

MARIKO MORI AND TAKASHI MURAKAMI
AND
THE CRISIS OF JAPANESE IDENTITY

by

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ABSTRACT

In the mid-1990s, Japanese artists Mariko Mori (b. 1962) and Takashi Murakami (b. 1967) began creating works that referenced Japanese popular culture tropes such as sexuality, technology and the idea of *kawaii*, or cute. These tropes were associated with emerging youth cultures instigating a “soft rebellion” against social conventions. While emancipated female youths, or *shōjo*, were criticized for lifestyles based on the consumption of *kawaii* goods, their male contemporaries, the *otaku* were demonized for a fetishization of *kawaii* girls and technology through *anime* and *manga*, or animation and comic books. Destabilizing the nation’s patriarchal theory of cultural uniqueness, or *nihonjinron*, the youth triggered fears of a growing infantilized, feminized automaton ‘alien’ society during Japan’s economically tumultuous 1990s.

In response to these trends, Mori and Murakami create works and personae that celebrate Japan’s emerging heterogeneity and reveal that Japan’s fear of the ‘alien within’ is a result of a tenuous post-war Japanese-American relationship. But in denoting America’s position in Japan’s psyche, Mori’s and Murakami’s illustration of Japan as both victim and threat encourages Orientalist and Techno-Orientalist readings. The artists’ ambivalence towards Western stereotypes in their works and personae, as well as their distortion of boundaries between commercial and fine art, intimate a collusion between commercialization, art and cultural identity. Such acts suggest that in the global economy of art production, Japanese cultural identity has become as much as a brand, as art a commodity.

In this ambivalent perspective, the artists isolate the relatively recent difficulty of enunciating Japanese cultural identity in the international framework. With the downfall of its cultural homogeneity theory, Japan faced a crisis of representation. Self-Orientalization emerged as a cultural imperative for stabilizing a coherent national identity, transposing blame for Japan's social and economic disrepair onto America. But by relocating Japanese self-Orientalization within the global art market, Mori and Murakami suggest that as non-Western artists, economic viability is based upon their ability to cultivate desirability, not necessarily authenticity. In the international realm, national identity has become a brand based upon the economies of desire, predicated by external consumption, rather than an internalized production of meaning.

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INTRODUCTION

Takashi Murakami (b. 1962) and Mariko Mori (b. 1967) are two of the world's most recognizable contemporary artists. Arriving onto the international scene in the mid-1990s, these Japanese share a propensity for a visual vocabulary borrowed from their native pop culture. Their absorption of cute, or *kawaii*, as well as technological and sexual themes, refers to Japan's changing social structure and vision of national identity since the end of WWII. They navigate the use of these tropes to expose a national fear of an increasingly infantilized and feminized, and even alien identity. While exploring these fears, they also reveal the potential of a youthful female-led, or *shōjo* culture in the formation of a shifting pluralistic national identity. In the international realm, they have been perceived as providing an 'authentic' perspective of Japanese identity. This study will investigate this presumption. I will analyse Mori's and Murakami's works in terms of their use of cultural signifiers and the ways in which they choose to both present their personae and represent their work to a non-Japanese audience. I will pay particular attention to the ways in which they have manipulated notions of identity in order to appeal to an American audience, emphasizing a contrasting threatening/victimized presence. In turn I will examine what these expressions reveal about the Japanese-American relationship, and how this relationship has affected the construction of Japanese national identity during the 1990s and early 21st century.

Originally a fashion model and subsequently a fashion design student, Mariko Mori began her professional career as an artist in the mid-90s when she started producing photographs of herself outfitted in various guises such as alien, cyborg or spiritual avatar. Posing as model in the work *Play with Me* (1994) (figure 2), Mori stands coyly dressed

with blue hair and armour, reminiscent of cyborgs in video games, Japanese comics and animation. The title suggests that she wants ‘to play’ with somebody, presumably with the men that surround her. But she receives little attention as they enter the video game arcade; her virtual video game counterpart is more enticing. She is objectified, and with no obvious interaction with the men, her isolation suggests a sense of social incoherence between men and women in Japan. Borrowing from the popular *anime*, or animation, and *manga*, or comic book recipe that combines a *kawaii* woman, technology and sexuality, the image is somewhat perplexing. Is she really trying to act like a child’s plaything, or is she asking the men to play with her in a sexual manner? If she is desiring the men’s attention, they seem to ignore her. Is this because she acts too demurely, or is this an act and an attempt to be coquettish? The work is ambiguous and calls for an internal understanding of Japanese culture. At the same time it calls up stereotypical notions of Japan, where Japan is represented as submissive female. As a representation of Japan, she is alluring. Veiled by an aura of potential threat with her armored gear, she is rendered relatively benign by her demure looks.

Murakami also investigates the confluence of cute women and technology in pop culture, but in an infinitely more eroticized fashion, as depicted by his female cyborg sculpture, *Second Mission Project ko²*, or *SMP ko²* (1999) (figure 1).¹ *SMP ko²* is a large toy-like sculptural installation depicting a cyborg in three stages of transformation. In one stage, she is in a naked human-like state. In another, she is shown in transition between human and the mechanical, and in the final stage, she is transformed into a jet-fighter plane. *SMP ko²* exhibits that strange place of collision in Japanese visual culture where the cute-wide eyed look of children’s animation merges with the erotic display of

¹ As with most of his works, Murakami has created several versions of *Second Mission Project ko²*.

youthful female bodies and the more technologically-prone fighting cyborg form. The fetishistic eroticisation of the female body is a dominant theme found in young men's *manga*, *anime*, and video games. But while it exhibits an admiration of the female form and technology, it also suggests a certain fear associated with these elements: *SMP ko²* is a high-tech weapon. As opposed to Mori's vision of femininity, *SMP ko²* is not only more eroticized, but it is also violent. With breasts exposed in the human form, she also exposes her genitals, which eventually become part of the phallic tip of a jet plane. But she is also very toy-like, reminiscent of a female version of a Transformer toy. The juxtaposition of a sexualized female form with a fighter plane and the associations of children's toys has a jarring effect. What is the significance of combining a sexualized yet childlike female body with technological weaponry? What does this tell the predominantly Western audience about Japanese sexuality, maturity and power? It creates a convoluted image that poses both threat and feelings of estrangement and attraction. By pinpointing this conjuncture, Murakami delves into many of the issues that shaped Japanese culture in the late 20th century, as well as many of the Western assumptions made about Japan.

From an outside perspective *SMP ko²* and *Play with Me* are confusing. Females appear to be liberated and strong, but also constrained and erotically objectified. The works express a complexity that hints at the plurality of Japanese identity, but they also fall prey to some standard Western stereotypes. The feminization and infantilization through *kawaii* tropes along with alien and cyborg signs can be read as symbols of Japanese culture itself. They create a notion of Japan as at once endearing, seductive and then also somewhat dangerous. The confusion replicates a Western perception of Japan

as a strange culture, impervious to clear understanding. This back and forth adherence and rejection of Western stereotypes explores Japanese identity from a privileged place within the culture, as well as from a perspective that appears to be decidedly Western, and perhaps even more specifically, American. This begs the question as to whom are Mori and Murakami addressing their work? Moreover, what do their works tell the audience about the ways in which Japanese identity is manifest in popular culture, and how are these ideas exported? This thesis will explore the ways in which historical, political, economic and social developments have been reflected in the production of Japanese pop culture vocabulary. In turn, Mori's and Murakami's works will be analysed in relation to the nation's evolution since the late 1970s. Their manipulation of cultural representations exhibits some of the fundamental issues at work in the recent construction of Japanese national identity. With a large American audience, their works encapsulate some of the social issues at stake as Japan faces an uncertain economic future amid the pressures of the globalization.

CHAPTER I: THE KAWAII PHENOMENON

Murakami's and Mori's use of the popular idiom of cute, or *kawaii*, is symptomatic of Japan's changing social structure and vision of national identity since the end of WWII. The introduction of *kawaii*, as typified by characters such as Hello Kitty, marked the dissolution of Japan's once strong notion of Japanese identity.² An aesthetic that became popular with adult females and males, *kawaii* threatened the stability of *nihonjinron*, a dominant theory of heroic Japanese identity in the 1980s and early 1990s. *Kawaii* was fashionable with the emerging class of independent young women, or *shōjo*, and signalled the breakdown of traditional Japanese society. For the traditionalists it represented the feared realization of an infantilised and feminised nation. Mori and Murakami navigate the use of *kawaii* tropes to expose the basis of these fears, as well as reflect upon the meaning of *shōjo* culture in the formation of a shifting national identity.

Kawaii initially evolved out of a visual aesthetic attributed to Walt Disney's post-WWII influence on *manga* and *anime* industries.³ This lasting impact is visible in certain stylistic traits like large heads and round bodies, or in high-pitched voices and coy posturing. Yet *kawaii* elicits a variety of associations beyond a Disneyesque version of

² Hello Kitty, or *Kitty-chan* as she is known in Japan, is a popular character developed in 1974 by Sanrio. Hello Kitty is now recognized worldwide for her encephalic head, small body, and lack of mouth, giving her a rather expressionless appearance. By Japanese standards she has a very 'cute' appearance. While most people outside of Japan would recognize Hello Kitty as Japanese character, she is promoted within Japan as British. See Takashi Murakami, "Little Boy (Plates and Entries)," in *Little Boy: the Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture*, ed. Takashi Murakami (New York: Japan Society; New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 2005), 44-45; and Sharon Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," in *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan*, ed. Lise Skov and Brian Moeran, (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1995), 220-254, for more about Japanese "characters."

³ These industries can be traced back to practices from the Kamakura period (1192-1333), when manga-like caricatures first emerged. See Frederik L. Schodt, *Manga! Manga!: the World of Japanese Comics* (Tokyo; New York: Kodansha International, 1983) and Frederik L. Schodt, *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga* (Berkeley, CA.: Stone Bridge Press, 1996). Disney was introduced before WWII, but during the post-war American occupation, the nation was flooded with Disney animation and comics. Kinsella, "Cuties," 241.

sweetness and innocence. First appearing in Japanese dictionaries in the 1970s, the term *kawaii* denotes ideas of genuineness, vulnerability, beauty, and even social (and sexual) inexperience.⁴ Despite being also associated with a sense of frailty, *kawaii* has become one of the most widely used terms in contemporary Japan, often used as a compliment for adults.⁵ Initially affiliated with childish behaviour and playthings, the *kawaii* aesthetic has infiltrated pop music, adult *anime* and *manga*, literature, fashion and consumer goods. It has evolved into an aesthetic and a style, as well as an attitude, a behaviour and statement. For many young adults, it is a way of life. Sociologists such as Sharon Kinsella have attributed this adult “regressive” infatuation to an attempt to achieve more independence.⁶ For Kinsella, this social trend demonstrated a soft rebellion by youths who rejected expected social roles in the family, workplace and society at large. To embrace *kawaii* was to maintain childhood freedom.⁷ These youths reneged on prescribed duties to support the economy and the nation as a whole that had been cultivated in the immediate post-war period.

By the 1980s, Japan had dug itself out of the mid-1940s economically and morally low period through a programme of planned economic growth. In response to this impressive turn around, a wealth of scholarship emerged. The most popular discourse, *nihonjinron*, attempted to explain Japan’s rapid success as a socio-cultural

⁴ *Kawaii* has etymological roots in the premodern term *kawayushi*, and is also related to the term *kawaiisō*. Whereas *kawayushi* denotes shyness, embarrassment, and vulnerability, *kawaiisō* means pathetic, poor, and pitiable. Kinsella, “Cuties,” 220.

⁵ Ibid., 220-222.

⁶ Kinsella, “Cuties,” 220-254. Numerous cultural ethnographers, anthropologists and theorists have studied the importance of *kawaii* in late 20th century Japan. A few to note include Ōtsuka Eiji, John Whittier Treat, Hiroshi Aoyagi, Sharon Kinsella, as well as many more.

⁷ Ibid., 245.

phenomenon.⁸ This theory was held together by “a moral and emotional imperative either to explain ‘Japan’ to outsiders or to seek the restitution of lost identity in national terms.”⁹ It was in part a reaction to the loss of identity experienced throughout the post WWII American occupation. Theorist Harry D. Harootunian argues that the U.S.A. portrayed its post-war relationship with Japan in gendered terms. The now infamous 1945 photograph of the first meeting between a formally attired and petite Emperor Hirohito next to the casually dressed and towering General Douglas MacArthur (figure 3) served as a symbol of the initial American-Japanese marriage during the American occupation. Imagined as the bride of America, Japan was inducted into an American ‘masculine’ style of democracy.¹⁰ Indeed, Japan’s early post-war self-image relied heavily upon American expectations but also upon the desire to self-differentiate. This image demanded a narrative based upon outside perspectives that, as Harootunian states, “demanded the appeal to fixed cultural values.”¹¹

Harootunian suggests that in order to build a cohesive national identity, Japan emphasized values and experience “attesting to a cultural endowment that had survived since time immemorial (a social Darwinist inflection that privileged enduring values supposedly because they had survived) as an explanation for both economic and technological success and the absence of conflict in the nation’s history.”¹² Embracing American modernization, and becoming re-industrialized in the late 1960s, Japan moved

⁸ See Yumiko Iida, *Rethinking Identity in Modern Japan: Nationalism as Aesthetics* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 164, for a more complete analysis of *nihonjinron*.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 164-5.

¹⁰ When MacArthur recalled his experience in Japan during Senate hearings, he stated that “measured by the standards of modern civilization,” the Japanese, “would be like a boy of 12 as compared with our development of 45 years.” John Dower, *Japan in War and Peace* (New York: New Press, 1993), 550.

¹¹ H. D. Harootunian, “America’s Japan/ Japan’s Japan,” in *Japan in the World*, ed. Masao Miyoshi and H. D. Harootunian (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 200.

¹² *Ibid.*, 199-201.

towards a more symbolic imperial institution. When Japan finally realized its economic weight on a global scale in the 1970s, social theorists explained Japan's meteoric rise through an illusory timeless culture grounded in racial homogeneity and familial consensus, or *nihonjinron*. "America's Japan became Japan's Japan once it was recognized in the 1970s that the goals of modernization had been reached, income-doubling secured, and high economic growth realized."¹³ However, when Japan finally recognized its status as an independent and more masculine "Japan's Japan" under the aegis of *nihonjinron*, cracks in the social fabric began to surface. The *kawaii* movement was one of the first signs of dissolution. Although less overtly radical than the 1960s politically-driven youth movements in Japan, this trend was frowned upon by many older Japanese.¹⁴ Those who had struggled to bring Japan out of its post-war devastation perceived the idealization of *kawaii* as anti-social. Leading intelligentsia and the mass media typecast the *kawaii* movement as a sign of society's increasing instability.¹⁵

The problem with *kawaii* was that it was largely associated with the rise of independently minded young women. During the latter part of the 20th century, many young women resisted traditional domestic roles.¹⁶ Although excluded from high-level career appointments, they enjoyed a certain amount of freedom due to relatively easy access to part-time or temporary employment. Known as *shōjo*, these young single women earned and spent money to satisfy their own desires. Developed in the Meiji era,

¹³ Ibid., 215.

¹⁴ In the 1970s there was at least one very radical group, the Japanese Red Army, an anti-government and anti-monarchist group. This extremist group gained notoriety for a 1970 airplane hijacking in Japan, and their later affiliation with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

¹⁵ Kinsella, "Japanese Subculture in the 1990s: *Otaku* and the Amateur *Manga* Movement," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 24, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 290-291.

