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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN SAINT LOUIS

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Look at Me: Japanese Women Writers at the Millennial Turn

by

David Holloway

A dissertation presented to the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

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INTRODUCTION: Ways of Seeing

Her subjects see, of course, but they are much more seen, captured by the gaze. Often, in the film stills and the centerfolds, this gaze seems to come from another subject, with whom the viewer may be implicated; sometimes...it seems to come from the spectacle of the world; yet sometimes, too, it seems to come from within.

--Hal Foster, "Obscene, Abject, Traumatic"

Oh traveler, go to Lacedaemon and say that in the mirror,
Graveyard of smiles, there is a single gravestone
Painted white, thick with makeup
Where the wind blows alone.

--Tada Chimako, "Mirrors"

This is a study of ways of seeing in contemporary Japanese women's fiction: it is a study of how literary characters are seen, how they see themselves, and how they see the world. Feminism's concern with "the gaze" has demonstrated that the ways in which men look at women influences the ways in which women look at themselves—as though a phantasmic male figure is always watching and scrutinizing, whose point of view seemingly represents that of the world at large. The political edge of the gaze has invited academic and intellectual recapitulations of its power over women. Hal Foster's work on the obscene, the abject, and the traumatic, for example, is a theoretical exploration of how contemporary female artists wrestle with the notion of women's status as sex(ual) objects. Some feminists have followed suit, arguing for a new politics of liberalized sexuality that rearticulates being looked at as an empowering rather than anxiety-inducing experience. This study contributes to ongoing academic and intellectual intrigue into women's place in the visual economy of sexual politics and the current state of feminism. We could argue that as feminism makes headway into dismantling and revisioning ways of seeing and being seen, women remain at the epicenter of a vigorous and unrelenting visual culture and meat market. This can be partially explained by the emergence of pro-sex feminism which, as

explained in Chapter Two, has wanted to neutralize the political and systemic threat of female objectification by saying that sexual objectification can work to women's advantage and advancement; it can also be attributed to the circulation of women's bodies as commodities and cash, as things to be bought and sold as well as things that are used to procure other things: sex continues to sell and be sold. The Japanese fiction analyzed in this dissertation emerges from an awareness of and disappointment with the state of the female body as an object of visual pleasure and cultural fascination. This dissertation is especially interested in how female characters deal with the visual terrain of contemporary Japan and their place within it; how they deal with being looked at all the time and how their experiences as objects of sexual consumption inform largely pessimistic worldviews.

It is not only sex that shapes the ways in which these characters see the world. As explained in Chapter One, Japanese fiction of the past several decades is foregrounded by a constellation of financial, natural, and sociocultural disasters that occurred in the early 1990s, what scholars called "the lost decade." Young people growing up in the years that followed have been labeled Japan's "lost generation" and are seemingly representative of a post-Japan Japan, one that is lacking the qualities of "Japan Inc."—not only the prominence of industry, but also and more importantly the personal sacrifice and commitment of the populace to a version of economic nationalism. During the period of high economic growth of the 1980 and early 90s, "the Japan Problem" was an external problem, particularly for the US government which saw its status as the world's number one economy threatened by Japan's thriving postwar economy; one could argue that after economic collapse and the resulting social anxiety, the Japan Problem became Japan's problem—which remains unsolved today amidst residual economic stagnation and an uncommitted and uncaring youth culture. The fiction presented in this dissertation is

occupied by protagonists whose lives have been shaped by the economic and social unrest of “the lost decade.” They seem lazy, self-indulgent, aimless. Some, like Moriko, the protagonist of Hasegawa Junko’s (b. 1966) “Museiran” lose their jobs.¹ Others, like the protagonists of Sakurai Ami’s (b. 1972) *Innosento wârudo* and Kanehara Hitomi’s (b. 1983) *Hebi ni piasu* do not really have jobs to lose.²

The protagonists are all young women primarily in their late-teens to mid-thirties whose collective life experiences belie any significant age or generational gap. Tanaka Yayoi suggests that young women writing today, such as Kanehara, whose works are discussed in chapters Two and Four, have grown up in “a new society” that is far removed from the gender inequalities that hounded women writers of previous generations—due to the passage of laws forbidding gender discrimination.³ Tanaka argues that their fiction reflects this changed landscape. Perhaps it does in some ways; but it also reminds us that for all the legal trailblazing, residual sociocultural mandates and expectations remain firm, particularly those that fixate on women’s experiences of their bodies. As demonstrated in Chapter Four, women are still expected to become mothers, which validates their worth *as women* in the popular consciousness. Indeed, motherhood is presumably the apex of a life that follows a clearly articulated trajectory from youth into adulthood, where marriage and children await. Chapter Four considers two examples of women who are unable and even unwilling to make the transition. Furthermore, and perhaps most obvious and urgent, women’s subjectivities continue to be dictated by public reception of their

¹ Published 2004, trans. The Unfertilized Egg (2006). Title hereafter referred to in English.

² Published 1997, trans. Innocent World (2004); published 2004, trans. Snakes and Earrings (2006). Titles hereafter referred to in English.

³ Tanaka Yayoi, “Writing a New Generation of Japanese Women,” *Japanese Book News* 78 (Winter 2013): 2.

bodies. Before a woman is able to become a mother, she must occupy a space of feminine decorum, exemplified by bodily maintenance and surveillance. Japan's thriving beauty culture—though hardly just for women—is a reminder of the vast importance of women's physical perfection in Japan. Chapter Two considers two examples of women who will stop at nothing to be thin. The protagonist of Matsumoto Yûko's (b. 1963) *Kyoshokusho no akenai yôake* is a twenty-one-year-old college student, while that of Hasegawa's *Kodoku no ii nari* is a thirty-five-year-old book editor.⁴ Both women presume that the perfect body is the key to happiness—the perfect life. Saki, the twenty-four-year old protagonist of Kanehara's *Haidora*, and discussed in Chapter Four, already has the perfect body; but she is miserable.⁵

In fact, all of the protagonists explored here are miserable. The notion of “women's pain” is crucial to this study. In contrast to works of literature that may rely on moments of healing or reconciliation, the fiction presented here is marked by a lack of finality. This fiction offers jarring case histories of women living in psychological and even physical pain; but it does not offer a solution. Rather, for these women, and even for their authors, the act of articulating pain and sharing it is cathartic. The texts demand our empathy and support, but not much else. In the Conclusion, I pursue this idea of women's pain further and ask how men are intended to receive these texts—if they are meant to receive them at all.

One of the main concerns of this dissertation is the excess of negative emotions that course through these works of fiction, particularly disappointment as the primary affective mode that informs the protagonists' life experiences. Stemming from a collective disappointment with the sociocultural and –political landscape of contemporary Japan that has little to offer its

⁴ Published 1991, *The Excessive Overeater: An Endless Dawn*, untranslated; published 2007, *Prisoner of Solitude*, untranslated. Titles hereafter referred to in English.

