manager of Robot Culture and Aesthetics (ROCA), a research network focusing on practice-based research into the intersection of art, technology, and society. In this field, she has published on Japanese robot theatre in the volume *Social Robots* (Ashgate Publishing, 2016) and on robot visuality in *TransVisuality. The Cultural Dimension of Visuality* (Liverpool University Press, 2015).

Katarzyna J. Cwiertka (k.j.cwiertka@hum.leidenuniv.nl) is chair of modern Japan studies at Leiden University. She is the author of *Modern Japanese Cuisine: Food, Power and National Identity* (Reaktion Books, 2006), *Cuisine, Colonialism and Cold War: Food in Twentieth Century Korea* (Reaktion Books, 2012), and *Himerareta washokushi* (with Yasuhara Miho; Shinsensha, 2016). Cwiertka has edited *Asian Food: The Global and the Local* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), *Critical Readings on Food in East Asia* (Brill, 2012), and *Food and War in Mid-Twentieth-Century East Asia* (Ashgate, 2013). She is currently working on a monograph about the history of food packaging in Japan.

Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni (ofrag@post.tau.ac.il) teaches at Tel Aviv University in the departments of Sociology and Anthropology and East Asian Studies. She is the former chair of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. Goldstein-Gidoni graduated from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London. Her current research focuses on gender, women, and 'new fathers' in Japan; on cultural globalization; and on the incorporation of New Age spirituality into the Israeli mainstream. Her latest book, *Housewives of Japan: An Ethnography of Real Lives and Consumerized Domesticity*, was published in 2012 by Palgrave Macmillan (second edition in paperback August 2015). She is also the author of *Packaged Japanese: Weddings, Business and Brides*, published by University of Hawai'i Press in 1997. She has published numerous articles in leading journals, including *Journal of Material Culture*, *Journal of Consumer Culture*, *Ethnos*, and *Ethnology*.

Fabio Gygi (fg5@soas.ac.uk) is lecturer in anthropology with reference to Japan at SOAS, University of London. He was born and raised in Switzerland, but spent his formative years in Japan, Germany, and England. After receiving an MA in European ethnology and Japanese studies from the University of Tübingen, he spent two years at the University of Tokyo carrying out fieldwork on 'rubbish houses'. He has a PhD in social anthropology from University College London (UCL). Before joining SOAS, he spent three years as an assistant professor of sociology at Dōshisha University in Kyoto. His research interests include material culture, gender, medicine, and technology.

Hayashi Michio (michio-h@sophia.ac.jp) is professor of art history and visual culture at the Sophia University, Tokyo. He obtained a PhD from Columbia University and joined Sophia University in 2003. Hayashi specializes in modern and contemporary art history and art criticism. His publications include *Painting Dies Twice, or Never* (vols. 1-7, Art Trace, 2003) and exhibition catalogue essays 'An Eye Open to Traces of Light: Thoughts on Ryūji Miyamoto' (*Ryūji Miyamoto Retrospective*, Setagaya Art Museum, 2004), and 'Tracing the Graphic in Postwar Japanese Art' (*Tokyo 1955-1970: A New Avant-Garde*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2012). Hayashi was co-curator of the *Cubism in Asia* exhibition (a collaborative project among three national museums in Japan, Korea and Singapore, 2005-2007) and co-edited/authored *From Postwar to Postmodern: Art in Japan 1945-1989* (Museum of Modern Art, 2012). Hayashi lives and works in Tokyo.