¹⁶ Changes in Japanese women's roles mirrored the Western "Second Wave" of feminism (from the 1960s until the late 1970s). This Wave was generally characterized by a concern for equality and the end to sexual discrimination and oppression.

the term *shōjo* was originally used to describe adolescent women.¹⁷ By the late 20th century it evolved into a pejorative term and was applied to sexually mature adult women in their 20s and 30s deemed socially unproductive by virtue of their rejection of prescribed roles of mother and wife.¹⁸ Immersed in a society with a tendency towards group consensus, *shōjo* were denigrated for their refusal to acquiesce to the conventions of an older generation. In addition to rejecting traditional gender roles, they led the overall spending on *kawaii* goods, services, and fashion. The media criticized the *shōjo* for creating their own “exotic and longed-for world of individual fulfillment, decadence, consumption and play.”¹⁹ Even though the 1980s demarcated overall increases in consumption, they became symbols of excess. They emblemized “pure play as pure sign,” with emphasis placed on their roles as consumers rather than producers.²⁰

Ever since their respective international debuts in the 1990s, Mori and Murakami have reflected the social relevance of *kawaii* and the emergence of the *shōjo* generation in their art. Mori in particular has isolated the link between *kawaii* and *shōjo*, and has shown how these two have been linked in popular culture production. In *Birth of a Star* (1995) (figure 4), Mori acts as model and alludes to the Japanese pop music industry—an industry famed in the 1980s for its cute pop idols. In this backlit photographic transparency, Mori acts the part of a young school girl wearing a short tartan schoolgirl

¹⁷ During the Meiji period (1868-1912) when Japan re-opened its doors to Western contact, the ‘traditional’ gender roles of female caretaker, mother and wife and male breadwinner developed. Urbanization increased and the emulation of samurai wifely roles replaced the labouring activities of farming and merchant wives. The stay-at-home wife fully gained popularity in the mid-1950s when the post-war economy was driven primarily by industries such as steel production and construction. Masatoshi Takada, “Changing Patterns in Sexuality and Sex-based Roles,” in *The Electric Geisha: Exploring Japan’s Popular Culture*, ed. Atsushi Ueda, trans. Miriam Eguchi (Tokyo; New York: Kodansha International; New York: Distributed in the U.S.A. by Kodansha America, 1994), 196-8.

¹⁸ John Whittier Treat, “Yoshimoto Banana Writes Home: *Shōjo* Culture and the Nostalgic Subject,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 19, no. 2 (Summer 1993), 362.

¹⁹ Kinsella, “Cuties,” 244.

²⁰ Treat, 362. See also Ōtsuka, Eiji in Midori Matsui in *Little Boy*, ed. Murakami, 210.

skirt, and large headphones perched on her head. It is a slick and saccharine vision that accentuates a sense of plasticity. Stiffened by her shiny vinyl stockings, she shields her true eye colour with opaque contact lenses and accompanies the image with vocal renderings of her own high pitched pop music composition. Mori's *Star* is a ready-made doll that encapsulates the essence of *kawaii*. She is meant to be consumed for visual and not necessarily aural pleasure. Referring both to a child's plaything and to the *kawaii* posturing of the 1970s and 1980s popular music industry, Mori plays upon the popularity of pop-idols known as *kawaiko-chan*, or "cute girls and boys."²¹ As symbols of *kawaii* and *shōjo* culture, pop-idols were not heralded for their productivity, talent, or ability. Rather, as Japanese literature and culture professor John Whittier Treat points out, they were idolized for their relative lack of talent.²² Simply being *kawaii* was enough.

Birth of a Star marks the beginning of *shōjo* demonization. It demarcates the point when consumption began to take precedence over production, and the moment when women became blamed for this shift. As Kinsella states, *shōjo* women became "the focus of the nation...in turn becoming the scapegoats for what many perceived as the unravelling of traditional mores of society."²³ Yet by the late 1980s, *kawaii* developed a relatively "humorous, kitsch androgynous style," embraced by young men as well.²⁴ Many men shied away from the average salary-man lifestyle of long work hours and envied the *shōjo* lifestyle. In turn, these men emulated the *kawaii* style and subverted

²¹ Hiroshi Aoyagi, "Pop Idols and Gender Contestation," in *Japan at the Millennium: Joining Past & Future*, ed. David W. Edgington (Vancouver; Toronto: UBC Press, 2003), 148.

²² Treat, 364. See Aoyagi "Pop Idols," 144-167 for more details on *kawaii* and pop music.

²³ Kinsella, "*Otaku*," 290.

²⁴ Kinsella, "Cuties," 220.

normative ideas of masculinity.²⁵ They avoided an identity associated with hard work and the gruff, emotionally detached notion of ‘true’ Japanese masculinity. As such, men became part of the *shōjo* problem.²⁶ *Shōjo* evolved to an overall catchall term for youth culture, and the general media associated *shōjo* with the corruption of Japanese society.²⁷ Japan’s putative infantilization was associated with a fear of possible feminization.²⁸

Anime and *manga* precipitated the apparent feminization of Japanese male culture. In early post-war *manga*, boys’ and girls’ genres were quite different. *Shōjo manga*, originally created for young female readers, was decidedly more *kawaii* in style, typically revolving around a love story featuring a large eyed-heroine with bisexual inclinations.²⁹ In the 1970s the amateur *shōjo manga* movement expanded upon the formulaic use of bisexual female protagonists, and switched to predominantly male homosexual characters.³⁰ This female-created amateur *manga* movement exaggerated but nonetheless highlighted the real-life experience of women exploring identities outside of

²⁵ During the 1990s, male pop singers and musicians were portrayed as sensitive, gentle and good looking, common attributes associated with the feminine ideal. Young men “experimented with ‘things feminine’ and ‘things foreign’ as constitutive parts of their identities.” Iida, *Rethinking*, 229-30.

²⁶ Jennifer Robertson states that *shōjo* “implies heterosexual *inexperience* and homosexual *experience*.” Jennifer Robertson, “Gender-bending in Paradise: Doing ‘Female’ and ‘Male’ in Japan,” *Genders*, no. 5 (Summer 1989): 56; quoted in Treat, 364. Treat states that *shōjo* is “presumably homosexual because the emotional life of the *shōjo* is essentially narcissistic in that it is self-referential, and self-referential as long as the *shōjo* is not employed productively in the sexual and capitalist economy.” Treat, 364. However, I argue that this narcissism would thus imply a certain thread of impotence or possibly asexuality rather than a homosexual nature. Narcissism infers a consumption of the self, rather than directing libidinal desires towards others of the same gender.

²⁷ Kinsella, “*Otaku*,” 309-10.

²⁸ Ironically, as Kinsella points out, female *shōjo* behaviour was “not actually traditional feminine behaviour at all, but a new kind of petulant refusal to be traditional subservient females.” Women were chastised for both “vying with men for good jobs and simultaneously denying them marriage partners.” Kinsella, “*Cuties*,” 249.

²⁹ This style originated with the father of modern day *anime* and *manga*, Tezuka Osamu and his 1953 manga *Ribon no Kishi* (*Princess Knight*). Revered in Japan for seminal works like *Kimba the Lion* and *Astro Boy*, Tezuka influenced many subsequent artists. Schodt, *Manga! Manga!*, 96

³⁰ The amateur *manga* industry is driven by individuals who print and distribute editions of their own *manga*. Stylistically and thematically innovative, amateur *manga* is hugely popular, with amateur *shōjo manga* leading in production volume. A number of influential female artists have since filtered into commercial girl’s *manga* magazines. Kinsella states that the amateur *manga* conventions “are the largest mass public gatherings in contemporary Japan.” Kinsella, “*Otaku*,” 298, 300-2.

heterosexual marriage. Although these themes of male homosexuality confused and displeased many male *manga* readers at first, this changed by the 1980s. *Shōjo manga* began attracting a male readership, and eventually a new style of *shōjo manga* emerged that was both written and read by young men.³¹ But the backlash against this type of male *shōjo manga* was swift. On one level, critics viewed *manga*'s insertion in print culture as a sign of "the victory of the popular" over "pure literature."³² Many academics felt that the infantile and frivolous *kawaii* manifestations of popular culture tainted the traditional and "pure" society aligned with the masculine.³³ On another associated level, these non-heterosexual love stories in *shōjo manga* signalled social dysfunction in the traditional sense.³⁴ New themes, with the cult of infantilization and gender incoherence colliding in alarming ways, reflected the realities of a growing incoherence between men and women.³⁵

In general, *shōjo manga* focused on non-conformist ideas of gender and sexuality. As Kinsella states, this style expressed "a profound disjuncture between the expectations of men and the expectations of women in contemporary Japan."³⁶ Mori's *Play with Me*

³¹ Schodt, *Manga! Manga!*, 102-3. Kinsella, "Otaku," 300.

³² Treat, 258-9.

³³ In Japan, "[it] has been suggested that this new material snobbism has freed young educated Japanese from the old academic snobbism of the 1950s and 1960s which demanded a familiarity (or at least a pretension of familiarity) with the works of Marx, Sartre and Dostoevsky for membership amongst the fashionable set; in this new snobbism, what counts is not the possession of knowledge but that of commodities demonstrating good aesthetic taste." Inoue, S., "Jyōhō to seikatusu-ishiki no henka," in *Jyōhō to Nihonjin*, ed. Masaichi N. (Tokyo, Kyōbun Dō, 1992) 131-2; quoted in Iida, *Rethinking*, 178

³⁴ Educational and political authorities eventually became so worried about *manga*'s potential threat to youth sexuality that a *manga* censorship campaign evolved between 1990 and 1992. Amateur *manga* producers, who happened to be predominantly female and produced works that dealt with alternative sexualities and gendered ideals, were particularly targeted. Kinsella, "Otaku," 312-313. Of course, I should point out that homosexuality is not a

³⁵ Birth rates and marriage rates have fallen while the aging population, suicide, alcoholism, and a new breed of social agoraphobics called *hikikomori* is growing. Common-law living situations are relatively rare. See Maggie Jones, "Shutting Themselves In," *New York Times Magazine*, January 15, 2006, and Zielenziger *Shutting out the Sun*, iii.

³⁶ Kinsella, "Otaku," 306.

(1994) (figure 2) represents an important shift in the liberation of female sexuality at the time. Placed under sale price signage, she stands ready and waiting, as if for sale. Her model calls to men to “play” with her as they enter the video game arcade in the electronic equipment sales district of Akihabara in Tokyo. Gone were the days when career-oriented women were derogatorily referred to as “extraordinary women, more manly than most men.”³⁷ When Mori created this image in 1994, it had been almost ten years since the Equal Employment Opportunity Law had passed. And yet, with the sharp economic recession of the 1990s, and the subsequent tightening of the job market, women were still relatively restricted in employment opportunities.³⁸ Instead women found alternative or corresponding means of challenging tradition, including through sexual commodification.³⁹ It was during this decade of *onna no jidai*, or “the age of women,”⁴⁰ that in 1993, one year before Mori produced *Play with Me*, sex-shops specializing in teen-age girls’ used underwear sprung up throughout the nation. Young adolescent women earned extra pocket money by selling used underwear. Meanwhile others actively pursued sexual encounters with much older men, an activity known as compensated dating or *enjo kōsai*.⁴¹ Teenage schoolgirls “dated” *oyagi*, or “middle-aged men,” who willingly provided monetary or designer good “gifts” in exchange for sexual favours. Breaking the taboo associated with modern moral concepts of permissive female sexuality, these *kogyaru*, or “little-girls,” fully embraced and exploited their designation as commodified symbols.

To the extent that the girls market themselves by becoming pure and empty

³⁷ “*otoko masari no tokubetsu na josei*,” Takada, 196-7.

³⁸ Mikiso Hane, *Eastern Phoenix: Japan Since 1945* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996), 159-60.

³⁹ Iida, *Rethinking*, 229.

⁴⁰ Aoyagi, 152.

⁴¹ This trend emerged almost a decade after *rorikon* first emerged.

signs to be filled in by the *oyagi*'s ideal, the girls erase the traits of their 'true' personalities to become an anonymous social type, the *kogyaru*, allowing them to momentarily free themselves from their everyday context and the governance of self-consciousness and social morality.⁴²

In works such as *Play with Me* where Mori takes on the role of the ultimate *kawaii* girl, the *kogyaru*, she manipulates her role as marketed symbol, slipping in and out of the multiple variations of the sign, be it as pop star, *manga* or *anime* star, little girl, or alien being. And yet the potential empowerment that these changing symbols provide is never quite within the viewer's grasp. Instead, Mori paints a static image of repression, where the subject lacks a sense of control.

For even though the *kogyaru* can be seen as a symbol of female sexual liberation, her emergence signals a retaliation of sorts against the male sexual objectification of women. Before the era of *enjo kōsai* when women and girls began to self-commodify, the eroticization and fetishization of little girls was already well entrenched in a late 80s type of male *shōjo manga* known as *rorikon manga*. As an allusion to Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, *rorikon manga* focused on the exploits of the ultimate symbol of *kawaii* innocence, young prepubescent schoolgirls. This new genre of men's amateur *shōjo manga* followed the exploits of "a girl heroine with large eyes and a body [...] both voluptuous and child-like," who often engaged in sexually explicit or violent acts.⁴³ Echoing *rorikon*'s rise in popularity, Murakami's work *Hiropon* (1997) (figure 5) features a large-scale figure of a youthful girl clad in only a thin strip of a bikini top, skipping in childlike abandon.⁴⁴ But instead of using a rope, she harnesses the milk

⁴² Yonohara, K., "Mirareru shintai to sei" ["Body and Sexuality"], in *Hayari no Bunka Chō kenkyū* (Kyoto: Seigen sha, 1998), 196-9; quoted in Iida, *Rethinking*, 232.

⁴³ Ibid., 305.

⁴⁴ *Hiropon* is slang for the drug heroin, suggestive of the addictive and perhaps unhealthy nature of *rorikon manga*. *Hiropon* was also the original name of Murakami's factory. He has since changed the name to the

spurting from her enormous breasts. Further complicating the issue, Murakami erases her genitalia, making her both woman and child. Denoting sexual maturity with her large breasts, the sculpture also embodies maternal readiness with her milk. But with a lack of visible sex organs she also suggests presexual maturity or even asexuality. *Hiropon* isolates a floundering sense of male virility. It exposes a culture where adult men idealize sexual relationships with girls instead of mature adult women.⁴⁵

Frustrated by her culture's patriarchal attitudes towards women Mori developed *Play with Me* as part of a series where she depicted herself in a variety of subservient and/or alienated roles. Mori claimed that these works represented her feelings of oppression and were a "demonstration to that [Japanese] society."⁴⁶ Assuming the role of a *kawaii* plaything, Mori alludes to the marginal world that young women occupy in traditional Japanese culture. She shows that *shōjo* women are simultaneously infantilised and eroticised by male spectatorship. *Kawaii* is no longer just a phase embraced by women as a mode of passive rebellion. The Lolita-ization of women represented a new means of controlling women's freedom. Standing in as model, Mori is ready to be consumed in all her *kawaii* glory, resplendent with flowing blue *anime* locks, shiny metallic costume and demure posturing. Frederik L. Schodt, in his extensive analysis of Japanese comics, *Manga! Manga!*, states that the eroticization of little girls originated as

more playful *Kaikai Kiki* (in 2001) (*Kaikai* and *Kiki* are also the names of two of Murakami's playful bunny-eared characters). Arthur Lubow. "The Murakami Method," *The New York Times Magazine*, April 3, 2005.