⁵ Published 2007, *Hydra*, untranslated. Title hereafter referred to in English.

younger generations, these protagonists do not see the positive side of much of anything. In an interview after the initial success of *Snakes and Earrings*, Kanehara commented on the half-empty outlook that is typical of her generation: “There are many people who don’t expect anything from society. That’s precisely why they are looking inward or to the people closest to them...I never knew the bubble era, so my way of looking at things can’t help being different. Since I was born, I’ve never experienced a time of prosperity.”⁶ Kanehara’s words echo in the hollows of the narratives presented here as her outlook is shared by characters whose lives lack prosperity as well as the expectation for anything more. This sense of disappointment carries over from the public sphere into the private, as characters grasp for anything that will give their lives purpose and meaning.

The notion of “the good life” is an important backdrop to this study. Current academic interest in affect has led scholars to pursue the logic behind what makes the good life good. I draw regularly from the scholarship of Lauren Berlant, Sara Ahmed, and Sianne Ngai, who have critiqued the construction of “the good life” in the popular imaginary through careful observations on the ways in which particular lifestyles have been coded with positive affect and fantasy—what Berlant calls “stupid optimism”⁷— or, conversely, how other lifestyles have been denigrated with negative affect. The body chapters of this dissertation are each devoted to one particular aspect of what I call “fantasies of femininity.” Chapter Two, “Repurposing Panic,” explores the affective complexities of “obscene” sex acts in two texts about two teenagers. Ami, the protagonist of *Innocent World*, and Lui, of *Snakes and Earrings*, negotiate lives that are

⁶ Norimitsu Onishi, “Just 20, She Captures Altered Japan in a Debut Novel,” *New York Times*, March 27, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/27/world/the-saturday-profile-just-20-she-captures-altered-japan-in-a-debut-novel.html> (January 14, 2014).

⁷ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 126.

caught between neo-liberal articulations of sexuality and sexual freedom and revamped discourses of passive female sexuality. Chapter Three, “Writing Size Zero,” focuses on the primacy of the thin body in Japan today, evident in Matsumoto’s text and Hasegawa’s *Prisoner of Solitude*—a portrait of an overeater and a bulimic, respectively, who have each placed a great deal of affective weight on being thin. Finally, Chapter Four, “The Dark Trauma,” looks closely at the gendered politics of aging. Moriko, the 35-year-old protagonist of “The Unfertilized Egg” and Saki, the 24-year-old protagonist of Kanehara’s *Hydra* are both concerned with getting older and how age may influence public perception of their beauty and sex appeal in the highly visual sexual economy.

I analyze the above aspects of these texts because issues of sex and sexuality, body size and body image, and youth and beauty are volatile issues in Japan and elsewhere. They have been subject to swings in public discourse and opinion and branded with particular affect, such that a thin body is better than a fat body, a young body is better than an old body, and so on. Sex is especially tenuous in Japan in light of the declining birth rate; politicians continue to disparage women who have sex for non-reproductive reasons, calling them selfish and even unpatriotic. I am also interested in these issues because they emphasize the gendered nature of how we look and how we are looked at. The issues discussed in this dissertation are predicated on a gendered division of seeing and the necessity for male-female attraction as the catalyst for “the good life.”⁸ The texts all demonstrate how the visual nature of heterosexual attraction is an important precursor to the successful fulfillment of fantasies of femininity. In fact, there is a glaring absence of female-female relationships in these texts, as though women’s homosocial bonds are

⁸ Sara Ahmed suggests that “the good life” is primarily a heterosexual one. “[T]he queer life,” she says, is an unhappy one because it lacks what is thought to be good or happy—a husband, a wife, children. Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) 93.

of no importance in the male-dominated visual economy, or at least must be compromised in the face of heterosexual desire and attraction. The implications of this theme are addressed in the Conclusion.

The disappointment that is engrained *in* the lives of these women is also evident *on* their bodies. Following Hal Foster's lead, I read the texts vis-à-vis thematic and theoretical categories of obscenity, abjection, and trauma. Chapter Two's focus on "obscene" sex acts suggests that obscenity is an important diegetic mechanism that at once invites the voyeur in but immediately forces him to leave. The texts discussed here toy with ideals and expectations of women's sexuality while also complicating contemporary forays into liberalized pro-sex and "raunch" feminism. Modern Japanese women's fiction has demonstrated a commitment to engaging social discourse and decorum surrounding sexual politics. Sakurai and Kanehara contribute to this ongoing negotiation through graphic depictions of incestuous and sadomasochistic sex. In Sakurai's *Innocent World*, protagonist Ami and her invalid half brother begin an intensely sexual relationship. At the same time, she seeks out and ultimately seduces her absentee biological father. While in *Snakes and Earrings*, Lui is drawn to her sadistic tattoo artist, whose violent sexual tendencies reflect the violence she seeks through tattoos and other forms of body modification. This chapter argues that incest and sadomasochism fall outside the domain of scripted female sexual conduct and challenge preconceptions of voyeuristic fantasy. Yet they also ask us to think about the real life consequences of the sexual politics of raunch.

The subversion of the male gaze is a cornerstone of Chapter Three, which places narratives of excessive eating and bulimic bingeing and purging alongside theoretical applications of abjection. Yuiko, of Matsumoto's *The Excessive Overeater*, eats obsessively all the while lamenting her increasing weight; in Hasegawa's *Prisoner of Solitude*, Mayuko

habitually binges and purges, especially during times of stress. Psychoanalytic conceptions of abjection emphasize the tension between diametric oppositions, particularly the clean and dirty body. Julia Kristeva argues that the formation of stable subject positions is threatened by what is unclean or in excess. She thus sees the abject as a border, and conceptualizes certain bodily orifices as places of potential rupture: mouth, ears, genitals, anus. Kristeva states:

We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it—on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger. But also because abjection itself is a composite of judgment and affect, of condemnation and yearning, of signs and drives.⁹

For Kristeva, the ambiguity of abjection undoes our ideas of ourselves as firmly constituted subjects; we are always in flux, always vulnerable to what is on the other side. Kristeva has written poignantly on food as a source of abject repulsion, which has invited comparisons to eating disorders. The texts I examine in this chapter concern women with “eating disorders,” but my interest in abjection is elsewhere. I read the construction of the thin body as a dual process of active abjecting and passive abjection; a slippery negotiation between slimming the body down by refusing to eat and being eaten alive by powerful discourses that extol the thin body.

In Chapter Four, our attention turns to aging as a similar experience of corporeal abjection. Given the value of youth in many countries, aging has been described as a traumatic experience for women that “threatens the core of feminine subjectivity.”¹⁰ The inevitability of death brings with it is a haunting reminder of one’s shelf-life. Dianna Tietjens Meyers is blunt in her articulation of women’s relationships with their always aging bodies and the looming threat

⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 9-10.

¹⁰ E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 46.

of unattractiveness within a milieu of “exclusionary beauty ideals.” She says: “Attractiveness at one stage of life ensures unattractiveness at another, and women are doomed to spend a significant part of their lives in despair over their ugliness or toiling to overcome it (and probably both).”¹¹ If abjection raises questions of the instability of identity, so, too, does aging. Indeed, Meyes argues that “the trauma of feeling that there is an irremediable disparity between who one is and who one appears to be” is reflected in our notions that age means one thing while youth means another.¹² The two texts examined in this chapter—Hasegawa’s “The Unfertilized Egg” and Kanehara’s *Hydra*— are concerned with women who, as explained above, cannot make the transition from youth to maturity. Hasegawa’s protagonist is thirty-five years old and single; Kanehara’s is a twenty-four year old model. For all their superficial differences, these texts are concerned with what it means to be aging—or at least to not be young—in a culture that equates beauty with youth. This chapter asks and then hazards an answer as to what happens to women refuse to age gracefully.