Kasuya Akiko (kasuya@kcuu.ac.jp) is professor in art theory and aesthetics at the Kyoto City University of Art. Born in 1963 in Hyogo, Japan, she formerly served as curator of contemporary art at the National Museum of Art, Osaka. Her major exhibitions include *Geijutsu to kankyō* / *Art and the Environment* (1998); *Ima hanasō* / *A Second Talk* (2002); *Tenkanki no sahō* / *Positioning – In the New Reality of Europe* (2005); *Ekishō kaiga* / *Still / Motion: Liquid Crystal Painting* (2008); the Tatsuno Art Project: Arts and Memories (Tatsuno to Purojekuto: Toki no Kioku) (2011-2015); and *Shi no gekijō* / *Homage to Kantor – Theatre of Death* (2015). Major publications include *Abantogādo sengen – Chūō no moderunizumu* (Avant garde declaration – Modernism in Central-Eastern Europe) (Sangensha, 2005; co-translator); *Pōrando gaku o manabu hito no tame ni* (For those who learn Poland) (Sekai shisōsha, 2007; co-author); *Chūō no modan āto* (Modern art in Central Europe) (Sairyūsha, 2013; co-author); *Chūō no gendai bijutsu* (Contemporary art of Central Europe) (Sairyūsha, 2014); and *Pōrando no zenei bijutsu* (Polish avant-garde art: Applied fantasy for survival) (Sōgensha, 2014). She has been the artistic director of the Tatsuno Art Project since 2011.

Ewa Machotka (ewa.machotka@su.se) is associate professor of Japanese language and culture at Stockholm University. Formerly, she was a lecturer in the art and visual culture of Japan at Leiden University, and curator of Japanese art at the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities in Stockholm, Sweden, and the National Museum in Kraków, Poland. Her research interests revolve around the role of art in collective identification, gender, nationalism, and Orientalism, primarily in the context of Japan. Currently, her main research projects pertain to the interaction between human society and the environment, especially the long-term relationship between the imagining of nature (visual, textual, and material) and environmental consciousness. Machotka is the author of *Visual Genesis of Japanese National Identity: Hokusai's Hyakunin Isshu* (Peter Lang P.I.E., 2009) and the co-author of *Too Pretty to Throw Away: Packaging Design from Japan* (Manggha, 2016).

Hendrik Meyer-Ohle (meyerohle@nus.edu.sg) is associate professor in the Department of Japanese Studies at the National University of Singapore (NUS). He studied business administration and Japanese studies at the Philipps University Marburg, where he also obtained his PhD with a thesis on the development of modern formats in Japanese retailing. Before joining NUS, in 2000, he worked for five years as a senior research fellow for the German Institute for Japanese Studies in Tokyo. Meyer-Ohle teaches, and studies, business and management in Japan, with a focus on marketing/retailing

and human resources. His publications include *Japanese Workplaces in Transition: Employee Perceptions* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), *Innovation and Dynamics in Japanese Retailing: From Techniques to Formats to Systems* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), and *Corporate Strategies for Southeast Asia after the Crisis: A Comparison of Multinational Firms from Japan and Europe* (co-edited with Jochen Legewie, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

Jennifer Robertson (jennyrob@umich.edu) is professor of anthropology and the history of art at the University of Michigan. Her six books and over seventy articles on Japan past and present cover the wide-ranging topics of the politics of nostalgia, theatre, sex-gender systems, art criticism, ideologies of 'blood', eugenics, colonialism, and, most recently, human-robot interactions. Many of her articles can be downloaded from <http://www.jenniferrobertson.info/>. Her most recent book is *Robo sapiens japonicus: Robots, Gender, Family, and the Japanese Nation* (University of California Press, 2017).

Gavin H. Whitelaw (whitelaw@fas.harvard.edu) is a sociocultural anthropologist and executive director of Harvard University's Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies. From 2008 to 2016, he served as associate professor of anthropology at the International Christian University (ICU) in Tokyo. Whitelaw's interests include globalization, work, commerce, foodways, and consumer culture, particularly in the context of contemporary Japan. His writings on these topics have appeared in journals such as *Anthropology of Work Review*, *Gastronomica*, and *Contemporary Japan*, as well as edited volumes including *Slow Food/Fast Food* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006) and *Capturing Contemporary Japan* (Hawai'i 2015). His ethnography about the cultural world of Japan's *konbini* is in the process of publication.

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