⁴⁵ An idealized vision of motherhood has "long been a staple of the incestuous sexual fantasies of Japanese men (as innumerable novels and films have documented)." However the late 20th century was perhaps the first time in postwar history that it was, "seriously shaken." Iida, *Rethinking*, 229.

⁴⁶ Kathryn Hixson, "Future Perfect: An Interview with Mariko Mori," *New Art Examiner* 26, no. 4 (Dec 1998/Jan 1999): 44-5.

a means to avoid censorship, “since the law tends to overlook nude scenes of children.”⁴⁷

But as Yumiko Iida states in *Rethinking Identity in Modern Japan: Nationalism as Aesthetics*, media and sex industries had been “unrestrainedly exploiting images of ‘innocence,’ erasing the boundary between professional and non-sexual workers, as well as age restrictions since the early 1980s.”⁴⁸

Indeed much of *rorikon manga* can be attributed to a male desire to rope in and harness women. The heroine, more often than not, seems to be a protagonist of contradictions. While *rorikon* portrays a young girl scantily clad or in revealing outfits, these outfits are often a version of a sexy armoured space-age suit. Tough and clever, the *rorikon* heroine puts up a fight when encountering typical scenarios involving potential rape or fights. Despite her youthful looks, she is no pushover.⁴⁹ Yet in Mori’s image she is not at all active. Instead of soliciting interaction with the surrounding men, she waits patiently and passively to be played with, like the Sega video console that stands next to her. Her timid posture suggests discomfort in this male-dominated environment. The image critiques a society that enables and replicates such images—providing little else for women than the role of victim.⁵⁰ Mori’s work suggests that the idea of the tough little *rorikon* girl is not an image of female empowerment. Kinsella states: “The little girl heroines of *rorikon manga* reflect simultaneously an awareness of the increasing power

⁴⁷ Schodt, *Manga! Manga!*, 134. In the late 1980s, traditional limitations on explicit content began to collapse, and by 1993, the long-time prohibition on depicting pubic hair and genitalia finally eroded. Schodt, *Dreamland*, 53-4, 59. Schodt, *Manga! Manga!*, 136.

⁴⁸ Iida, *Rethinking*, 231.

⁴⁹ Kinsella, “*Otaku*,” 305.

⁵⁰ Sharalyn Orbaugh has examined the notion of the female technofied fighting body, or the ‘Busty Battlin’ Babe’ (BBB) protagonist, in *anime* and *manga*. As a character pulled from video games, the BBB instills notions of identification and desire in the predominantly male video ‘gamers.’ Orbaugh perceives BBB’s fighting abilities as a retaliation against women’s increasingly independent position in society. BBB is a *man-made* character developed primarily for serving the state or her male creator. Sharalyn Orbaugh, “Busty Battlin’ Babes: The Evolution of the *Shojo* in 1990s Visual Culture,” in *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, ed. Joshua S. Mostow, et al. (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2003), 201-228.

and centrality of young women in society, and also a reactive desire to see these young women disarmed, infantilised, and subordinated.”⁵¹ For the male audience, these types of *manga* produce an idealized, controllable partner in a type of fantasy realm. She is strong, but considerably younger than the male reader. Continually beaten down and objectified, she is unable to fully realize an identity as liberated *shōjo*. Unlike the physical manifestation of the *kogyaru*, Mori’s girl is incapable of regulating the means and ways in which she is consumed.

Shōjo culture and the popularity of *kawaii* marked a change in Japanese culture and society. *Kawaii* came to symbolize female emancipation, commodified culture, and despondency towards the post-war social structure. In addition to signalling a passive regressive rebellion of self-infantilization, *kawaii* also revealed a national turn towards gender re-evaluation. The integration of *kawaii* and erotica in *shōjo manga* in the form of homoerotic themes and *rorikon* represented a debilitating heterosexual incoherence. Confronted by female independence, men chose either to emulate women or to infantilize them as *kawaii* objects. Youth maintained a kind of childlike inertia, consuming and using their sexuality in unconventional, non-reproductive fashions. The patriarchal theory of homogeneity, *nihonjinron*, and the economic stability of the nation were contested by the sense of an increasingly feminized and infantilized society. Traditional rules were set aside, as the emerging youth rejected old identities and explored new ones. Mori’s *Play with Me* and Murakami’s *Hiropon* identify the palpable sense of confusion, and the social conflict between the resistance to and embrace of changes that marked a shift in the post-War construction of a strong unified national identity.

⁵¹ Kinsella, “*Otaku*,” 306.

CHAPTER II: THE OTAKU CRISIS

At the same time that women initiated major social shifts, Japan became the forerunner in technological innovation. These catalysts of change coalesced into the pop cultural fetishization of the female cyborg form like Mori's *rorikon* model in *Play with Me. Shōjo* women and technology demarcated overwhelming change in Japanese lifestyle. But as women became increasingly socially and economically independent, their more affable virtual or synthetic counterparts grew more and more attractive, like Mori's imagined videogame replica in *Play with Me*. Video games, computers, and cell phones encouraged physical isolation in an already fragmented society. Embraced by the younger population, technology became a source of a fear of mutation, and its main consumers, the *otaku*, became symbols of Japan's corruption. Along with the *kyogaru*, the *otaku* as part of the emerging youth known as the *shinjinrui*, or "new breed" of humans, represented the 1990s evolution of the 1980s version of *shōjo* youth culture.⁵² John Whittier Treat states that the emergence of the *shinjinrui* identified the "breakdown in social order, the eroticisation of children, and the proliferation of gratuitous images and commodities."⁵³ Although the *kogyaru* received a lot of attention through the 1980s and 1990s, her male equivalent, the *otaku*, caused even more concern. The advent of the technologically-obsessed *otaku* with their predilections for *rorikon* cyborg themed products destabilized the social order. For many, they were not only incomprehensible, but foreign, and the tie that was made between the *otaku* and the perpetrators of several malicious attacks

⁵² First used in 1985, the term *shinjinrui* is somewhat misleading—as is any concrete notion of youth. Kinsella points out that the term is variously used to identify either teens, people in their 20s or those in their 30s, but is also at times used to identify a cross section of age groups. Kinsella, "Otaku," 292.

⁵³ Treat, 355.

cemented the fear that the alien resided within Japan.⁵⁴ No longer able to maintain the homogeneous *nihonjinron* theory, people were forced to recognize their nation's heterogeneity, Mori and Murakami included. Confronting the idea of heterogeneity, the artists touch upon some of the *otaku*'s favoured themes and interests, re-evaluating the stability of the nation's gender and social ideologies and the *shinjinrui*'s effect on the shifting national order.

Although objects of desire, the pairing of women and technology represented the fear of loss of identity during the 1990s. Susan Napier has shown that the female cyborg—the embodiment of women and technology—became an increasingly popular *anime* and *manga* protagonist who presented a painful and alienating reality.⁵⁵ This was in sharp contrast to earlier cyborg characters like the original “technologized body,” *Astro Boy*.⁵⁶ Although *Astro Boy* was not human, he was imbued with human characteristics, including the capacity to have feelings; he was in essence a “superhuman.”⁵⁷ Later cyborg characters however, exhibited a confused relationship between the body and mind or spirit.⁵⁸ In Oshii Mamoru's 1995 *anime* version of *Ghost in the Shell* (*Kōkaku Kidōtai*), the main protagonist, Major Motoko Kusanagi, searches

⁵⁴ The most notable violent crimes included the killing of little girls by Miyazaki Tsutomu (discussed later) and the 1995 Aum Shinrikyō sarin gas attacks on the Tokyo subway.

⁵⁵ Treat, 92-101.

⁵⁶ Tezuka Osamu's 1951 *manga* production *Tetsuwan Atomu*, or *Astro Boy* as he is known outside of Japan, was the first *manga* depicting the meshing of technology and humans. *Astro Boy*'s Japanese name is *Tetsuwan Atomu*, revealing an atomic derivation. In 1963, *Astro Boy* became an *anime*, the first televised Japanese animated series ever. Susan Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 87.

⁵⁷ *Astro Boy*'s fighting persona has since served as the prototype for the ensuing male-oriented style of *anime* productions: the *mecha* genre that emphasizes masculine, “hard-edged, thrusting, outward-oriented power.” Ibid., 87. “*Mecha* (a shortening of the word “mechanical”), privileges a favourite form from Japanese popular culture, the robot.” Ibid., 11.

⁵⁸ *Ghost in the Shell* was rated number 1 on *Billboard*'s August 24, 1996 best-seller list of videos. Peter M. Nichols, “Home Video,” *The New York Times*, September 13, 1996.

for the presence of a ghost (human soul) within her cyborg shell.⁵⁹ Lacking a ghost as well as a fixed gender, Kusanagi eventually fuses with a male-voiced character. Kusanagi's identity is entirely dependent upon technological developments. Without a stable body, soul and gender; her identity is not fixed, nor is it clear that she is even partially human. Such radical changes in human make-up signalled the transformative and dangerous capabilities of technology. In pop culture representations, technology had the power to provoke identity loss.

Similarly, the core fear of *shōjo* resided within its malleable nature. As with worries about the rising prominence of women on the work force and their influence on the emerging social structure, the fear of technology became fixated on technology's ability to foster change. Asian studies professor Sharalyn Orbaugh has shown that while discourse surrounding *shōjo* has been largely contradictory, it is overwhelmingly associated not only with ideas of the feminine, but also with transformation.⁶⁰ In a sense, technology is part of *shōjo* culture. This fear of technology can be traced back to particular market developments in Japan after the end of World War II. Through solid economic restructuring, Japan became one of the early innovators in the development and production of information technologies and popular cultural media. Japan emerged as a forerunner in the distribution of video games, electronic entertainment systems, cellular phones, computer parts and other technology. However, expanding production gave way to the global trend of flexible accumulation whereby Japan began producing more than it was able to consume. Exports were high until 1985, when the yen was revalued and doubled in relation to the U.S.A. dollar. To counter the drop in exports, a drive towards

⁵⁹ The *anime* is based upon Shiro Masamune's 1991 *manga*. Napier, *Anime*, 104-7.

⁶⁰ It has been ambiguously described as an uncertain, mercurial, elastic, and even an ungended aspect of society. Orbaugh, 204-5.

greater internal consumption evolved in order to support high levels of domestic production.⁶¹

In an ironic turn of events, while the emergence of the new breed of youths brought about criticism concerning their individualistic attitudes, their prevalence also signaled the growing commodification and standardization of desire. As Yumiko Iida states, Japan became caught in a “drive to realize the ‘hyperreal’ and displace ‘the real.’”⁶² But with the decontextualized image framing consumer culture, the excessive 1980s drive to absorb the hyperreal began to be questioned in Japanese society. This was heightened in light of some of the real-time physical *otaku* appropriations of the *rorikon* symbol at the turn of the decade. The *otaku* were perceived as the actual technofied reality of Japanese culture. So named because of their preference for the more formal and distancing form of address, or *otaku*, these men were unaccustomed to close friendships.⁶³ These anti-social, so-called “geeks” valued relationships with technology and virtual realities over physical human relationships, and were vilified for these proclivities and a seemingly skewed perception of reality. Mori’s *Play with Me* captures the essence of the *otaku*. Although seemingly benign, the men in the image, and their rejection of reality over the virtual, represent some of the core fears associated with the *otaku*.

In 1989 the national media’s unveiling of a series of gruesome murders solidified the *otaku* as a social pariah and threat. Miyazaki Tsutomu marked the point at which

⁶¹ The U.S.A. raised the value of the yen, and under international pressure, Japan formally sanctioned the increase in a joint agreement with the United States (1985 Plaza Accord). This meant that Japanese exports became less desirable because of their higher price tag.

⁶² Iida, *Rethinking*, 176.

⁶³ *Otaku* literally translates as ‘your home’ and by association ‘you’, ‘yours’ and ‘home.’ Kinsella, “*Otaku*,” 310. The term *otaku* was originally taken from the vocabulary of fulltime homemakers who are predominantly defined by their roles as wives and moms.

1980s *kawaii* and technological infatuation had gone too far. Over the period of a year, this 26-year-old man kidnapped, raped and murdered four elementary school girls. Discovered in a home full of *otaku* paraphernalia, Miyazaki became the media's unsolicited *otaku* poster boy.⁶⁴ He crossed the bridge from the virtual world of *rorikon* and embodied the danger of technological over-consumption. An acceptable virtual fantasy turned into an unacceptable reality. As Treat points out, Miyazaki "consumed the empty sign of our simulated desire and disposed of it like a throw-away carton."⁶⁵ Miyazaki's brutality was taken as evidence of new homicidal tendencies. His crimes marked the critical turning point of *shōjo* culture, where Japanese society completed a transfer to become something wholly Other.⁶⁶ As the supposed upholder of stable morals and traditional ethics, Miyazaki as an adult male had become a cyborg monster produced by society itself, and was more monstrous than Godzilla or any potential real life female equivalent.⁶⁷ The *otaku*'s existence was proof that man was no longer in control. He had

⁶⁴ He was found with *rorikon manga*, *anime* and videos, as well as various replicating devices uncommon for household use at the time. Treat, 355

⁶⁵ Ibid., 355.

⁶⁶ Kinsella points out that the concept of the *otaku* changed dramatically after the Miyazaki incident. In the media's hands it was first used in association with Miyazaki, but soon the term came to represent all amateur *manga* artists and fans, and then all Japanese youth. Kinsella, "Otaku," 311.

⁶⁷ Even though earlier pop cultural icons such as *Astro Boy* or even *Godzilla* revealed a fear of mutation in relation to atomic power, this fear was usually moderated by a modicum of awe and/or empathy. Katsuhiro Ōtomo's 1988 *anime*, *Akira* (based on Ōtomo's 1980s *manga*), is another interesting study of the mutation and youth theme; see Susan Napier, "Panic Sites: The Japanese Imagination of Disaster from Godzilla to Akira," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 19, no. 2 (Summer, 1993): 327-351, for more information on science fiction, popular culture and notions of dystopia in Japan. The Miyazaki event was the first of several other catastrophic events that marked the beginning of the 1990s, including the 1995 Great Hanshin earthquake and the Aum Shinrikyō attack in 1995. The Aum Shinrikyō were a cult that developed a faith built upon an amalgamation of Buddhist beliefs and other religions, incorporating elements of science, occultism and science fiction. Members killed 12 people and injured thousands in the Tokyo subway system by releasing deadly Sarin gas. The media made it known that they used *manga* to proselytize and recruit new members. 2 years later in 1997, a 14-year old boy was arrested for several attempted murders, two of which were successful. Carefully planned out and recorded in his diary, the murders included the decapitation of a 12-year old boy, whose head was placed in front of the school with a note declaring the beginning of a "game" with the "foolish police." Cited in "Kyojutsu chosho" [Police investigation reports] published in *Bungeishunju*, March 1998, 110-160; quoted in Yumiko Iida, "Between the Technique of Living an Endless Routine and the Madness of Absolute Degree Zero: Japanese Identity and the Crisis of Modernity

literally become the alien from within, consuming and attacking everything in sight. Japanese society had mutated.

As a sign of Japan's shifting identity, the *otaku*'s emergence dismantled the *nihonjinron* theory of uniqueness. Japan had both been promoted through a dominant internal discourse, as well as perceived from the outside as an ethnically and culturally homogeneous nation.⁶⁸ During the height of *nihonjinron*, it was not unheard of to hear comments made by the likes of then Prime Minister Nakasone, who in 1986 claimed that Japan's Intelligence Quotient scores were higher than that of the United States due to Japan's untainted minority-less population.⁶⁹ However, the year of the Miyazaki incident marked a break away from homogeneity: 1989 was the beginning of the economic crash. In addition the population was confronted with revelations of systemic governmental and corporate corruption.⁷⁰ In light of Japan's economic downturn and changing post Cold War alliances, Japan's co-dependence with the United States became more apparent. Moreover, with Emperor Hirohito's death in 1989, there was renewed discourse surrounding the degree of his WWII complicity. Other parties also raised questions about the veracity and legitimacy of Japan's interpretation of history and identity. Chinese nationals issued complaints about Japan's unwillingness to admit wartime atrocities.