While obscenity, abjection, and trauma are discussed individually, this is not to suggest that they do not share certain affects. The texts, too, overlap thematically. They are all concerned with sex and romance (admittedly some more so than others), and they are all concerned with beauty; more than a few focus on body image. My aim in chapters Two through Four is to theorize about what I see to be outstanding motifs in these works. Together, the six texts discussed constitute an unhappy gestalt of contemporary femininity and feminism and its accompanying affective platforms. I find that obscenity, abjection, and trauma are more than

¹¹ Dianna Tietjens Meyers, *Gender in the Mirror: Cultural Imagery & Women’s Agency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 156.

¹² *Ibid.*, 157.

theoretical lenses. They are a trajectory of sorts that maps the protagonists' ways of living and affective modes in their own right.

From these texts, we can deduce a narrative of femininity that pushes women from “here” to “there.” The Conclusion, “Discourses of Disappointment, Heuristics of Happiness,” demonstrates, however, that the texts themselves lack a stable narrative progression. In typical plot-driven narratives, there is movement and futurity, as events are linked by causality. In ours, there is none. There is plot, of course, but the protagonists do not change or develop and they do not go from “here” to “there.” Often, they end up back where they started. I situate this kind of static narrative within a Japanese narrative tradition that does not culminate in finality, as Western readers may expect. Rather, they offer glimpses of lives, case histories of women who are simply trying to get by in permanent crisis mode. As Berlant states: “Crisis is not exceptional to history or consciousness but a process embedded in the ordinary that unfolds in stories about navigating what’s overwhelming.”¹³

Life wears us out, she argues, and we simply try to survive by gravitating toward “the good life,” which, paradoxically, may not be that good after all once the fantasy is exposed. It seems to be a prevalent theme in recent Japanese women’s fiction, too—how to survive today. Author Kawakami Mieko explains that her works are meant to reflect the ways in which “we [meaning women] are always doing our best at living.”¹⁴ The six works of fiction presented in this dissertation offer case histories of social dislocation. They offer no resolutions to their

¹³ Berlant, 10.

¹⁴ Quoted in Yuri Kageyama, “Blog Catapults Japan’s New Literary Star: Obscure Singer Wins Country’s Most Prestigious Honor For a New Writer,” *NBCNews.Com*, March 19, 2008, http://www.nbcnews.com/id/23711082/#.UtfzxPZZU_4 (January 16, 2014).

problem, but rather moments of lives that are hard and will continue to be hard after their individual stories end.

CHAPTER ONE: Apocalypse and Anxiety in Contemporary Japan

...Japan in the 1990s appears to be plagued by the loss of an end, death or absolute, the loss of a structuring frame for cognition and a system of meaning authorized by a sense of the finite.

--Yumiko Iida, *Rethinking Identity in Modern Japan*

...it's sort of comical how you think that you've made a choice that exempts you from the fashion industry when, in fact, you're wearing the sweater that was selected for you by the people in this room.

--Meryl Streep, *The Devil Wears Prada*

FANTASIES OF AUTONOMY

If Roland Barthes is to be believed, Japan is empty and dislocated, a semiotic minefield. Taking a poststructuralist approach in his analysis of Japanese culture, *L'Empire des signes* (1970; trans. The Empire of Signs, 1982), Barthes posited that, in contrast to the West, nearly all things Japanese—such as cuisine or poetry or the theater or city planning—have no fixed center of meaning. Everything is a free-floating and vacant sign, from language to subjectivity, challenging the “modern industrial capitalist” imperative for “the acquisition of a seemingly stable, unchanging identity.”¹ Yumiko Iida suggests that through his understanding of Japanese culture as a semiotic free-for-all that ultimately lacks “a modern notion of subjectivity,” Barthes anticipated much of what postmodern thought has said about identity politics.² Specifically, as Renata Salecl argues, the so-called postmodern condition is predicated on a structural simulacrum that advocates plasticity: “Life is like a computer game in which the subject can play with his or her identity, can randomly follow fashion rituals, has no strong national or religious

¹ Sharalyn Orbaugh, *Japanese Fiction of the Allied Occupation: Vision, Embodiment, Identity* (Boston: Brill, 2007), 24.

² Yumiko Iida, *Rethinking Identity in Modern Japan: Nationalism as Aesthetics* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 201.

beliefs, etc.”³ When, in 1979, Jean-Francois Lyotard “gestured toward the ample potential for individual freedom” in his articulation of a postmodern aesthetic that challenged Enlightenment promises of a monolithic truth, this is probably not what he had in mind.⁴ For we live in an age Slavoj Žižek calls “extreme individualization” where nothing, not even life itself, has a definitive meaning or purpose and because we can be anybody we want, we cannot really be anybody at all.⁵

The supposition that Japanese culture is sustained by lack has reached critical mass in the past several decades. Scholars do not necessarily see Japan as a postmodern playground anymore, but rather as a nation that has collapsed into itself, a postmodern casualty.⁶ Iida contends that a confluence of political and economic ruptures, violent acts, and natural disasters during the 1990s portended the fall of old regimes and belief systems and bespoke fears of the end of the world at the millennial turn. As explained in greater detail below, the death of Emperor Hirohito in 1989—and all that his reign symbolized—seemed to set in motion a number of calamities that lasted throughout the following decade and warped the national psyche,

³ Renata Salecl, *(Per)Versions of Love and Hate* (New York: Verso, 1998), 159-160.

⁴ Yumiko Iida, “Between the Technique of Living an Endless Routine and the Madness of Absolute Degree Zero: Japanese Identity and the Crisis of Modernity in the 1990s,” *Positions* 8, no. 2 (Fall, 2000): 424.

⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (New York: Verso, 1999), 373.

⁶ Some contend that Japan can never truly be a modern or even postmodern society because, for all of its poststructuralist potential, the Japanese themselves possess no “inner autonomy.” In Japan, “[t]he desire to belong to a group, to merge one’s identity with that [of a] collectivity and to organize one’s life around its norms is very strong and can be seen reproduced constantly in endless situations[.]” According to John Clammers, for Maruyama Masao Japanese “groupism” is an obstacle to true individuality and (post)modernity. John Clammer, *Contemporary Urban Japan: A Sociology of Consumption* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1997), 47-48.

especially that of the Japanese youth who found that the Japan of their parents was suddenly not their own. In other words, Japan was split open and its youth fell into the chasm. Author Murakami Ryû (b. 1952), whose nihilistic fiction taps into this terrain, labeled them the “lost generation,” a potent symbol for the 1990s—Japan’s “lost decade.”⁷ As Anne Allison points out in *Millennial Monsters*, the reclusive twenty-four year old protagonist of Murakami’s *Kyôseichû* (2000)⁸ identifies himself as a worm, “a nonreflective, silent ‘body’ ...--a living, spatially extended thing” that exists but does not exist really.⁹

Worm is a *hikikomori*, a shut-in, one of several “subcultural groups” to gain notoriety during the recessionary 1990s.¹⁰ Along with introverted animation superfans (*otaku*) who pump upwards of 2.5 billion dollars into the Japanese economy each year buying the latest video games and comics and *anime*,¹¹ and sexualized and truant school girls (*kogyaru*) who offered their bodies in exchange for money and goods, *hikikomori* seemed to represent a new generation of Japanese who experienced the world through the “consumption loop” of a derailed consumer-

⁷ Ryu Murakami, “Japan’s Lost Generation: In a World Filled With Virtual Reality, The Country’s Youth Can’t Deal With the Real Thing,” CNN.COM, May, 1 2001, <http://www.cnn.com/ASIANOW/time/magazine/2000/0501/japan.essaymurakami.html> (June, 13 2014).

⁸ The title of the book is a play on the term *kiseichû*, meaning parasite. The characters Murakami uses—共生虫 rather than 寄生虫—are meant to highlight a certain degree of symbiosis (共) in an otherwise parasitic relationship.

⁹ I have borrowed this phrase from Asja Szafraniec’s study of Samuel Beckett’s novel *L’Innommable* (1953; trans. The Unnamable, 1958), which is the disjointed monologues of an unnamed narrator/protagonists whose personae are manifested in two dichotomous characters, Mahood (Manhood?) and Worm. Asja Szafraniec, *Beckett, Derrida, and the Event of Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 128-129.

¹⁰ Iida (2000), 426.

¹¹ Mark Wheeler MacWilliams, *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime* (New York: M.E. Sharp, Inc., 2007), 4.

oriented sign-economy.¹² This means that daily life, not only for these subcultural groups but also for countless others, was predicated on the accumulation and consumption of things and experiences in lieu of doing something more substantial. For *otaku* and *kogyaru*, “plugging in” and buying stuff were activities that indulged the inherent artificiality and superficiality promised by the sign-economy, while the closeted existence of *hikikomori* suggested a refusal to participate in it by refusing to participate in anything at all.¹³ While *otaku* clung to the fantasy and momentary escapism promised in animation and video games and *kogyaru* turned to older men (*oyaji*) who offered cash and designer goods in exchange for a transient encounter (a phenomenon called *enjo-kôsai*, or compensated dating), *hikikomori* shut themselves away from others in order to lead “capsule existences.”¹⁴

What is striking is that the emergence of these groups eclipses the extent to which a great number of “anxiety-ridden” Japanese who did or do not fit neatly into a subcultural category

¹² Cited in Iida (2000), 430.

¹³ Things are more complicated than this, of course. Scholars have analyzed the behavior of all three of these groups in more complex and *active* terms, looking to the ways that the lifestyles they led represented an affront to many of the social pressures of the day. Young women who recognized what their bodies could command, for instance, were afforded the opportunity to manipulate men out of large sums of cash. And the purchasing power they commanded from their “dates” with these older men was equally suspect. Jan Bardsley and Hiroko Hirakawa point out that high-end spending is threatening to the moral majority who see self-expression and self-indulgence erode the old orthodoxy of self-sacrifice. This is especially pertinent regarding women in Japan. The image of the Japanese woman who “practices frugality, saves religiously, and makes sacrifices for the sake of family and nation,” though outdated and old-fashioned, remains part of the Japanese imaginary, and is even making a come-back amidst Japan’s declining birthrate. Jan Bardsley and Hiroko Hirakawa, “Branded: Bad Girls go Shopping,” in *Bad Girls of Japan*, ed. Laura Miller and Jan Bardsley (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 112.

¹⁴ Anne Allison, “New Age Fetishes, Monsters, and Friends,” in *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*, ed. Tomiko Yoda and H.D. Harootunian (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 343.

have been equally displaced by the events of the 1990s.¹⁵ The fiction I analyze in the following chapters profiles some of these people, and I argue that millennial Japan is an important backdrop to understanding this fiction and where the protagonists “come from.” The protagonists of these works lead “thin” lives: Hasegawa’s Moriko, in “The Unfertilized Egg,” for example, parties all night with her younger coworkers, and stumbles home to her filthy apartment when most people her age (mid thirties) are getting up to go to work; meanwhile, Kanehara’s Lui, in *Snakes and Earrings*, does not do much of anything at all except drink and have sex. “Thin” is an apt term that reverberates particularly well with the contemporary moment and its emphasis on physical thinness as a cornerstone of appropriate feminine praxis. In this context, physical thinness becomes a symbol and symptom, an embodiment of a life rather meaningless, even “thin”—exemplified by Matsumoto’s *The Excessive Overeater* and Hasegawa’s *Prisoner of Solitude*, whose protagonists share the same concern over what they eat and how to attract men. These four texts are predicated on this dual axis of thinness, and the tumultuous 1990s and the body-conscious climate of the past decade—both of which I outline in this chapter—set the stage. They were all published after 1990 and concern women whose lives seem representative of the hollow lives of the lost generation and whose subjectivities are either explicitly or implicitly governed by the logic of the body.

In this chapter, I will describe in more detail some of the outstanding events of the 1990s. I will do so because the era was traumatic in many ways and shaped the lives of those who grew up during the recession and experienced first-hand the trials of finding one’s way on unstable (literally and figuratively) ground. Furthermore, I will place the fall of the national consciousness in dialogue with the rise of the physical body. Indeed, incidentally or not, with the spread of the

¹⁵ Iida (2000), 456.

mundane into the cultural fabric came the emergence of the physical body as that which matters most, particularly for women. My focus is not necessarily on *how* this happened (though I will comment on certain key developments that pushed the body to the fore), but on *why* the body matters so much, especially in a milieu in which not much else does. Today, the body, both male and female, is primed by intersecting forces of self-care and net-worth—it is a “project” that takes time and money intended to reflect a refined subjectivity (mirroring an aged association of thinness as restraint and fatness as gratuitousness) as well as socioeconomic status. But because women have historically been aligned with bodies and men with minds in philosophic discourse and social praxis, women’s bodies are that much more charged and their projects that much more stringent.

Beauty practices have always mattered of course, but there is no denying the fact that today they matter more than ever. Cultural practices continue to reaffirm women as bodies (though men’s bodies are becoming more susceptible here), and the contemporary social infatuation with the body as “cultural plastic”—something to be broken down, rearranged, sculpted to individual taste—is the latest manifestation of historically contingent concerns over women and their bodies.¹⁶ As Laura Miller summarizes:

Every inch...is plucked and pumiced, and failure to engage in new beauty practices would...result in a woman being judged decidedly frumpish. In the struggle against natural and unworked flesh, the entire geography of the body...comes under the control of new beauty regimens.¹⁷

¹⁶ Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, 10th ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), xvii.

¹⁷ Laura Miller, *Beauty Up: Exploring Contemporary Japanese Body Aesthetics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 9.