Korean victims such as the so-called "comfort women," who were forced into sexual

in the 1990s," *Positions* 8, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 443. See also Andrea G. Arai, "The "Wild Child" of 1990s Japan," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 841-863. Nonetheless, Miyazaki represents the fear of the *otaku* and not necessarily the reality of the *otaku*'s existence, a group that can be characterized as largely non-violent.

⁶⁸ David W. Edgington, "Continuity and Change in Japan," in *Japan at the Millennium: Joining Past and Future*, ed. David W. Edgington (Vancouver; Toronto: UBC Press, 2003), 249.

⁶⁹ Millie Creighton, "May the Saru River Flow: The Nibutani Dam and the Resurging Tide of the Ainu Identity Movement," in *Japan at the Millennium: Joining Past and Future*, ed. David W. Edgington (Vancouver; Toronto: UBC Press, 2003), 125.

⁷⁰ Inflated land speculation and lavish spending on art, specifically European impressionist art, played critical roles in creating the bubble economy that began to burst in January 1990. For more on Japanese investment on European Impressionist art, see Peter Watson, *From Manet to Manhattan: the Rise of the Modern Art Market* (New York: Random House, 1992).

slavery by the Japanese military, made restitution claims. Japan's ethnic minority groups such as the Okinawans, the Ainu, the ethnic Korean and Chinese labourers (primarily brought over during WWII), and the outcast Burakumin also became more vehement in their demands. By 1994, when Shigeru Kayano became the first Ainu member to sit in the Japanese Diet, the myth of a homogeneous population could no longer hold water. It was impossible to ignore the disparity between the people's ethnic and cultural identity and the faltering of an idealized corporate national structure.

Mori and Murakami highlight the deterioration of this belief in homogeneity. Murakami, taking on the role of the obsessive *otaku* with his interest in *kawaii*, young girls, erotica, and computer technology, depicts the antithesis of the vilified *otaku*. He inhabits the *otaku* position and reveals the source of the *otaku* fear, but does not condemn their strange proclivities. Infatuated with the *otaku*, Murakami created *Second Mission Project ko²* (figure 1)—a three-part sculptural version of the *otaku* fantasy. This paean to the mythologized *otaku* obsessions represents the collapsing of gendered roles in a new form of hybridized *manga*. Murakami takes typical elements used to engage male readers of *shōnen manga* (boys' comics), such as an eroticized female torso and a transformative element: she changes into a phallic shaped weapon, with her genitals forming the forward nose of the jet. But by clearly demarcating her sex, and depicting a strong female protagonist who undergoes a major transformation, he illustrates traits of *shōjo manga* (girls' comics). *SMP ko²* hovers between both genres, and like typical works of a new non-gender specific *manga*, retains a girlish innocence. In many ways *SMP ko²* is in a liminal state caught between girlhood and womanhood, human and robot, female and male. She is at the edges of all boundaries. *SMP ko²* is completely alien, and yet in all

her/his/its parts, is entirely recognizable. *Hiropon* and *SMP ko*² seethe with a fetishistic interest in the youthful female body, as well as a juvenile interest in hi-tech gun-wielding planes. Yet unlike Miyazaki, Murakami's interpretation is not violent. His *otaku*-like infatuation is that of a young boy. Like the majority of self-proclaimed *otaku*, he is harmless. Murakami is more interested in remaining in the fantastical world of *otaku* obsessions than transgressing and finding solace in replicating fantasies of the flesh. He admits the frailty of male identity, and implies the death of traditional masculinity and the death of a patriarchal society, but not the death of Japanese culture. His idea of Japanese culture is one of evolution.

Murakami's *My Lonesome Cowboy* (1998) (figure 6) offers another self-reflexive look at the *otaku* insular world.⁷¹ A tall statue, *My Lonesome Cowboy* is naked, pale in complexion, and depending on the version, set with a shock of blond or blue hair. With large eyes, long legs, and a slender body, he is the ideal male form found in *shōjo manga*, except that his naked body is fully exposed. Releasing a lasso of sperm around his head, *My Lonesome Cowboy* responds to Murakami's female figures as a harmless and at times slightly pathetic male observer. In his expression of release and obvious glee, *My Lonesome Cowboy* signals self-sufficiency. Contrary to his given name, this over-enthusiastic and exhibitionist cowboy is not lonesome, but is instead more of an independent pioneer. Encircled by a self-induced arc of ejaculate, he celebrates his social freedom and at the same time emphasizes the *otaku*'s sense of segregation. The sculpture acts as both a critique of the *otaku* insular world, and a defense against societal

⁷¹ The title *My Lonesome Cowboy* also makes reference to Andy Warhol's film *Lonesome Cowboys* (1968). A spoof on Hollywood Westerns, it is a tale of highly sexed cowboys, starring members of Warhol's Factory. It may also refer to Warhol's 1965 film *My Hustler*, which provided visual inspiration for John Schlesinger's movie *Midnight Cowboy* (1969).

disparagement. The release is self-directed and self-manipulated. It satisfies a need, but, as many critics of *shōjo* will attest, this act displays a certain lack of productivity in the traditional sense. His seed is not released for procreative purposes, merely liberated into the atmosphere for his own selfish enjoyment. Conceived as sterile (unproductive and as such feminine) by the strictures of regulated society, he leads a separate but fruitful existence. Murakami highlights the multi-faceted existence of Japanese life, and a desire for independent voices to be heard and recognized. *Cowboy* celebrates difference.

Mori takes a slightly different approach to Murakami's overt *anime* and *manga* references in works such as the series, *Nirvana* (1996-98). In *Nirvana*, she diverges from her earlier emphasis on the direct *otaku* interpretation of the *kogyaru*. Acting as a medium, she becomes the ultimate empowered *kogyaru* girl, and redeems technology itself in the hands of a woman. *Shōjo* culture becomes a hybrid reality of a utopian vision; it embraces the harmonious coexistence of humans and technology. Creating an installation which includes a 3-D video with accompanying music, four billboard-sized digitally composed photographs encased in glass, and a lotus-shaped acrylic *Enlightenment Capsule* (1996) (figure 7), Mori combines religion with her two other interests, science and technology. She addresses 1990s New-Age spiritualism, fashionable religions of Asian origins such as Buddhism, and Eastern inspired fashion. While predominantly Japanese in origin, it is a mishmash of cultural references.

Mori's works imply that technology harnesses and perhaps even ameliorates nature. Inside *Enlightenment Capsule* Mori places a *Himawari*, a lighting device engineered and designed by her inventor/ art historian father that cuts out the harmful Ultraviolet rays and radiation of solar light, releasing a soft glow. In these works, and in

some of her landscape images, Mori foregrounds a sort of idealized Shangri-la.⁷² The powers of technology enable a spiritual and harmonious existence throughout the world, creating an idea of globalized harmony. However, Mori's work is also specific in its cultural references to Japan. The installation makes its most obvious cultural reference to Japanese Buddhist philosophy and beliefs, particularly in the video piece *Nirvana* (1997-98) (figure 8) and the image *Pure Land* (1997-98) (figure 9).⁷³ In these latter two works, Mori plays the role of *Kichijōten*,⁷⁴ the Japanese Buddhist female deity of beauty and prosperity,⁷⁵ and encircles herself with flying three dimensional colourful animated characters. These *kawaii* characters play traditional instruments used in both Shinto (Japanese indigenous religion) and/or Buddhist rites.⁷⁶ In another allusion to Buddhism, the title *Pure Land* is also a synonym for nirvana—the enlightened, 'awakened' and 'liberated' state that one can achieve through meditation.⁷⁷ Not only does it describe the place of ascendancy beyond death, but particularly in Japanese ideology, to a state of

⁷² In the landscape photographs, *Pure Land* (1996-98), *Burning Desire* (1996-98), *Entropy of Love* (1996) and *Mirror of Water* (1996-98), Mori calls attention to the spiritual aspect of the forces of nature. Each reflects one of the four elements, earth, fire, wind and water. They are computer-manipulated photographs of sites that are milieus of spiritual or physical energy. Sites include Arizona's Painted Desert, a wind-power station in California, the Biosphere dome near Tucson, and caves in France. Carol S. Eliel, "Interpreting Tradition: Mariko Mori's *Nirvana*," in Mariko Mori and Dominic Molon, *Mariko Mori* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998), 29-30.

⁷³ Dominic Molon, "Countdown to Ecstasy," in Mori, *Mariko Mori*, 15.

⁷⁴ Eliel, 31.

⁷⁵ Dietrich Shekel, "Buddhist Temple Names in Japan," *Monumenta Nipponica* 40, no. 4 (Winter 1985): 371. Kichijōten evolved from the Hindu deity, Lakshmi. Eventually incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon, Lakshmi emerged as Kichijōten after the introduction of Buddhism into Japan. A rare 8th century version is found in the Yakushiji Temple in Nara. Tokyo National Museum, "National Treasure *Kichijoten* from Yakushiji," available from http://www.tnm.go.jp/en/servlet/Con?pageId=D01&processId=02&event_id=513&event_idx=1&initdate=2004/08/01&dispdte=2004/08/01 (accessed December 4, 2004).

⁷⁶ The presence of these characters recall Tezuka Osamu's frequent use of religious themes in his own *manga* and *anime*. Margery King, "Mori Pop," in Mori, *Mariko Mori*, 38.

⁷⁷ *Pure Land* also references a specific sect of Japanese Buddhism developed in the 12th century A.D. devoted to the Amida Buddha (Buddha of infinite light/life). Joseph M. Kitagawa, *On Understanding Religion* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987), 76.

living “*this* life in an awakened, liberated manner.”⁷⁸ In Mori’s works, Japan becomes the gateway to such a state. She re-imbues the *rorikon* imagery of futuristic techno-girl with religious iconography and a harmonious celebratory image of feminine power. In her vision, the *shinjinrui* are forerunners of not just a forward-thinking culture but a forward-thinking global identity. Japanese culture is a benchmark of hybridity. Traditional religions and technology meld harmoniously in everyday life. The real-life *kogyaru* girl becomes a visionary emblem of a changing and forward thinking society.

Responding to changes in Japan’s social configuration, Mori and Murakami represent a changing multifaceted vision of Japan. In the dominant discourse the arrival of the *otaku* signaled the dissolution of a national identity based upon strong patriarchal notions. The *otaku* not only represented the realization of an infantilized and feminized society, but also the infiltration of the foreign within. The myth of *nihonjinron* was falling apart. A forced economic reevaluation (caused by external global market conditions) resulted in the *shōjo* drive for consuming goods. But with the advent of technological innovation, consumption of goods developed into a consumption of Japanese identity. Miyazaki and his apparent *otaku* drive for consumption represented the ultimate perversion. His overzealous drive to consume the emerging national identity of an eroticized youthful femininity, normally mediated through technology, was manifested in real time and place. His actions marked the end of any stable sense of national identity, whereupon Japan became no longer recognizable to itself. Miyazaki’s ability to consume represented the complete absorption of the foreign within. Japan had self-mutilated through its own technology. But Mori’s and Murakami’s complex view of Japanese

⁷⁸ Robert S. Ellwood and Richard Pilgrim, *Japanese Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1992), 154.

identity reconfigures these internal social developments into something more positive. The *otaku* are not simply the alien within, causing havoc and destabilizing the nation for pure personal satisfaction in an attempt to destroy Japanese society. Instead, the artists identify the *otaku* as part of *shōjo* culture that celebrates innovation and independent thinking. *Shōjo* culture allows for a heterogeneous view of Japanese society that is less patriarchal, less group-minded, less corporate and more liberated in its acceptance of non-traditional gender roles and technology. Mori's and Murakami's re-interpretation of *kawaii*, sexuality, femininity and technology enables the presentation of a national identity that is more complex than the *nihonjinron* discourse ever allowed. They take on popular culture tropes associated with youthful scapegoats and reflect not necessarily the troubles of the youths, but of the society that condemns them. Their works end up celebrating the changes within and postulate a revitalized vision of Japaneseness that reaches beyond standardized traditional modes of representation and identification. Mori and Murakami instigate a confrontation against the homogeneity discourse cultivated within.

CHAPTER III: RE-ORIENTING ORIENTALISM

Mori and Murakami use of *shōjo* themes celebrate the nation's heterogeneous populations. Their juxtapositions of *kawaii*, technology and sexuality reflect the ways in which the cultivation of *nihonjinron* has failed to represent a coherent national identity. Japanese identity is pluralistic, and youth-driven pop culture is the manifestation of rebellion against expected norms. At the same time, Mori and Murakami also confront the external cultivation of Japanese identity. In Japan, the fear of the “alien within” is not tied solely to issues of cultural and social heterogeneity, but also to issues of sovereignty. With its close economic and militarist relationship with the U.S.A. and a historical emphasis on *nihonjinron*, Japan has often self-defined by what it is not. Mori and Murakami reflect upon the ways in which Western and particularly American perceptions of Japan have historically held a negative impact on Japanese self-perception. The artists' works suggest that the discourse surrounding the fear of the “alien within” may actually be a manifestation of the fear of the “alien without” inserting itself into Japanese self-perception. Miyazaki, as the *otaku* killer, reawakened the state of “America's Japan,” when technology in the form of the atomic bomb took over Japan, and social cohesion fell apart under American rule. As such, both artists also look to the past to define the current state of “Japaneseness.” Clearly demarcating what Japan is not, they illustrate some of the main cultural differences that separate Japan from its one-time occupational force, the United States, and depict a contemporary post-modern renaissance in Japanese culture. However, in looking to the U.S.A., Mori and Murakami also reconfigure essentialist ideas of Japan similar to the Orientalist discourse that Edward Said first

described in his seminal text, *Orientalism*.⁷⁹ While Mori and Murakami claim cultural superiority, their claims to historical victimization replicates the Orientalist discourse that precludes Western superiority and seeks to portray people from a vague geographic area known as the Orient, as primitive and as Other. While Said focused primarily on the exoticization of the “Arab Orientals,” much of *Orientalism* is applicable to Western pervasive views about other “Oriental” nationalities, including the Japanese. In a strange turn, the artists works end up embodying both traditional stereotypes of “Orientals” and contemporary stereotypes of Japanese. At once resisting stereotyping, but also relying upon tropes of identification, Mori and Murakami construe a nation struggling to find itself.

As Murakami points out in his writings for the 2000-2001 exhibition *Superflat*, Japan has a history of disparaging its own culture. During the late 19th century when Japan reopened its doors to the West, Japan turned to Western culture as source of modernity and inspiration, especially in the realm of artistic expression.⁸⁰ As Edo prints and traditional methods of painting gave way to Western styles in Japan, 19th century European and American artists, such as Vincent Van Gogh (figure 10) eagerly looked to Japanese art from the pre-modern era.⁸¹ Critical of Japan’s sway towards the West,

⁷⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978). Said’s seminal postcolonial text investigates the systemic and regularized characterization of a loosely outlined geographic (including most of Asia and the Middle East), known as the “Orient,” in Western discourse. While mostly examining the framing of the ‘Arab Oriental,’ he identifies a certain trajectory of the Oriental generalization. Orientals are stereotyped as weak, exotic, feminine, backward and passive in relation to the West, and yet somewhat threatening in their exoticness. Examining works that sought to understand the Orient during periods of colonization, Said shows how discourses have framed these peoples as ‘Other.’ The West, in contrast, has been typified as a dominant masculine and knowledgeable presence.