One might argue that today more than ever before, women are aware of themselves *as bodies*. Interestingly, however, despite the postmodern imperative for “extreme individualization” and plasticity, it is largely the same body (type) that women are sculpting.



“The landscape must be read. It is a sign, or rather a symptom. Trauma is the psychoanalytic form of apocalypse, its temporal inversion. Trauma produces symptoms in its wake, after the event, and we reconstruct trauma by interpreting its symptoms, reading back in time.”¹⁸ To James Berger, traumatic events can be read like post-apocalyptic scenarios: there is a before, something happens, and there is an after. Japan scholars sometimes interpret the 1990s in this manner, as a moment in which a sequence of events suddenly knocked the nation and its people off course. This is true, to an extent, though a more nuanced understanding of the events of the 90s, such as that explicated by Tomiko Yoda, contextualizes them within a broader global framework and points to the social, political, and economic ruptures that took place as an inevitable outcome rather than an isolated, unpredictable cataclysm. But Japan during this time is indeed a landscape, to use Berger’s term, that can be read and interpreted, the effects of which are engraved on contemporary life and those who live it.

Yoda explains that much of Japan’s problems were rooted in economic collapse and shifts in global economic currents. I should stress, as Yoda does, that the collapse of the economy was only part of a succession of “occurrences” that contributed to a “negative

¹⁸ James Berger, *After the End: Representations of Post-apocalypse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 21.

psychology and pessimistic outlook” that continues to haunt the landscape today.¹⁹ These occurrences “have become closely interwoven with the economic crisis in the popular imagination, underscoring the perception of a national peril that encompasses virtually all aspects of Japanese contemporary society.”²⁰ To summarize, Japan’s “iron triangle” of “industry, bureaucracy, and single-party politics” combined with “the ethos of harmony and formidable work ethics of a homogenous and highly disciplined population” sustained the nation from postwar rebuilding and led, due to the rising value of the yen vis-à-vis an export-driven economic infrastructure, to a speculative bubble that burst in the late 1980s followed by a recession that remains intact today. Yoda further points out that the low interest rates that were introduced by Japanese banks to curb inflation drove investors to other parts of East Asia in search of money-making opportunities. Thus, when the economies of Thailand, Russia, and Latin America experienced their own upheavals during the mid 1990s, investments flatlined, and the already tired Japanese economy suffered all the more.²¹ Many Japanese banks that had offered low-interest loans to investors went bankrupt and the Japanese banking system did not last much longer thereafter, ending “the glorious age of Japanese economic success.”²²

This sense of an end was felt in other aspects of Japanese society. Perhaps most striking was Hirohito’s death in 1989 and with it the end of a Shōwa era (1926-1989) that was at various moments marked by extreme militarism, Cold War politics, and postwar economic prosperity.

¹⁹ Tomiko Yoda, “A Roadmap to Millennial Japan,” in *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*, ed. Tomiko Yoda and H.D. Harootunian (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 20.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

²² Iida (2000), 424.

Iida astutely explains that with the end of the era came its revival in the form of eulogistic and popular narratives of nostalgia that lasted through the following decade.²³ For conservatives, the emperor's death was a chance to "enhance the national consciousness" by vivifying the myths of the emperor system in elaborate ceremonies that were broadcast by the media to the world at large.²⁴ For others it was a chance to revisit the emperor's involvement in the Asia-Pacific War. Harry Harootunian and Tomiko Yoda posit that the postwar period "began with the United States conspicuously conspiring with Japanese and the imperial house immediately after the war to absolve the emperor from war responsibility[.]"²⁵ Hirohito's death, then, meant the revaluation not only of the emperor's legacy but also of the relationship between Japan and the United States that had promised, in addition to preserving the emperor as figurehead after defeat, "unprecedented economic affluence and military protection, if not the promised social democracy."²⁶ These scholars posit further: "The Japanese desire to retain the dependent relationship it has lived with the United States points to a reluctance to let go of the distorted history that has retained for it both the principle and principal of political authority and thus the whole of its modern history."²⁷ With Hirohito's death, then, came the unofficial end of the postwar and the necessity to rethink Japan's role in the world.

²³ Iida (2002), 211.

²⁴ Kyung-Koo Han, "Two Deaths of Hirohito in Japan," in *Death of the Father: An Anthropology of the End in Political Authority*, ed. John Borneman (New York: Berghahn, 2004), 112.

²⁵ Harry Harootunian and Tomiko Yoda, "Introduction," in *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*, ed. Tomiko Yoda and H.D. Harootunian (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 1-2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

But part of Hirohito's narrative is his transformation from untouchable divine being to accessible "father." From the Meiji Period (1868-1912), during which Emperor Mutsuhito reigned, emperors had been given fatherly status under a national push for unity vis-à-vis the national body (*kokutai*). Stressing the importance of filial piety, the government envisioned each household as a hierarchy, the head of which was the father. At the national level, the emperor assumed the role of father and his subjects the role of his family. As Sharalyn Orbaugh explains, "The vesting of absolute authority in the patriarchy is for the benefit of all members of the family. With this kind of logic extended 'down' into each individual household and 'up' to the level of the nation, with the emperor as symbolic father, the political rhetoric of *kokutai* could mobilize the entire nation under one grand metaphor."²⁸ However, with Hirohito, the emperor became, at least in theory, a touchable father, a person. Occupation forces stripped him of his divinity immediately after the war and clothed him in garments not unlike (though of superior quality) those worn by his subjects when he went on tours of the country to galvanize rebuilding efforts. In contrast to the hopes of the Occupation forces, however, the populace did not see "Mr. Hirohito" as an equal, because although the "imperial body" was sartorially similar, he was still the emperor and lived a cloistered existence within the confines of the imperial palace. In fact, his very humanness seemed to amplify the extent to which he was not like his populace. Žižek explains the phenomenon thus: "The more we represent the king as an ordinary man, caught in the same passions, victim of the same pettiness as us...the more he remains 'king.' Because of this paradoxical exchange of properties, we cannot deprive the king of his charisma simply by treating him as our equal."²⁹ Hirohito was indeed a paradoxical figure and seemed to exist on

²⁸ Orbaugh, 200.

²⁹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 411.

two planes, as an instigator before the war but a pacifist after, as a divine figure before the war but a man after, as the human but untouchable father of the national household.³⁰ In a sense, then, when Hirohito died of illness at age 87, it was as though all of the complexities of his existence died with him, lending to “a sense of closure...shared by the entire society.”³¹

Closure, maybe, but it is hard not to see Hirohito’s death and the “mood of mourning” it precipitated as a harbinger of things to come. The economy bottomed out in the following years, as discussed, but the national body began to falter as well, both externally and internally. In January 1995, before the effects of economy could really be felt by the majority of Japanese, the Great Hanshin earthquake leveled the city of Kobe, leaving 6,000 dead, 300,000 displaced, and causing between ten and twenty trillion yen in damage.³² Transportation came to a stop, water supplies were destroyed, and the city’s bay-front area, an homage to “the city’s economic success” by way of its “glittering futuristic buildings and a development plan supported by nearly all segments of the population,” was left in ruins.³³ While the disaster itself “exposed the precariousness of life in this highly urbanized nation,” the fall of the bay-front area meant the symbolic fall of the city itself.³⁴ And the highly-publicized failure of the government to respond

³⁰ Emperor as father had been a part of the cultural imagination prior to 1989. Author Ôe Kenzaburô has overlaid a dying father with the nation’s dying emperor in some of his fiction, such as *The Youth Who Came Late* (1962) and “The Day He Himself Shall Wipe My Tears Away” (1973). Susan J. Napier, *Escape From the Wasteland: Romanticism and Realism in the Fiction of Mishima Yukio and Oe Kenzaburo* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University; Distributed by Harvard University Press, 1991), 158.

³¹ 211.

³² *Ibid.*, 237; Yoda, 20.

³³ Iida (2002), 237.

³⁴ *Ibid.*; Yoda, 20.

to the disaster in an adequate manner, combined with “criticism for corruption and corner-cutting,” exposed the fragility not only of the city and life in general, but also of the whole of the social infrastructure.³⁵

It is also the case that 1995 marked the 50-year anniversary of the end of the war. For many, the widespread destruction following the earthquake rekindled dormant images of war. Akira Mizuta Lippit, for example, found in the earthquake an “avisual echo of World War II...a return of the repressed atomic bombing.” He went on to say, “The displaced or deferred spectacles forced the nation to revisit the primal scene of postwar Japan.”³⁶ If Japan had been able to lay to rest much of what “postwar” had meant when Hirohito died, the earthquake brought it back to life. As William Tsutsui points out, however, not everybody viewed what happened through this historical lens; some saw themselves as extras in an apocalyptic movie, an apocalypse shaped not by what fell from the sky, but from what stirred beneath the earth.³⁷

The apocalyptic mood festered in March of the same year when the Aum Shinrikyô cult released sarin in the Tokyo subways, killing and injuring thousands. The cult’s charismatic leader, Asahara Shôkô (whose real name is Matsumoto Chizuo), who was convinced that the Kobe earthquake had been caused by a death ray designed by United States, founded the group in 1984. He used it as a platform to preach “destruction” and “Armageddon,” beginning in

³⁵ J. Victor Koschman, “National Subjectivity and the Uses of Atonement in the Age of Recession,” in *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*, ed. Tomiko Yoda and H.D. Harootunian (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 124.

³⁶ Quoted in William M. Tsutsui, “Oh No, There Goes Tokyo,” in *Noir Urbanism: Dystopic Images of the Urban City*, ed. Gyan Prakash (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 119.

³⁷ William M. Tsutsui, “Oh No, There Goes Tokyo,” in *Noir Urbanism: Dystopic Images of the Urban City*, ed. Gyan Prakash (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 119.

Tokyo and spreading to the rest of the world.³⁸ The cult was a bastion of the latest technology thanks to its curious ability to attract graduates from elite universities and some of the brightest minds in technological and scientific fields. Some wondered what the cult offered these people that the rest of society did not. The answer, at least in part, was community and a sense of purpose (even if that purpose was grounded in apocalyptic narratives) and emotional support—what society at large was lacking.³⁹ Iida cites critic Nishio Kanji to demonstrate that Aum is illustrative of “a series of closely linked features symptomatic of contemporary Japanese unease: deepening nihilism, weakening identity, and a growing ambiguity in values, morality and meaning” as well as “freedom” masquerading as “boredom.”⁴⁰ In other words, when the crux of life in contemporary Japan or other “postmodern” societies is “extreme individuation” and the freedom to choose one’s identity, a freedom that is undercut by the inability to choose, Asahara’s group succeeded because it offered a subjective identity to those who wanted one. In this way, the Aum attacks were the violent manifestation of “the immanent problems of contemporary Japan[.]”⁴¹

Violent outbursts were not limited to Aum, however. In May 1997, the severed head of an elementary school boy was discovered on the grounds of Tomogaoka Junior High in Kobe; a note was found inside the boy’s mouth: “Everyone, the game starts now....Just try to stop me. I really love killing.” Fourteen-year old Shōnen A (Youth A), as he would be called, also sent angry letters to *Kōbe shinbun* (The Kobe Newspaper) in which he wrote of not being

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Iida (2002), 242.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 243.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

“recognized as a real, living human being” and living a “transparent existence.” In this same note, he blamed Japanese society and its emphasis on “compulsory education” for reducing him to transparency and vowed “revenge.”⁴² Shônén A was captured shortly after sending his letter to the press, and confessed to bludgeoning a ten-year old girl with knife in March 1997 and attacking two other girls with a hammer.⁴³ He spent the majority of his sentence in a psychiatric hospital and was released on March 11, 2004 at age twenty-one. Because he had been a minor at the time of the killings, the government has released no personal information on Shônén A, though rumors circulate on the internet that his real name is Azuma Shin’ichirô.

It is important to see the crimes committed by Shônén A in relation to those committed by Aum Shinrikyô. Both reconceptualize violence as something more “local” than previously thought. No longer was violence the domain of criminals and outlaws, but an activity the educated elite (Aum) and even a child (Shônén A) participated in. Furthermore, the “transparency” Shônén A wrote about speaks to the same complaint that drove some to Aum—lack of subjectivity. With Shônén A, the issue was even more acute, however, for his actions precipitated serious concerns over the state of the family unit, beginning with the immediate family and widening to the national family which was still mourning the loss of its father. As Andrea G. Arai suggests, following the Kobe incident, the discursive context of “the child” was broken down and substituted for larger societal anxieties and lacunae: “[T]he locus of anxiety,

⁴² Quoted in Marilyn Ivy, “Revenge and Recapitulation in Recessary Japan,” in *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural life from the Recessary 1990s to the Present*, ed. Tomiko Yoda and H.D. Harootunian (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 205.

⁴³ Marilyn Ivy, “Revenge and Recapitulation in Recessary Japan,” in *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural life from the Recessary 1990s to the Present*, ed. Tomiko Yoda and H.D. Harootunian (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 204; See also Takayama Fumihiko, *Shônén A: Jûyon-sai no shôzô* [Youth A: Portrait of a Fourteen-Year-Old] (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 2001), 58.