⁸⁰ Takashi Murakami, *Superflat* (Tokyo: MADRA Pub. Co., 2000). Notable artists that have achieved recognition include Yoko Ono, On Kawara, Nobuyoshi Araki, and Kubota, Shigeo.

⁸¹ Midori Matsui, “Toward a Definition of Tokyo Pop: The Classical Transgressions of Takashi Murakami,” in *Takashi Murakami: The Meaning of the Nonsense of the Meaning*, Amada Cruz, et al. (New York: Center for Curatorial Studies Museum, Bard College in association with H.N. Abrams, 1999), 22.

Murakami curated the 2000-2001 *Superflat* exhibition and reclaimed the pre-modern.⁸²

Although he was already well-known, this exhibition signalled a turning point in Murakami's career, solidifying his international reputation and establishing him as an authority on Japanese culture. In coining the term Superflat, Murakami defined a style and ethos. He proposed a distinctly Japanese hybrid vision that destabilized binaries, and included works by graphic designers, *manga* illustrators, *anime* creators, and artists, all on equal footing.⁸³ In the catalogue's accompanying manifesto, Murakami stated that, "'Superflatness'...contributed to and continues to contribute to the construction of Japanese culture, as a worldview."⁸⁴ Although the exhibition only displayed contemporary works, in the catalogue Murakami drew upon work produced in the 17th and 18th centuries. Simultaneously rejecting Renaissance perspective space and repossessing the Japanese pre-modern flat aesthetic, Murakami demanded a re-evaluation of art history and the hegemony of the Western canon. He reclaimed the roots of Western modernism, and emphasized a visual lineage based upon planarity and surface value, flatter than the high modernism period of 1950s America. Murakami challenged the idea that American artists improved upon the Japanese pre-modern style.⁸⁵ In his words,

⁸² The term Superflat, as found in various writings about Murakami and the exhibition, alternates between two discrete words and the combined version of SuperFlat or Superflat. Originally shown in Tokyo and Nagoya at the Parco Department Stores in 2000, the exhibition was subsequently picked up and expanded for United States distribution. From 2001 to 2002, it toured the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Los Angeles, California, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the Henry Art Gallery in Seattle, Washington. By this point in his career, Murakami had already had solo exhibitions in Los Angeles, a visiting professorship at UCLA, as well as exhibitions in New York, including a project for New York Grand Central Station. Jacqueline Cooper, "Superflat," *New Art Examiner* 29 no 1 (Sept/Oct. 2001): 58-65.

⁸³ Murakami, *Superflat*, 9.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸⁵ Even though Murakami never states it outright, he positions Japanese art as the source of derivation for American abstract expressionism, heralded most famously by American art critic Clement Greenberg. While Murakami points to *Superflat* residing within the Japanese tradition of an undifferentiated arena that included both fine and popular art, Greenberg made clear that avant-garde art, such as Abstract

Superflat was “a pioneer, an epoch, and the creation of heretofore-unseen images. ‘Superflat’, one form of ‘Japanese’ ‘avant-garde’ ‘art’, is an ‘—ism’ –like Cubism, Surrealism, Minimalism, and Simulationism before it—only this is one we have created.”⁸⁶ He even insinuated that Japanese pre-modern art was essentially post-modern. Prior to Meiji contact, only the term *geijutsu*, or “the technique of creating beautiful things,” was used.⁸⁷ Art in Japan existed in much broader terms.⁸⁸ In Murakami’s mind, the Superflat tradition rekindled a sense of Japanese historical authenticity. No longer constrained by false Western pretences of division by media and genre, Japanese art has only just reacquired its fluidity between fashion, fine art, design, animation, comics and graphics.

Mori also refers to the ancient traditions of Japanese culture to create a “superior” and distinctly “pro-Japanese” identity. Like many *nihonjinron* theorists, she construes Japan as existing in an almost unbroken tradition based, in part, in the nation’s specific religious history. Mori reclaims ideas of Orientalism proper, such as the notion that Asian nations are pre-modern or archaic. But like Murakami, she also incorporates elements of a futuristic cyborgian reality. Japan lives both in the past and in the future. Cultural tropes are used to reclaim identity. Mori relies upon the idea of Japan as feminine, technological, and spiritual to form an aesthetic liberation of identity. In more spiritual works, she redeems Japanese female identity through depictions of female spirits or

Expressionism, was not akin to kitsch. Clement Greenberg, “Avant Garde and Kitsch,” *Partisan Review* 6 (July – August 1940): 34-49.

⁸⁶ Murakami, *Superflat*, 25.

⁸⁷ Noriaki Kitazawa, *Me no shinden* (Bijutsu Shuppan-sha, 1989): 148; quoted in Murakami, *Superflat*, 15.

⁸⁸ Once Western contact was made in 1868, within the realm of painting two distinct forms evolved that were divided along national lines. To counter the newly established Western-influenced *yōga* tradition, *nihonga* emerged as the definitive Japanese style, despite its incorporation of many Western elements. *Nihonga* has often been criticized for not only being reactionary, but also for being particularly nationalistic. These distinctions still exist today. Murakami received his PhD in *nihonga* at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music in 1993. *Ibid.*, 22.

goddesses. Mori references a wealth of divine figures, including the Shinto goddess of light, *Amaterasu Omikami*, animistic female spirits, and Buddhist goddesses such as *Kichijōten*.⁸⁹ The images echo the ingrained yet quiet influence of religion in Japanese secular culture. It is a nation of religious syncretism, where Shintoism and Buddhism exist in a “religious world view embracing several traditions.”⁹⁰

In more recent works like *Wave UFO* (2003) (figure 11), Mori foregrounds the liberating qualities of technology. Consisting of a teardrop-shaped fibreglass structure that fits three reclining people at once, *Wave UFO* accommodates shoeless participants who are fitted with electrodes on their temples. After mounting the lily pad shaped steps leading into the structure, they lie down and watch a projection of visual imagery across a ceiling screen created by their combined brainwave patterns. The seven-minute projection of blue, yellow or pink waves is then followed by an animated sequence based on the artist’s own abstract amorphous paintings. In this work Mori attempts to connect people. She brings viewers into what she describes as, “a deeper consciousness in which the self and the universe become interconnected.”⁹¹ Originally conceived as a Public Art Fund project in mid-town New York City, *Wave UFO* presents Mori as a kind of medium.⁹² Drawing upon “the Buddhist principle that all forms of life in the universe are interconnected,” she aligns Asian religion with the alien as something more powerful

⁸⁹ *Amaterasu Omikami* is the Sun Goddess who brought light to the world and from whom the Imperial family claim direct descent. In the video piece *Kumano* (1998-99), Mori takes on an animistic role as a messenger in a white fox skin. The fox skin may be an allusion to the *Tanuki* or fox spirits in Japanese mythology and religions. *Tanuki* are popular spirits who are masters of transformation in Japanese folklore, and can also be found in associative roles in Shintoism and Buddhism.

⁹⁰ H. Byron Earhart, *Religion in the Japanese Experience: Sources and Interpretations*, Encino and Belmont, California: Dickenson Publishing Company, Inc., 1974), 223.

⁹¹ Public Art Fund, “Public Art Fund Presents Mariko Mori *Wave UFO*,” *Public Art Fund Projects* [on-line press release] http://www.publicartfund.org/pafweb/projects/03/mori_release_s03.html (accessed March 5, 2005).

⁹² *Wave UFO* was also shown at the 2005 Venice Biennale.

than mere mortal spirituality.⁹³ In many ways this installation works to transcend cultures and cultural identification by extending into the extraterrestrial realm. However, it is Mori's own alienness by association that announces a kind of foreign healing for the masses.⁹⁴ Contrary to the notion of individualism gone awry through the *otaku*'s predilection for isolating devices, Mori denounces the emotionless cyborg representation. She transforms it into an unimpeded identity that transcends cultures and borders. Her vision of Japanese identity, while initially female, transforms into a fantasy of undifferentiated gender. She veers towards a more salvation-oriented vision, where essentialized Asianness offers a solution to social and sexual dislocation.

As much as Mori and Murakami celebrate a culture that is holistic in its approach to art, religion and technology, their works also reflect upon Japan's cultivation of a victim identity. In addition to pointing out Japan's superiority, they illustrate the ways in which Japan has lost out to the United States. Mori's and Murakami's works reveal the realization that Japan's attempts to differentiate itself from the U.S.A., and the fear of the "alien within," are manifestations of the fear of the "alien without." In the collective perception, the *otaku* are worrisome because their feminized, infantilised and technofied attributes epitomize American preconceptions of Japanese male identity. Japan has never quite rid itself of American influence, despite its political sovereignty. The *shōjo* culture of the *shinjinrui* personifies Japan's mutation into America's child bride. Japan has become not just a bride, as depicted by Emperor Hirohito in the 1945 photograph next to

⁹³ Public Art Fund [Internet site].

⁹⁴ In addition to the association between the alien and Mori's own identity that creates an alignment between Japaneseness and alienness, the act of removing one's shoes and putting on a pair of provided slippers, is culturally significant. Even though it is not culturally unique to Japan, this practice is a very important custom in Japan, exercised upon entering a home. Westerners have likely experienced this practice upon entering Japanese restaurants lined with tatami mats.

General Douglas MacArthur, but an Americanized bride for the American groom—
“America’s Japan,” so to speak. The artists both seem to blame the U.S.A. for the self-flagellating Japanese identity.⁹⁵ Japan may have regained an essential form of expression through booming *anime* and *manga* industries, but it is still constrained by the repercussions of an ongoing Orientalist discourse. Murakami argues that Japan has been politically victimized, and purports that this victimization is the underpinning element of Japan’s current identity. Returning to the original trauma of the U.S.A.-Japan wartime relationship, Murakami staged the widely acclaimed *Little Boy* exhibition at the Japan Society in New York. The exhibition included works created by a variety of fine and commercial artists, along with an array of commercially produced characters such as Hello Kitty.⁹⁶ It was filled with the strange and wonderful, erotic, child-like, violent images and figures. As a reference to the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, the exhibition encapsulated Murakami’s vision of contemporary Japan.

To emphasize this identity, Murakami included one of his more volatile pieces in the exhibition. *Time Bokan* (2001) (figure 12) is a painting of an amorphous shape that intimates both a skull (with smiling flower faces in the eye sockets) as well as the billowing mushroom-shaped cloud left behind in the wake of an atomic bomb. Borrowed from a 1970s *anime* television series of the same name, the image resembles a cloud that appeared in each episode. At the end of every episode, the apparition of this cloud signalled the death of the series’ villains, who in subsequent instalments, miraculously

⁹⁵ Murakami does acknowledge the fact that American popular culture, such as Disney has also positively influenced Japanese popular culture development and style. Amada Cruz, “DOB in the Land of Otaku,” *Meaning*, Amada Cruz, et al., 16.

⁹⁶ The exhibition paralleled a series of Public Art Fund projects created by two artists from Murakami’s KaiKai Kiki Co. Factory: Chiho Aoshima and Chinatsu Ban. Their respective works were shown in the subway system and at the edge of Central Park.

reappeared.⁹⁷ Appropriated by the Japanese, the atom bomb has become symbolic of the people's resilience and the lingering after-effects of the war.⁹⁸ Murakami argues that the prevalence of such *kawaii*ified imagery is a direct result of American occupational trauma. Under American guidance, Japan rewrote its constitution and included Article Nine—an article that forbade Japan's wartime participation and the development of an active military, navy or air force (Article Nine was reproduced in print in the *Little Boy* exhibition and catalogue). In Murakami's mind, the post-Occupational American vision of Japan as dependent child lives on. In return for American promotion of Japanese economic development, Japan provides the U.S.A. with military bases. It became the showcase for capitalism in Asia, and acted as a buffer against the expansion of communism in Asia during the Cold War.⁹⁹ Essentially, Murakami claims that this inequality in relation the U.S.A. ensured Japan's inferior status. In the *Little Boy* exhibition catalogue, he states, "Our society and hierarchies were dismantled. We were forced into a system that does not produce 'adults.'"¹⁰⁰

Mori's early work also infers the lasting effects of a long-imposed Orientalist ideology. Although her alien, cyborg or spiritual beings provide a somewhat emancipated view of women, they also represent the feminine and exotic foreignness of Japanese identity from the American perspective. In her 1994 series of photographs, the elusive Asian woman serves to satisfy the viewers' fetishizing gaze.¹⁰¹ While melding fantastic

⁹⁷ Murakami, "Little Boy (Plates and Entries)," in *Little Boy*, ed. Murakami, 12-15.

⁹⁸ The Japanese did not necessarily treat their injured well after the atomic bombing. Many survivors have felt the need to hide their past in order to maintain jobs, friendships and even marriages.

⁹⁹ C. Johnson, "Cold war economics melt Asia," *The Nation*, February 23, 1998, 16-19.

¹⁰⁰ Takashi Murakami, "Superflat Trilogy: Greetings, You Are Alive," in *Little Boy*, ed. Murakami, 152.

¹⁰¹ Gwen Stefani's 'Harajuku' girls from her 2005 music tour and who appear in some of her music videos for the 2004 album *Love. Angel. Music. Baby* are evidence of contemporary Western objectification. Rumored to be contractually forbidden to speak English, these four ethnically Japanese women (one is said to be a Japanese-American) are supposed to mimic the provocative and unique clothing style of youth

elements and the realities of a Japanese patriarchal society, upon closer reflection they are revealed to be custom-made for foreign viewers. In works like *Play with Me*, the overall “knowledgeable” gaze comes from viewers who stand outside the frame. Given that these works were first exhibited in Mori’s debut American solo show, *Made in Japan*, that gaze is offered to an American audience. It cultivates the Orientalist ideology of “Orientals” inferior to the masculine, powerful and knowledgeable Westerners. Much like mid 20th century Asian female roles in Hollywood films, Mori’s subjects are erotic, potentially dangerous women, easily subjugated by their white male counterparts.¹⁰² Japan is read as woman—caught between girlish innocence and deviant whore.¹⁰³ Mori’s images propose that while the American understanding of Japanese reality is limited, the power of American suggestion is very strong in Japan. In this way, Japanese social reaction against female independence is symptomatic of a cultural fear of engendering a Western stereotype.

As much as Mori and Murakami illustrate that the fear of the *otaku* is associated with the fear of the external American alien infiltrating the Japanese psyche, the issue of self-Orientalization comes to a fore in their own works. The artists identify through conventional cultural norms such as aesthetics, the feminine and the spiritual, as well as through ideas of technology, consumption, *kawaii* and the *shinjinrui* subcultures,

found in the hip Tokyo district Harajuku (an popular area photographed for its colourful array of fashion hipsters in the cult favorite book, *Fruits*, by Shoichi Aoki, London and New York, Phaidon, 2001.) Stefani implies their objectification. “I remember how exciting it was to see these girls in Tokyo when *No Doubt* toured Japan in 1996,” she recalls. “And I just wanted to give them a shout-out [on the album]. At that point, I thought ‘Man, I’m going to get me some of my own.’ They became my muse, my inspiration, and gave me the confidence to overcome every time I drew a blank while creating my record.” Gwen Stefani interview by Michele Sponagle, “Gwen Stefani: Girl power,” *Georgia Straight*, November 17, 2005 [magazine on-line] <http://www.straight.com/content.cfm?id=14155> (accessed November 19, 2005).

¹⁰² Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the ‘Yellow Peril’: Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 134.

¹⁰³ This is not to say that Japan’s inherent gender inequalities are caused by Western influence. However in the *Made in Japan* series, Mori points to a desire on her part to satisfy certain Western notions of what it is to be a Japanese woman, in all its limitations, and rarely any of its liberties.

reinforcing a more stereotypical notion of Japanese identity. While Murakami suggests that Japan is unilaterally less powerful than the United States, Mori's portrayal of Japan is also reductive. Even her more recent spiritually driven works convey a narrow view of Japan. These works never delve into the specifics of the deities' cultural, social or even religious significance. The deities are recognizable to a Japanese audience, but their power and meaning are lost to viewers outside of Japan. By aestheticizing spiritual icons and overlapping them with her own image, she suggests that Japanese spirituality is something one can easily latch on to and experience immediate results. There is no need to understand the meaning or value of the beliefs. Mori also combines disparate Asian cultural attributes, such as religion and clothing, into an idea of cohesive Asian identity. Religious works such as *Nirvana* indulge in a Western desire for homogenized Eastern spirituality and ancient iconographic imagery.¹⁰⁴ Although she identifies very specific Japanese deities such as *Kichijōten* in *Nirvana*, Mori indiscriminately cloaks herself with other cultural and religious signifiers, like in *Burning Desire* (1996-98) (figure 13), where she is portrayed as a multiple-armed Shiva-like deity in Tibetan monk-inspired clothing.¹⁰⁵ She generalizes, idealizes, and reduces Asian culture and religions into mere costuming effects. In this manner, she is reminiscent of kimono-clad Björk on her 1997 *Homogenic* album cover, or Madonna in her 1998 videos for *Ray of Light* and *Shanti-Ashanti* making Buddhist mudra poses and painting her hands with henna. Mori's interest in these religions appears, at best, shallow.

¹⁰⁴ See Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," *Art in America* 71, no. 5 (May 1983): 118-131, 187, 189, 191.

¹⁰⁵ Dominic Molon, "Countdown to Ecstasy," in Mori, *Mori*, 15. Descriptions of the installation have stated that Mori explores the "beliefs of various civilizations (including Mayan, Egyptian, Greek, Indian and Chinese as well as Japanese). It is not explained how Mori utilizes or expresses these civilizations, save for the latter three cultures found in Asia. Eliel, "Tradition," *Mori*, 29

Mori's and Murakami's technological characters invite a contemporary Western "othering" of Japanese culture. To the untrained eye, the *otaku* and *kogyaru* prototypes represent a futuristic and fantastic reality of unemotional cyborg creatures. The artists present a vision of the Japanese as people who "despise physical contact and love media, technological communication, and the realm of reproduction and simulation."¹⁰⁶ Without an intricate understanding of Japan's subculture, the heterogeneity within is not immediately apparent. Instead given recent Western acclimatization with Japanese contemporary sense of design and visual vocabulary through the 1980s and 1990s importation of Japan's technology, Western theories surrounding Japan's cultural uniqueness flourished, some even advocating emulation.¹⁰⁷ This type of Western assessment contributed to the *nihonjinron* concept of superiority. At the same time, some of the cultural analysis also materialized in the form of negative racial stereotyping. Japan supplanted the West in technological advancements to create a certain type of dependency.¹⁰⁸ The threat of dependency distorted the paternalistic Occupational vision of Japan as wife, and provided the catalyst for the development of a specific discourse labeled Techno-Orientalism.

Coined by David Morley and Kevin Robins in *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries*, Techno-Orientalism is a revitalization

¹⁰⁶ V. Grassmuck, "Otaku: Japanese kids colonise the realm of information and media," *Mediamatic* 5, no. 4 (1991): 201, quoted in Morley, *Spaces*, 169-170.

¹⁰⁷ Companies such as Atari, Sega, and Nintendo contributed to a visual vocabulary with early videogames *Mario Bros*, *Donkey Kong* and *Frogger*. Television programs like *Astro Boy*, *Sailor Moon* and the *Transformers* were also exported. Ezra Vogel's highly popular cultural analysis, *Japan as Number One*, is a notable example that advocates Japanese emulation. Ezra Vogel, *Japan as Number One* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979).

¹⁰⁸ The American military relied upon Japanese technology.

of Said's notion of Orientalism.¹⁰⁹ Like Orientalism, Techno-Orientalism describes a notion of Otherness, but is otherwise specific to Japan. As Morley and Robins point out, with the demise of the Soviet Union, Japan was positioned as the new foreign threat to the United States.¹¹⁰ Japan became "modern to the point of appearing postmodern," with a future that seemed "to be the current measure for all cultures."¹¹¹ The Orient had previously been contained through a process of objectification, based upon the notion that the West was modern and the non-Western nations were pre-modern. Japan, however, showed itself to be a possible risk to the U.S.A.'s economic security, and America was forced to consider the unthinkable—that it might take on the role of student. The West/East and modern/primitive correlation was destabilized, confronting the West's notion of centrality and hegemony.¹¹² Techno-Orientalist ideology emerged as a means of controlling notions of Japanese superiority, whereupon the Japanese were not framed as better humans than the Americans, but were instead classified as non-human.

Mori's and Murakami's focus on the *otaku* and *kogyaru* generation, as well as their specific technological interests, epitomizes this Techno-Oriental vision. Even though Murakami tries to re-imbue the *otaku* with humanity, the *otaku*'s identity as an obsessive compulsive ends up standing in for Japanese society as a whole. Compounding this vision is Mori's summoning of the fantastical. Mori skewers notions of time, placing

¹⁰⁹ David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 153.

¹¹⁰ With its economic downturn in the 1990s, Japan has significantly lost rank in its threatening position against the United States. The rise of China and North Korea, and since the 2001 World Trade Center terrorist attacks, other "Orient" nations/factions have taken up the position.

¹¹¹ Morley and Robins, *Spaces*, 153.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 160. Sony's purchase of Columbia pictures in 1989, and Matsushita's purchase of MCA (Universal) in 1990, caused negative reactions in the U.S.A. As Morley and Robbins point out, films like Ridley Scott's *Black Rain* identified the American sense of apprehension. In this movie, tensions and divisions are outlined when Takakura Ken's character says to Michael Douglas' detective, "Music and movies are all your culture is good for.... We make the machines." *Ibid.*, 159. See also Ian Buruma's analysis of Michael Crichton's 1992 novel *Rising Sun*. Ian Buruma, "Wake Up, America," in *The Missionary and the Libertine* (London; Boston: Faber and Faber, 1996), 262-268.

the alien and the cyborg within contemporary Japan. Of her 1994 series of photos, Mori states, “My pictures look futuristic, but in Tokyo, these places simply exist—there are all these monitors in the subways. It had to be Tokyo.”¹¹³ Mori’s temporality defines a foreign space where fantasy has the occasion to surface in reality. She projects Japan into a future that the West has yet to achieve.¹¹⁴ Theorists Morley and Robins suggest, “If the future is technological, and if technology has become ‘Japanised,’ then the syllogism would suggest that the future is now Japanese, too.”¹¹⁵ It is “a postmodern romanticisation of Japan as a space somewhere between the real and the imaginary.”¹¹⁶ This romanticisation temporarily dampens Japan’s threatening presence, situating it in a realm exterior to the perceived reality of the West.

Incapable of fully embracing the heterogeneous multifaceted aspects of Japanese identity, Mori and Murakami inevitably incorporate a more homogenized, condensed vision of Japan to the outside world. Even though they try to reinforce a pluralistic idea of identity, they also reinforce the cultural divide between Japan and the West, and in particular, America. As they criticize the dominant Japanese discourse for associating the *otaku* with the embodiment of the American alien presence within, Mori and Murakami end up reiterating a self-Orientalizing victim gaze in their own works. They rely upon the known stereotypes of Japan and present a fantastical realm, non-threatening in its weakened state, but pleasing to the eye and easily consumable. Embodied as woman, Japan is caught between infantilized eroticized *kawaii* girlhood, asexual spiritual

¹¹³ Mariko Mori, “We’ve Got Twenty-Five Years,” interview by Dike Blair *Purple Prose* 9 (Summer 1995): 96-101, www.thing.net/~lilyvac/writing22.html (accessed December 7, 2004).

¹¹⁴ One could argue that nations such as Korea, China and Taiwan are also becoming more and more linked with a Techno-Orientalist identity.

¹¹⁵ Morley and Robins, *Spaces*, 168.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 169.

sanctuary and threatening technological alienness—but always circumscribed by a sense of futility. The hyper-identification of tropes calls attention to the limits of expression. In Mori's and Murakami's representations, the technological is encoded through a veil of submissiveness, be it feminine, eroticized, infantilized, or a combination of the three. Even when Mori attempts to relate technology to a state of spirituality, she renders it benign and futuristic—outside of reality's grasp. Mori and Murakami cannot or will not overcome outside perspectives, despite their attempts to position Japanese culture as revolutionary and the *shinjinrui* as an evolving state of Japanese post-modern liberty. In the end, these works reinforce the idea that they are affected by the U.S.A. and cannot evade any self-identification discourse beyond one that caters to an American perspective.

CHAPTER IV: COMMERCIALIZING IDENTITY

Mori and Murakami only temporarily succeed in destabilizing static notions of national identity. Though limited by the American understanding of Japanese culture, society and history, the artists are not necessarily victims of an American perspective. Appearance-wise, they waver between overturning stereotypes and profiting from them. This confusion is compounded by the fact that they present public personae that manipulate stereotypical perceptions of Japanese identity. By blurring distinctions between their personae and Japanese identity, as well as distorting boundaries between commercial and fine art, they reveal a collusion between commercialization, art, and cultural identity. In addition Mori's and Murakami's ambivalence towards these conflicting identities reveals the contemporary crisis of Japanese national identity. Their strategies of self-Orientalization reiterate a systemic act of national self-Orientalization that satisfies international market demands for homogenization, as well as fulfills the need to transpose blame onto America for the sense of Japan's social dislocation.

Murakami clearly revels in the counter-cultural appeal of the *otaku*. As a recent cultural phenomenon in Japan, the *otaku* are even newer to American audiences. This is in part due to Murakami's diligent self-promotion. In his hands, the *otaku* lose some of their "alien" signification in the transition to America. As the unofficial ambassador of the *otaku*, he has created a character who is far more human-like, or personable to Western standards than the *otaku*'s contemporary Japanese male counterpart: the businessman. Unlike the latter, the *otaku* carry an independent streak of rebellion against the corporate structure, but in an affable way that is appealing to ideals of democracy and independence. The irony is that Murakami's embodiment of the *otaku* as mass producer

of commercial and fine art embodies Japanese productivity—the supposed antithesis of the *otaku* generation. An example of Murakami’s marriage of *otaku* and businessman personae is found in his collaboration with the fashion house Louis Vuitton.¹¹⁷ In 2003, upon the invitation of creative director Marc Jacobs, Murakami designed the widely popular *Monogram Multicolore* line of bags for the deluxe French luggage and fashion company. The bags were an instant hit. Although estimated sales in 2005 were in the range of US \$300 million,¹¹⁸ Murakami’s success has been perhaps better measured in the number of cheap reproductions found on street corners of metropolitan cities worldwide.¹¹⁹ These knock-offs expanded his visibility into the consumerist multitude.

Murakami further blurred the lines between fine art and commercial art the year that Louis Vuitton released the Murakami designs, by staging an exhibition of paintings using the same company logo emblazoned on his line of \$5000 limited edition bags.¹²⁰ As an entrepreneur, he continually blurs boundaries. He produces cheap tchotchkes and toys, and at the same time he maintains factory produced “fine art” that sets record sales at auction houses.¹²¹ Irreverent of ideological conflict, Murakami commercialises the *otaku* label. Just as *kawaii* was absorbed and made benign by mainstream Japan, the artist distils the *otaku* into a brand as the face of a consumable Japanese youth culture. In

¹¹⁷ In his 2007 exhibition © MURAKAMI at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) Murakami collaborated with the museum and Louis Vuitton. The fashion house sold its wares in the museum grounds in an exclusive Louis Vuitton store during the length of the exhibition. The store was among the exhibition rooms featuring artworks. At the 2008 Brooklyn Museum exhibition opening, stalls were set up outside, appearing to sell counterfeit Louis Vuitton bags, but were actually selling authentic goods.

¹¹⁸ Lubow. “The Murakami Method.”

¹¹⁹ Tailgating his success, Murakami produced a cherry design for Louis Vuitton bags in 2005.

¹²⁰ The exhibition took place at his then-commercial gallery in New York, the Marianne Boesky Gallery.

¹²¹ At the New York Sotheby’s auction on May 15, 2008 that Murakami attended, *My Lonesome Cowboy* sold for over 15 million USD. Andrew Goldstein, “Takashi Murakami Watches From the Wings at Sotheby’s,” *New York Magazine*, May 5, 2008, http://nymag.com/daily/entertainment/2008/05/takshi_murakami_watches_from.html (accessed May 30, 2008).

Murakami's vision, the *otaku* became the postmodern, post-bubble economy businessman.¹²² However, what first appears as a glimpse into the intricacies of *otaku* subculture quickly amounts to a homogenizing gaze upon Japanese culture overall. Murakami's *otaku* reveals an aesthetic culture that is slightly odd—enough to be exotic, but not intimidating to the American audience. His works acknowledges the non-Japanese audience's desire for the next “authentically” exotic product. By legitimizing the *otaku*, Murakami tampers with a Western stereotype of Japanese identity, hovering between desirability and otherness. His *otaku* is made benign by *kawaii*ification.¹²³

Providing a contrast to Murakami's savvy *otaku* businessman as the modern-day Japanese male, Mori's fusion of the *kogyaru* girl and spiritual avatar creates an amalgamate modern-day Japanese woman. Playing with the two seemingly opposite stereotypes, Mori cultivates the status of celebrity artist, effacing any trace of where her sense of identity truly resides. In many ways, Mori is the Madonna (as in pop music) of the visual arts scene, providing the idea of a transmutable and transformative personae as a medium.¹²⁴ She reevaluates the ultimate *shōjo* rebel—the *kogyaru* who exchange sexual favours for brand-name goods—and depicts the consumability of *shōjo*ness. Like the *kogyaru*, Mori's public persona is an anonymous social type who momentarily frees herself from her “everyday context and the governance of self-consciousness and social

¹²² “*Superflat* art is surprisingly flexible. It is graciously and knowingly amenable to art historical, cultural, theoretical, and non-theoretical readings alike.” Kitty Hauser, “*Superflat*: Kitty Hauser on fan fare,” *Artforum International* 43, no. 2 (October 2004): 286.

¹²³ Ironically, most *otaku* are repulsed by Murakami's works like *Hiropon*. They find *Hiropon* too blatantly eroticized, and consider it a parody, due to its size and phallic nipples. Lubow.

¹²⁴ In Mori's most recent works produced for her 2007 solo exhibition at Deitch Projects in New York, she expands upon the cosmic exploration of the intersection between technology and spirituality. She includes a variety of works exploring Celtic and mid-Jomon era (3500-2500 BC) Japanese rituals and symbols. Works such as *Tom Na H-iu* (2005-06), and *Flatstone* (2007) speak to ideas of universality and ideas of eternal life.

morality.”¹²⁵ She is an empty vessel who can shift from eroticized *rorikon* cyborg to spiritual deity to disembodied messiah. As a kind of visual palimpsest, she is a form upon which desires can be inscribed, erased, and rewritten again and again.¹²⁶ This unstable identity, however, expresses a Madonna-like desire to please and attract as large an audience as possible. Mori’s willingness to appear only within these specific Japanese identities reiterates the limits of Japanese identity in American discourse. Her persona fulfills the traditional and contemporary Orientalist desire for Japanese women. The transient identity is part exotic, dangerous temptation, part subservient plaything, and part redemptive source of salvation. Mori does not establish a fully developed subject, and instead cultivates a persona that exists in the realm of desirable object. She never fully inhabits adulthood in relation to sexuality; she exists only as eroticized childlike object, or as an asexualized spiritual being. Both artists only manage to temporarily destabilize the legitimacy of Japanese stereotypes.