‘the child,’ stands for...the more truly frightening possibility of a problem at the interior of a knowledge about culture, a knowledge that relies on the development of ‘the child’ for the resubstantiation of its continuity and vitality[.]”⁴⁴ Arai further suggests that what was truly frightful about “the child” was not what he *did* but what his actions stood for—““displaced lack,”” the hole opened up by the vacated family and the absentee father.⁴⁵

Indeed, if the boy “child” (the son of the national body) was cause for concern in the mid-1990s, so too was the truant and sexualized teenage daughter—*kogyaru*—who did not necessarily lament lack of direction and transparency but may have fed off of it, at least in theory. Many, not just those who took to compensated dating, saw the latest designer fashions as an opportunity to set oneself apart as well as means to cultivate purchasing power and manipulate older men out of large sums of money. All of this is secondary to critic Miyadai Shinji who understands *enjo-kôsai* as the ultimate expression of a society that has lost its mind. For him, young women offering their bodies and time in exchange for money or goods (and old men lining up to give these woman anything they want) is the nadir of a baseless existence. Miyadai argues that “the meaning of life” in Japan at the end of the century “is nothing more than a technique of living[.]”⁴⁶ And the only thing anybody has to cling to is a body that, according to Miyadai, will eventually decay and die. So enjoy it while it lasts, he says,

⁴⁴ Andrea G. Arai, “The ‘Wild Child’ of 1990s Japan,” in *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*, ed. Tomiko Yoda and H.D. Harootunian (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 223.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Iida (2002), 234.

advocating the jettisoning of meaning in favor of the “momentary pleasures” of Japan’s consumer culture.⁴⁷

Miyadai echoes the words of Bryan Turner who has argued that our cultural infatuation with the body is the pinnacle of a process that began after the industrial revolution, when “the labouring body” was superseded by “the desiring body.” “[F]eudal and industrial bodies were tied to property, ownership and control. In the post-industrial age the body has become separated from the economic and political structure of society.”⁴⁸ The body is now “the locale for pleasure, desire, playfulness.”⁴⁹ Both Miyadai and Turner argue that consumer capitalism is responsible for the libidinal turn of the body, particularly in recent years. In Japan, the rise of compensated dating in the 1990s signaled to Miyadai that “the commodification and consumption of one’s own body has become a pleasurable activity[.]”⁵⁰ It signaled to others the loss of tradition (a prominent theme of the “lost decade” in general),⁵¹ while others still accused teenage girls and twenty-something women of losing their moral compasses in light of the rising street values of their bodies.⁵² *Enjo-kôsai* emerged as a new activity and represented the easiest way to get one’s

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Sean T. Sweeney and Ian Hodder, “Introduction,” in *The Body*, ed. Sean T. Sweeney and Ian Hodder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Iida (2002), 232.

⁵¹ David Richard Leheny, *Think Global, Fear Local: Sex, Violence, and Anxiety in Contemporary Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 102.

⁵² The Japanese term for prostitution combines the ideographs for “sell” and “spring”—*baishun*. But in an attempt to shift the emphasis from the young women selling their bodies to the older men buying them, Miyadai offered the subtly distinct *kaishun*, which combines the ideographs for “buy” and “spring.” Leheny, 103.

hands on quick cash or high-end luxury goods that were otherwise out of arm's reach. Armed with cell phones, a technological advancement during this decade, these young women could find johns fast and efficiently. Critics were concerned that women, the supposed carriers of the torch of tradition, were letting it burn out in favor of the latest designer fashions, body adornments, and indeed momentary pleasures. In short, the body offered momentary escape, and for the young women who offered theirs in exchange for fancy things and for the older men who willing bought them, the body was a repository for instant gratification.⁵³

Iida finds that the women who engaged in compensated dating turned inward, using their bodies to fit a particular “type” or “imagined identity,” that of the sexualized *kogyaru*.⁵⁴ To do so was to “cope,” to anchor oneself to *something* in a world of free-floating signifiers. In this way, *kogyaru* were not unlike the anime superfan who also gravitated toward a prefigured identity—*otaku*—because there were no viable alternatives. With their minds occupied by video games and animation, *otaku* “[sought] refuge in the virtual rather than in the actual world” in a manner

⁵³ In addition to *enjo-kôsai*, prostitution in general was cause for concern during this time, not because of the act itself, but the rationale that drove some women to it. The 1997 murder of Watanabe Yasuko—a researcher at Tokyo Electric Power Company earning upwards of \$100,000 per year who moonlighted as a prostitute (sometimes for as little as \$20 per customer) in Shibuya—nurtured fears of moral decay. Many were left asking why a woman who earned so much and who was from a “good family” would engage in prostitution. Various theories have been floated—from jealousy over a rival female colleague’s promotion to having been dumped by a married man. Furthermore, the wrongful conviction of Nepali national Govinda Mainali (who was acquitted in 2012) raised questions about the Japan’s justice system and legal processes, especially regarding foreign nationals. Watanabe is not alone, however; other Japanese women have said that it is not money that drives their urge to sell their bodies but rather “something that’s less clear.” See Valerie Reitman, “Japan’s Case of the Unlikely Streetwalker: An Economist Moonlighting as a Prostitute and the Foreigner Declared Guilty After Her Death Highlight Overlooked Aspects of the Society,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 2001, <http://articles.latimes.com/2001/mar/19/news/mn-39753> (July 10, 2013); Shinichi Sano, “Something That He Never Did: A Japanese Author Writes an Impassioned Plea for Justice in the Case of Nepali Serving Life Imprisonment for Murder in Tokyo,” *Nepali Times*, March 26-April 1, 2004, <http://nepalitimes.com/news.php?id=9779#.Ut2NKPbna8U> (January 20, 2014).

⁵⁴ Iida (2002), 232.

similar to the escapism *kogyaru* found in designer goods and cash on hand.⁵⁵ The women who engaged in compensated-dating—and research suggests that it was not as big a phenomenon as the media let on—were often looked down on, however, while *otaku* were left alone for the most part. This is partially thanks to technological advancements (the same that helped *kogyaru* get their hands on cell phones) and the global success of Japanese animation in the latter part of the decade, lending even to the reinvention of the *otaku* label as a whole.⁵⁶ It is also partially due to the invasion of the virtual and the artificial into all segments of contemporary society. When we all lead virtual lives, at least to some extent, *otaku* are not all that anomalous—just an exaggeration of what is “normal.” (It was probably also because when women act in socially “unacceptable” ways, the social uproar tends to be louder than when men do.)

What is interesting in Iida’s formulation of the *kogyaru/otaku* dynamic, and one she does not necessarily comment on, is the ways the former represent something the latter can never have. For central to the *otaku* ideology is emasculation and social failure vis-à-vis engagement with actual women. Although women—often supersexualized—are mainstays of popular comics and animation consumed by *otaku*, those in the real world present a challenge. Indeed, in describing the *otaku* lifestyle, both Iida and Thomas Lamarre use autoerotic terminology (Iida uses the phrase “masturbatory attitude” to describe the *otaku*’s retreat into his own world;

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁵⁶ In the early 1990s, the *otaku* image was a negative one, stemming from an incident in which a man named Miyazaki Tsutomu abducted and murdered four young girls. After he was arrested, investigators found a large collection of pornographic animation in his apartment. During the media coverage of this discovery, Miyazaki was referred to as an *otaku* (until then a relatively exclusive self-referential term used among *otaku* to describe themselves and each other), leading some to conclude that he had intended to act out fantasies from animation.

Lamarre is more direct, saying that the *otaku* “play[s] with himself”⁵⁷), as though *otaku* are not asexual nerds but sexual beings whose only recourse to release are their own bodies and the erotic women portrayed in the media they collect. Thus, if the *kogyaru* related to the world through the consumption of her body by others, the *otaku* did so by consuming his own body by way of symbolic consumption of the body of an other.