In many ways Mori’s and Murakami’s examinations of popular culture display the effects of global consumerism. Their unstable identities offer glimpses of a complicated Japaneseness, but the complexities are essentially lost in translation. To

¹²⁵ This is in reference to the way that the *kogyaru* controls her sexuality through the exchange of sexual favours. Yonohara, “Mirareru shintai to sei” [“Body and Sexuality”], *Hayari no Bunka Chō kenkyū*, (Kyoto: Seigen sha, 1998), 196-9, quoted in Iida, *Rethinking*, 232.

¹²⁶ In this tenuous state, Mori exposes how, since the 1990s, “a mutated market-friendly work once again came to the fore, in which identities became spectral associations, their blending and wafting this way and that being the subject of consumerist whim.” Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21. Robert Raczka in his review of Mariko Mori’s 1998 solo exhibition at The Andy Warhol Museum, states, “The various costumings and their multiplicitous associations notwithstanding, Mori’s art yields a cumulative identity, for we are now fully in the familiar realm of fragmented and mutable personae. The extent to which these fictive personae represent aspects of Mori’s real self or desires is open to speculation, undeterminable (as even Mori’s own account would have to be viewed skeptically), and ultimately beside the point.” Robert Raczka, “Mariko Mori: The Andy Warhol Museum,” *New Art Examiner* 26, no. 3 (Nov. 1998): 46.

maintain subjectivity is difficult, if not impossible.¹²⁷ While they do manage to momentarily destabilize stereotypes by playing disparate identities against themselves, the superficial dominates. Such representations are the reality of working within the international art field, where tastes are often dictated by New York City. Not only does the city hold the highest concentration of commercial galleries in the U.S.A., it is the centre of the international art market.¹²⁸ Because trends in the art world are frequently dictated by this city's commercial galleries, cultural and economic concerns are entwined and managed according to American interests. In the present global scheme, American mass culture is accorded higher prestige, and also tends to appropriate exotic elements from other cultures. Post-colonial theorist Geeta Kapur reflects that in the global

¹²⁷ Mori's and Murakami's artistic portrayals of Japaneseness are so extreme in nature that they can be read as parodies. In many ways, their works reflect Judith Butler's theories about the use of parody as a means to critique. In her 1990 book *Gender Trouble*, Butler speaks of enacting a gendered reality through the citation of conventions and ideologies of the social world, where these very conventions and ideologies are constructions in themselves. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990). Whereas Butler exposes how parodies like drag expose gender as a learned practice (gender performativity), Mori's and Murakami's works show that ethnicity, and understanding of ethnicity and/or nationality is also learned and enacted. The artists' portrayals of Japanese identity are ethnic parodies (albeit parodies infused with gendered ideals). The representations destabilize and bring to light the assumptions of national and/or cultural identity. On the subject of performativity and race, Louis Miron and Jonathan Inda state that "race performativity is the power of discourse to bring about what it names through the citing or repetition of racial norms." Louis Miron and Jonathan Inda, "Race as a Kind of Speech Act," *Cultural Studies: A Research Annual* 5 (2000): 86–87, quoted in Catherine Rottenberg, "Passing: Race, Identification, and Desire" *Criticism* 45, no 4 (Fall 2003): 436–7. With limited room to inhabit subjectivities beyond that which is available in performative norms, "race performativity compels subjects to perform according to these "fictitious" unities, thus shaping their identity and their preferences." Catherine Rottenberg, "Passing: Race, Identification, and Desire" *Criticism* 45, no 4 (Fall 2003): 437. Forced into an already limited understanding of Japanese identity, Mori and Murakami's ability to dispel myths are somewhat constricted by the scope of the discourse. While they do manage to destabilize the stereotypes by playing disparate identities against themselves, the superficial dominates. As Judith Butler points out, performativity exists in "identificatory processes by which norms are assumed or appropriated, and these identifications precede and enable the formation of a subject, but are not, strictly speaking performed by a subject. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: on the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

¹²⁸ The New York Stock Exchange is the centre of international trade.

economy, “the United States, having ‘won’ the cold war, is the moral conductor.”¹²⁹ For non-Western artists the pressure to fit into a New York-driven aesthetic is intense.

However, there is interest in non-Western contemporary art. “Postcolonial” art gained purchase with the rise in popularity of international biennales during the 1990s. Some argue that these international exhibitions of art are vehicles that open the market, enable cultural exchange, and encourage a confluence of styles. But as Julian Stallabrass states in *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art*, these biennales are often no more than “a cultural elaboration of new economic and political powers,” where cultural difference has become a catchy new marketing tool.¹³⁰ Paraphrasing artist and writer Coco Fusco, Stallabrass states that, “globalization has transformed the art world along with the management of racial and cultural difference to follow the model of corporate internationalism...diversity is normalized while its critical content is sidestepped.”¹³¹ National, cultural and ethnic signifiers have become tools of the trade. Mori’s and Murakami’s works pinpoint the means by which diversity is usurped by global corporatism. Indirectly, they show how national or cultural identity has been appropriated by corporate marketing strategies, and how these strategies are intimately aligned with artistic production. Non-Western artists often feel obligated to manipulate their works to fit into this limited sphere of taste and aesthetic desires, or at least concede to having their

¹²⁹ Geeta Kapur, “Globalization and Culture: Navigating the Void,” *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 192.

¹³⁰ Stallabrass, 37. Stallabrass argues that events like biennales produce a demand for art that celebrates neoliberal ideals of globalization such as the mobility of labour and the linked virtues of multiculturalism. They highlight the diversity of the international labour market, but do not necessarily speak to the plight of the individuals nor accord any true political voice. *Ibid.*, 42.

¹³¹ Coco Fusco, *The Bodies that were not ours: and other writings*, (London: Routledge, published in collaboration with inIVA, Institute of International Visual Arts, 2001) quoted in Stallabrass, 70.

works read in a limited fashion.¹³² Having both held solo exhibitions in the U.S.A. coincidentally entitled *Made in Japan*, Murakami and Mori expose the fragility of the American concept of Japan.¹³³ As Dominic Molon writes in an exhibition catalogue of Mori's work, the title *Made in Japan* makes a "sly economic allusion to the double-codedness of this label as both stigma and status symbol."¹³⁴ It exposes the ties between economy and culture, and acknowledges the role Japanese exports have played in building an idea of Japaneseness.

There is an awareness of Japan's changing role from one-time producer of undesirable goods to a state of growing influence and desire for the West. Even though Japan's dominance of the production of technological and manufactured goods wanes, its growth in cultural output has grown exponentially.¹³⁵ *Kawaii*-inflected *anime*, *manga*, video games, pop music, fashion and movies are now a dominant part of Japan's general export economy.¹³⁶ Since the late 1990s, major productions like *Pokémon*, *Princess Mononoke*, and *Spirited Away* have appeared in mainstream theatres throughout the world.¹³⁷ Unlike earlier internationally renowned Japanese artists like On Kawara and

¹³² It should be noted that neither Mori nor Murakami have stated that their works are limited by American desires.

¹³³ Murakami *Made in Japan* exhibition was held in 2001, at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, while Mori exhibited with the same exhibition title at Deitch Projects, New York in 1995, at the Shiseido Gallery, Tokyo the same year, and another in 1996, at Deitch Projects, New York.

¹³⁴ Molon, "Countdown," in Mori, *Mariko Mori*, 14.

¹³⁵ By 2004, China became the number one worldwide exporter of information- and communications-technology goods.

¹³⁶ In 2002 Japan's estimated cultural export reached \$15 billion U.S.A., up from \$5 billion in 1992. Tsutomu Sugiura, "April Report," quoted in "Is Japanese Style Taking Over the World?" Christopher Palmeri and Nanette Byrnes, *Business Week* (July 26, 2004): 56.

¹³⁷ American studios such as Disney and Warner Bros partnered with Japanese production companies for the translation and distribution of many of these works throughout North America. Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2002), 38. Recently, films such as *Ringu* (1998) and Japanese influenced films such as *Kill Bill* films (Vol. 1, 2003; Vol 2, 2004), have found success. Other popular Japanese cultural products have also found their way into American metropolitan culture. While fashion was once relegated to high-end fashion designers like Issey Miyake and Rei Kawakubo, newer younger designers like Jun Takahashi and A Bathing Ape are infiltrating the street wear market in the West. Sanrio, with its most popular

Yoko Ono, who were not so much about making note of their “Japaneseness,” Mori and Murakami embody all the contemporary signifiers of Japanese identity, and take advantage of Japan’s already visible pop cultural vocabulary in the United States. They know fashion is fleeting and while Japan’s cultural economy is hot their work will be better valued, if not necessarily understood, for their cultural references. In truth, Mori’s and Murakami’s use of stereotypes is not arbitrary, but seems to reflect a strategy of ambivalence on the artists’ part that relates to the effects of commercialization and globalization. They profit from the uncertain relationship between art and commerce, and the ways that ethnicity, culture and nationality are used as branding tools. They play the line dangerously close to sensationalism and market branding, replicating the more radical notions of Japan. Murakami does not actually show the boring, staid image of a traditional businessman, nor does Mori show a woman who represents the traditional image of a housewife. They compound the idea of ambivalence by at once maintaining the division between fine art and popular culture, and then by questioning it.

On the one hand, Mori calls for the spiritual re-enchantment of art. Her works recall an earlier period when high art and spiritual revelation were supposedly tied together and discrete from market demands. She claims sincerity in her spiritual aspirations, condemning materialism and commercialism. In an interview with Kathryn Hixson in *New Art Examiner*, Mori states:

In this century art became independent from religion.... Everything is looked at in a very materialistic way now. The human has a body and

character Hello Kitty, has found a sizeable niche in the United States, and has even paired up with the fashion designers Heatherette with the *Hello Kitty Couture by Heatherette* line in 2003. As Japanese cultural products have grown in popularity, the U.S.A.’s iconic status has floundered in Japan. Since the 1990s, American popular culture has dwindled in popularity (lowered Hollywood ticket sales and American book sales as well as diminished interest in American style restaurants and even English language classes).

a physical existence, but it is also spiritual. We need to think about the balance between them.¹³⁸

But by capitalizing on her Japaneseness and a certain generalized Eastern aesthetic and spirituality, Mori is somewhat hypocritical. She does not ridicule the globalized commercialization of religion and spirituality as one would expect of a self-claimed Warholian protégé.¹³⁹ Yet the nature of her work hints at the superficiality of such statements. *Wave UFO* provides viewers with one quick seven-minute session to attain spiritual harmony. It is an easily disposable method for relieving social malaise through an aesthetic visual experience based upon cultural appropriation. She promises spiritual enlightenment and offers a false sense of security in the future of technology. Mori glosses over the negative effects of religion and technology on society (and the environment), and the reality of unequal access to technology.¹⁴⁰ She is in the business of selling immediate gratification. Yet critics rarely question Mori's appropriation of the divine. She is never viewed as blasphemous, nor is she criticized for appropriating the cultural trappings of various Asian religious and ethnic groups. Despite receiving sponsorships from cosmetics company Shiseido and playing dress-up for photo shoots in

¹³⁸ Hixson, 44-5.

¹³⁹ "That's always a great challenge for the artist, to challenge the master." Mariko Mori in interview with Margery King, in reference to Andy Warhol. April 15-17, 1998, in King, 36-7.

¹⁴⁰ Like many organized forms of religion, Buddhism has its dark side. With the advent of Buddhism in Japan, a caste structure developed. People handling dead animals (such as leather workers, butchers, etc.) became associated with pollution and were ostracized from society. Known as the Burakumin, or people of the hamlet, they are also often rather derogatorily referred to as *eta* (full of pollution), or *hinin* (non-person). Although it is easier for the Burakumin to hide their caste status today, they are still discriminated against in Japan. Often their lineage is revealed in investigations instigated by potential marriage candidates or employers. Nagahara Keiji, "The Medieval Origins of the *Eta-Hinin*," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 5, no. 2 (Summer, 1979): 388. The Buddhist-based cult Aum Shinrikyō cult is an example of dangerous religion. In light of the Aum Shinrikyō's interest in a sense of belonging and pursuing the transcendental through science and technology as well as the apocalyptic, Mori's utopian works like *Nirvana* take on a rather revelatory significance. In respect to technology, Mori only points to its positive aspects, like the Himawari's ability to filter the sun's harmful UV rays. She ironically negates technology's negative impact such as its role in the destruction of the ozone layer that in turn has caused the sun's rays to be more volatile.

fashion magazines like *Harper's Bazaar* and German *Vogue*,¹⁴¹ Mori purports to be sincere in her caution towards commercialism. It is difficult to know where the act begins and ends. As critic Dike Blair states in *Flash Art*: "She insinuates the emptiness of consumer culture while her work elicits the thrill of consumption."¹⁴²

On the other hand, Murakami actively acknowledges his love for capitalist guru Bill Gates and gleans tips from Gates' autobiography for his Warhol-like production company, Kaikai Kiki Factory.¹⁴³ There is a no holds barred approach to the commercialization of art and culture within his oeuvre. However, Murakami also critiques the Japanese market for its lack of interest. He claims that his partnership with Louis Vuitton was driven by the fact that there was no market for contemporary art in his native land, and that this collaboration resulted in an expanded Japanese appreciation of his fine art works.¹⁴⁴ Contrary to his *Superflat* theory, this bolsters the idea that a distinction exists in Japan between fine and commercial art.¹⁴⁵ At the same time Murakami defends his Louis Vuitton collaboration by relying upon the *Superflat* rhetoric of holistic art. By tying himself to the fashion house he makes it obvious that he sells a brand (his solo retrospective exhibition, © *Murakami* at LA MOCA in 2007 and the Brooklyn Museum in 2008 is a clear example of his branding intent). Murakami envisages his art in the way that Benjamin Buchloh perceives the direction of contemporary art: "use-value is increasingly surrendered, and art (like money) has

¹⁴¹ *Harper's Bazaar*, December 1999. *Vogue*, August 1999.

¹⁴² Dike Blair, "Mariko Mori, Deitch Projects," *Flash Art* XXIX, no. 189 (Summer 1996): 132.

¹⁴³ In 2001, Murakami also established the bi-annual art fair in Tokyo, Geisai, through Kaikai Kiki. In 2007, they set up a fair in Miami during Art Basel Miami Beach in December. See <http://www2.geisai.net/aboutus.html>

¹⁴⁴ Marion Maneker, "The Giant Cartoon Landing at Rockefeller Center," *The New York Times*, August 24, 2003, sec. Arts and Leisure Desk, p. 23.

¹⁴⁵ Murakami's inability to access a "fine art" market in Japan also suggests that at present, Japanese society is reluctant to accept popular culture or art like Murakami's as "fine art," and is still reliant upon Western taste dictates.

become a commodity of pure exchange value.”¹⁴⁶ But Murakami never outright states the same. Even though his actions speak loudly of an attitude that embraces the marketing of art and conflates it with Japanese cultural identity, his point of view remains elusive. In one article Murakami has been quoted saying, “I need to rebuild the wall between the commercial art and the fine art I do...I need to focus on the fine-art side of me for a while.” Later in the same article, he confuses the matter by stating, “What I would like to do now is break down the barrier between high and low art in the West.”¹⁴⁷ Unclear as to whether or not a separation exists between the two, Murakami is not afraid to capitalize on ambiguity. He profits from moving effortlessly from fashion to art, as well as from the idea that art and fashion are distinct.¹⁴⁸ Like Mori, Murakami indiscriminately ties his persona to his work. They both aim to please and to satisfy desires of the consumer.

As Stallabrass states, in today’s market, fine art still “must continually display the signs of its freedom and distinction from the mass,” in order to maintain a culturally unique position ratifying its economically higher stature.¹⁴⁹ Artists satisfy the theoretical demand for the dissociation between art and its economic value, while, at the same time, they satisfy the art market’s commercial demands for cultural tropes, thereby stimulating higher market appeal for their work. Just as evasive about the nature of fine art and its relations to popular culture, they are also reticent about admitting how much their identities have been purloined into branding their art. The ways in which Mori and

¹⁴⁶ Stallabrass, 88.

¹⁴⁷ Jim Frederick, “Move Over, Andy Warhol,” *Time Asia* 161, no. 20 (May 26, 2003): 43, 44.

¹⁴⁸ The latter notion guarantees that his “factory-made” artwork will sell for more than the factory-made bags, and will be viewed as examples of distinguished taste. This is despite the fact that the artwork and the bags are produced in the same manner: designed by Murakami, factory-produced by the hands of others, and replicated in limited editions. In regards to Murakami’s work, Kitty Hauser argues that his indeterminacy “serves his purpose of market saturation to leave his critical options open, enabling him to play the role of international artist, brand manager, sage, and apologist for a subculture which he presents—when it suits him—as ‘discriminated against’ in mainstream Japan. Hauser, 286.

¹⁴⁹ Quoted in Stallabrass, 5.

Murakami alternately play up and play down the commercialization of art suggests that ambiguity towards Japanese identity is a strategy unto itself. Murakami's refashioning of the feminized and infantilised victim into a post-modern *otaku* anti-hero or Mori's redemptive feminized technofied spiritual leader revamps Japanese identity into a highly consumable product. But Mori's and Murakami's catering to U.S.A. sensibilities suggests more than just strategic career moves.¹⁵⁰ Their works reflect not only their own pressures as individual artists, but also the difficult position that Japan has found itself in self-defining as an entire nation. Their works establish the means by which identity, and in this case national identity through culture, has been usurped by globalization as a marketing tool, where the concept of Japan as a brand comes to the fore. Their ambivalence about self-Orientalizing points to issues central to Japanese cultural production in the international framework whereupon the Japanese have self-Orientalized in relation to the waning sense of cultural stability.

As Japanese products/personae in the international domain, Mori and Murakami are caught in a difficult place of negotiation. Contrary to the *nihonjinron* discourse, Japan is not "a discrete national subject that stands in opposition to the global order."¹⁵¹ It is a nation whose once-strong imagined community has been put to question, and by way of its economic turn has had to confront the repercussions of globalization in relation to self-

¹⁵⁰ While there has been the odd disparaging response to their art, (usually directed towards Murakami's so-called eroticisation of young girls), on the whole reviews have been favourable. However, in the United Kingdom, Adrian Searle, a prominent arts critic for *The Guardian*, has gone so far as to call Murakami's Serpentine exhibition in 2002 as the worst exhibition of the year in Britain, adding that it was, "Slick and cute, with added vomit." Adrian Searle, "The critics year: Highs and lows, with added vomit," *The Guardian* (London), December 17, 2002. Just as scathingly, Searle's critique of Mori's 1998 exhibition also at the Serpentine, tells us of a similarly violent physical repudiation, "It is a perfumed montage of faked innocence, fake aspirations, false utopias. It is an art we can only view passively. Its faux-spirituality makes me want to puke." Adrian Searle, "Arts: Visual arts: Barbie finds Nirvana; High-minded guff can't disguise the banality of Mariko Mori's show at the Serpentine," *The Guardian* (London), July 14, 1998.

¹⁵¹ Tomiko Yoda, "A Roadmap to Millennial Japan," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, no. 4 (Fall 2000), 647.

definition. Japanese national identity is in crisis, and Mori's and Murakami's appropriation of the dualistic role of the objectified subordinate, sexualized feminine and infantile image in conjunction with the technological threatening image reflects the pressures that Japan faces in admitting its own sense of internal and international displacement on the ideological and economic level since WWII. Mori and Murakami broker the tendentious relationship between Japan and the U.S.A., at once revealing and pushing it to extremes, strategically providing a marketable cultural image of Japan.¹⁵² But by coddling Techno-Orientalist visions through eroticization, feminization or *kawaii*ification, rendering Japan's threat impotent, they present a caricature of Japan's fractured social order and its relationship to the U.S.A. Japan's internalized fears of Americanization are transformed into representations of Japanese culture.

Mori's and Murakami's inability to sustain a self-definition in a localized sense, describing the plurality of Japanese identity through the *shinjinrui* and their pop cultural tropes, reveals a waning ability to accurately communicate a cohesive cultural identity through what Benedict Anderson's calls an imagined community.¹⁵³ With its disparate subcultures, Japan can no longer rely upon a stable notion of cultural identity for national identification. However, the international economy of desire still makes demands for national identity based upon cultural homogeneity. As such, with its history of self-

¹⁵² During the occupation, the U.S.A. government mapped out Japan's political and corporate sector by simply reinstating Japan's pre-war faction, many of whom happened to be former war criminals. Michael Zielenziger, *Shutting out the Sun: How Japan Created its own Lost Generation* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 274. Three significant events occurred in the 1950s that have reverberated in the political, social and economic make up of Japan ever since, including: the signing of Japan's Article 9 in the Constitution; the signing of the Mutual Security Treaty in 1951 (which permitted continued U.S military presence in Japan, as well as an undeclared rearmament in accordance with the U.S.A. Cold War strategy); and the 1954 establishment of the conservative the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) that has ruled almost consistently for over fifty years, drafting and implementing policy with the input of elite bureaucrats.

¹⁵³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. and extended ed. (London; New York: Verso, 1991).

definition in relation to economic success, Japan has consumed and replicated a culture of self-Orientalization to make sense of its lack of control. As Masanori Oda points out, between Japan and the West (and specifically the United States), there is a kind of reciprocity.

[The] Japan/ese often appear as ‘as you like,’ self-fashioned figures to the West, not only to satisfy their own gaze, but to disguise the real portrayal of their own nature or desires, as if to say, ‘This figure is not so bad for me.’¹⁵⁴

Mori and Murakami allow the desires of others to slip in and dominate the interpretation of their works. But at the same time, as a kind of *shōjo* soft rebellion against these desires, they profit through Orientalization. Like the *kogyaru*, the artists exploit their designation as brands within the global economy: Murakami as the infallible businessman who, like the Toyota brand, seemingly understands the U.S.A. market better than the Americans know themselves; and Mori, who presents herself as malleable consumable innocence, becoming whatever the American audience desires.¹⁵⁵

In spite of profiting, they resist being held accountable for their complicity in self-Orientalization. Mori and Murakami blame consumer culture and the U.S.A. for their problems. At the same time that they play up ideas of superiority, they also invoke the notion that they are mere products of an American-influenced environment, or “cultural ready-mades.”¹⁵⁶ Their works cleverly appeal to liberal American feelings of guilt associated with its corporate and international policies, as well as assuages such feelings by highlighting the stylistic, *kawaii*ified, technological, and economic genius of the artists

¹⁵⁴ Masanori Oda, “Welcoming the Libido of the Technoids who Haunt the Junkyard of the Techno-Orient, or the Uncanny Experience of the Post-Techno-Orientalist Moment,” in Grenville, 228.

¹⁵⁵ In 2007, Murakami collaborated with hip hop musician Kanye West to design his album cover *Graduation*.

¹⁵⁶ Harry Berger, Jr. *Fictions of the Pose: Rembrandt Against the Italian Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 15.

and the Japanese.¹⁵⁷ The appearance of consuming and producing the superficial is not only expected, it is justified. It is the process of postmodernity that Fredric Jameson entails as the “becoming cultural of the economic, and the becoming economic of the cultural.”¹⁵⁸ Whereas Japan can no longer pretend to solidly offer a homogeneous cultural identity, Mori and Murakami provide the superficial, vacuous interpretation of Japanese culture, appealing to the global consumption of national identity. Global economic demands have encouraged not only a false sense of distinct cultural identity grounded upon national divisions, but have also encouraged a superficial reading and consumption of these cultural identities. The importance lies in how their works are looked at, not what they look like. Desire is based upon perception and not necessarily understanding. As non-Western cultural producers in the international art field, Mori’s and Murakami’s success is based upon their ability to cultivate desirability. *Play with Me* and *SMP ko*² are successful in the international realm because they appeal to outside desires of what the viewer thinks Japan should represent, not of what the works actually represent. The artists’ cursory attempts at specificities reveal the inability to maintain cultural cohesion and the decline of the nation-state in practice but not in theory.

¹⁵⁷ It is not farfetched to presume that Murakami’s *Little Boy* exhibition held in New York as a jab against U.S.A. bullying and unfair power politics.

¹⁵⁸ Fredric Jameson, “Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue,” *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 60.

CONCLUSION

Instead of revolutionizing the ways in which Japanese identity is consumed, Mori and Murakami underscore the instability of Japan's cultural identity, and in turn question the validity of relying upon culture as a means to secure national identity. The ways in which they manage the particularities of Japanese subculture and the fracturing of a homogeneous vision through the convergence of pop cultural tropes such as *kawaii*, technology, the feminine and sexuality highlight the decline of Japan as a cohesive nation-state. Since the 1990s, visible youth groups such as the *kogyaru* and the *otaku* have become the faces of a pluralized society rebelling against social conventions of the immediate post-war generation. In many ways Mori's and Murakami's depictions of such groups illustrate a celebration of Japan's heterogeneity, as well as an understanding of the underlying tensions between Japan's heterogeneity and the homogeneous rhetoric of the *nihonjinron* theory that dominated the discourse of the 1970s and 1980s. Their reflections of the 1990s social shifts signal not only the reality of a mutating society in the face of a declining economy, but also the fear of the 'alien within' associated with these changes. Mori's and Murakami's works demystify the association between *shōjo* culture with ideas of infantilization, feminization, and alien as reflexive retaliations against the fear of American subjugation. But in as much as their works respect unconventional gender identities, sexualities, equality, and independence from Japanese social norms, as well as a burgeoning Renaissance in Japanese culture, Mori's and Murakami's presentations of the idiosyncratic *shōjo* culture give way to stereotypical interpretations in the international domain.

Mori's and Murakami's revelation of a post-war fear of American influence through the presentation of a victimized stance and a technological superiority ends up reiterating an Orientalist perspective. In the international purview of their works, Japanese cultural specificity gives way to Western homogenization. Not indifferent to such stereotypical readings, Mori and Murakami ambivalently walk the line between commercial and fine art, aware of the effects of the dominant American discourse on the international art market and of their works' economic and cultural value. There is a reason that both artists held exhibitions entitled *Made in Japan*, and have made their Japanese origins widely known through their art and through the cultivation of their personae. The artists align themselves with a carefully scripted idea of Japaneseness, inserting themselves into already existing roles such as the businessman, the *otaku*, the *kogyaru*, and the spiritual medium, and reiterating a brand of Japaneseness whose threat is always made benign. It is an unfinished immature vision of Japanese culture.

However, Mori and Murakami are not simply acting the role of savvy capitalists, taking advantage of market demands. Their dependence upon the international commercial viability of Japanese cultural branding embodies the crisis of Japanese representation. In the 1990s, with its fallen economy and heterogeneous population, Japan no longer sustained a cohesive national identity. Through self-Orientalization, blame for Japan's internal social and economic irregularities could be transposed onto outer forces, retaining the myth of cultural integrity. Mori's and Murakami's passive absorption of self-Orientalization not only reflects the actual American influence on Japanese collective self-perception, but also exposes the importance of homogenized cultural identity for perpetuating national identity in the global market of desire.

Specificity loses out to homogenization. Regardless of the fact that the particularities of their representations are lost in translation, their works become part of a larger economic exchange of identity. Aware of their status as Japanese cultural products, they embrace the Oriental brand. Art is a commodity, and culture is a brand for national identity. They and their works are only a small part of the larger exchange of the Japanese cultural product. The legitimacy and accuracy of their portrayals are not so very important, it is the illusion, or belief that they portray an idea of authentic Japaneseness. For any individual, the representation of cultural authenticity for an entire nation is predicated by an incomplete vision of nationality. Thus, through their embrace of superficiality, Mori and Murakami open up the dialogue concerning national identity and the future of the nation-state that is increasingly at odds with the populations that inhabit it and the economies that manage it.

FIGURES

Figure 1. Takashi Murakami, *Second Mission Project ko²*, 1999
Installation view of *Second Mission Project ko²* (1999) at Wonder Festival, Summer 2000.

Oil paint, acrylic, synthetic resins, fiberglass and iron.

Courtesy of Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York; Blum & Poe, Los Angeles;

Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, Paris and Miami; and Tomio Koyama Gallery, Tokyo.

Photo by Kazuo Fukunaga

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Figure 2. Mariko Mori, *Play with Me*, 1994
 Fuji super gloss print, wood, pewter frame, 120 x 144 x 3 inches
 Courtesy of the artist and Deitch Projects.
 © Mariko Mori



Figure 3. General Douglas MacArthur on the left of Emperor Hirohito on the day of their meeting, September 27, 1945 at the U.S. Embassy, Tokyo.
 Photo by U.S.A. Army photographer Lt. Gaetano Faillace



Figure 4. Mariko Mori, *Birth of a Star*, 1995
3D Duratrans print, acrylic, fluorescent lights
Courtesy of the artist and Deitch Projects,
© Mariko Mori



Figure 5. Takashi Murakami, *Hiropon*, 1997
Oil paint, acrylic, fiberglass and iron
223.5 x 104 x 122 cm
Courtesy Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin,
Paris & Miami
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Figure 6. Takashi Murakami, *My Lonesome Cowboy*, 1998
Oil paint, acrylic, sythetic resins, fiberglass and iron
254 x 117 x 91.5 cm
Courtesy Blum & Poe, Los Angeles
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Figure 7. Mariko Mori,
Installation view, *Enlightenment Capsule*, 1996, Deitch Projects, 1996
Courtesy of the artist and Deitch Projects.
© Mariko Mori



Figure 8. Mariko Mori, *Nirvana* (video still), 1997-98
3D Video
Courtesy of the artist and Deitch Projects.
© Mariko Mori



Figure 9. Mariko Mori, *Pure Land*, 1997-98
Glass with photo interlayer, 5 panels: 120 x 240 x .85 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Deitch Projects.
© Mariko Mori



Figure 10. Vincent Van Gogh, *Flowering Plum Tree (after Hiroshige)*, 1887



Figure 11. Mariko Mori, *Wave UFO*, 2003

Aluminum, magnesium, carbon fiber, Technogel, and fiberglass, 16 x 37 x 17 feet

Courtesy of the artist and Deitch Projects.

© Mariko Mori



Figure 12. Takashi Murakami, *Time Bokan* - black, 2001

Acrylic on canvas mounted on board

180 x 180 cm

Courtesy Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York

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Figure 13. Mariko Mori, *Burning Desire*, 1996-1998

Glass with photo interlayer, 5 panels: 120 x 240 x .85 inches Courtesy of the artist and Deitch Projects.

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