These relationships—transient and unfulfilling as they may be—come to a head with the emergence of the *hikikomori* as a recognized social phenomenon.⁵⁸ Although the scholars from whom I have been drawing thus far do not discuss *hikikomori* at any length, it is important to note that from the early 1990s “[p]ublic discussions [of the topic]...gradually began to emerge[.]”⁵⁹ As I have been arguing, the context and timing is important, as the 1990s was a watershed moment for a number of reasons relating to social life in Japan and the collapse of a national and even personal identity. Sachiko Horiguchi provides an in-depth analysis of the efforts of psychiatrists to define and quantify the term *hikikomori* through the 1990s. It was only in the early 2000s that some scholars backed away from pathology and medicalization to look at social and cultural factors. As with *otaku*, a series of high-profile cases reported by the media helped shape the public imagination and contributed to the stigmatization of *hikikomori* and the

⁵⁷ Iida (2002), 228; Thomas Lamarre, “*Otaku Movement*,” *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*, ed. Tomiko Yoda and H.D. Harootunian (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 376.

⁵⁸ It is tricky to adequately summarize conditions such as those represented by *hikikomori* (or anorexia) that have both medical and social aspects. Here, I will interpret *hikikomori* in metaphoric terms, but I do not wish to shortchange other medical causes that cause some to pull away from society.

⁵⁹ Sachiko Horiguchi, “*Hikikomori: How Private Isolation Caught the Public Eye*,” in *A Sociology of Japanese Youth: From Returnees to NEETs*, ed. Roger Goodman, Yuki Imoto and Tuukka Toivonen (New York: Routledge, 2012), 124.

social landscape that fostered them. For instance, Horiguchi notes an incident from 1999 in which a twenty-one year old man walked onto the grounds of an elementary school and randomly stabbed a young boy to death. The following year, the Niigata police found that a man had been keeping a woman locked in his room for nine years. The man's mother, with whom he lived, commented that she had never noticed the presence of the woman because she was not allowed to go into her son's room.⁶⁰ The media painted both men as *hikikomori*, after which (male) shut-ins were branded "potentially dangerous" sorts and the image of unstable men brooding in their rooms, in concert with the other things people were dealing with in millennial Japan, spawned "moral panic."⁶¹

Moral panic because to some "*hikikomori* is a natural consequence" of the downward spiral of contemporary Japan.⁶² The prevalence of shut-ins today speaks to a number of the issues addressed earlier in this chapter, particularly the ramifications of the failed economy, the dissolution of familial bonds, and the restlessness of the younger generation.⁶³ Michael Zielenziger demonstrates that the "Japanese family" (the *ie* system), in which multiple generations live under the same roof, received a makeover after the war. Not only did Occupation forces find the system "too feudal" for a modern nation, but postwar rebuilding and

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Michael Zielenziger, *Shutting Out the Sun: How Japan Created its Own Lost Generation* (New York: Vintage, 2006), 71.

⁶³ Michael Zielenziger cites Saito Tamiki's claim that there are over one million adults in Japan who are *hikikomori*. Horiguchi, however, has shown that scholars and medical professionals have contested—if unable to invalidate—Saito's findings. The problem is defining the condition and getting people to talk openly about it. As both scholars have argued, while many Japanese will shy from identifying themselves or anyone in their family as *hikikomori*, everybody knows someone who is one. See *Ibid.*, 60; see also Horiguchi, 127.

widespread construction of small apartment complex and mass exodus toward the suburbs forced multi-generation households to disperse.⁶⁴ With the rise of the economy, however, Japanese corporations projected the closely-knit clan system onto their infrastructure, fostering unwavering devotion and community among employees. Lifetime employment and luxurious year-end bonuses were not uncommon for the men who worked so hard. But when the economy collapsed, so did the corporation as community, and many corporate devotees found themselves jobless and alone. Some clinicians have argued that the communal nature of the *ie* system had eclipsed the necessity for individual identity (recall that “individuality” is necessary for modern nations). So when the family fell, the corporate family picked up the slack, but when that, too, fell, there seemed to be no other options. For psychiatrist Saitô Satoru, the push for economic prosperity and privileging of corporate allegiance compromised familial integrity. “In this country, we haven’t cherished relationships with people; we’ve only chased economic efficiency,” he says.⁶⁵

The loss of confidence in those who had been hardwired to believe in the economy and infallible corporate entities that sustained it represented larger national self-doubt, while the superficiality of a money culture bled into larger concerns over the state of the family and a directionless existence. The youth in particular didn’t really know what to do. As Zielenziger states: “Young Japanese today face their own forms of adjustment disorder and concoct disturbing new ways to escape a society that annihilates their hopes and washes out any promise of self-realization in a torrent of rootless materialism.”⁶⁶ His words are overdetermined, but he

⁶⁴ Quoted in Zielenziger, 69.

⁶⁵ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 71.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

has a point. The *hikikomori* seemed to encapsulate—metaphorically or symbolically—the isolation that many young people felt; whereas some found outlets in shopping or sex or videogames (playing up the aimlessness of contemporary life), others rejected the world at large and all that it did or did not stand for.



My point has been to briefly comment on some of the major shifts in 1990s Japan that led to a cultural thinning and general ennui. I have tried to foreground my discussion of the thin body in Japan by demonstrating how life during this time can be understood as lacking substance, or as being “thin.” Is this to say that the thin body is a physical manifestation of a life void of substance, a barebones existence? This is certainly possible given that bodies reflect cultural moments. Bulimia, for instance, has been read as a side-effect of rampant capitalism and binge consumerism by Susan Bordo and other feminist scholars. We might argue that an infatuation with thinness is predicated on cultural thinning, a term used by Sherry Ortner to denote the reduction of multiple complex fields and thoughts to something easily digestible (“religiosity” is the example she gives; “truthiness” might serve as another).⁶⁷ I borrow her term to draw attention to the possibility that the body is representative of a whittling away—a thinning—of substantive life experiences and pleasures, a thinning of society and culture.

In the fiction analyzed in the following chapters, the protagonists lead very sparse, possibly meaningless, lives. Meaning is subjective, of course, and we would be remiss to accuse these protagonists of not doing anything worthwhile with their lives (they could potentially disagree with me, after all). But those things we do to give life meaning—what I called

⁶⁷ Sherry B. Ortner, *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 50-51.

ideologies in the Introduction—are not things that really work out for the women in this fiction and they spend most of their lives doing not much of anything. So in a sense, their lives *are* thin. And their lives are representative of the life experiences of many young women (and men) today in Japan. In other words, the contemporary moment is so interesting because although bodies—especially women’s bodies—have always mattered, the importance of the body today seems to be matched only by the unimportance or unreliability of everything else.

In fact, we might say that this fiction exposes an overwhelming ideology of the body that is governed first and foremost by lack. Anthony Elliot draws our attention to Žižek’s supposition that “the identity of the self is framed upon a fundamental sense of psychic insufficiency, lack, absence, trauma.”⁶⁸ Bodily experiences for many women today seem to emerge from this same constellation of feelings of incompleteness. Žižek’s claim is embedded in his understanding of identity as a construct of overlapping “ideologies of nationalism, race, ethnicity and gender” that people gravitate toward to fill an innate emptiness—a decentered self-in Lacanian psychoanalysis.⁶⁹ In the following chapters, his words prove prophetic, as the protagonists in the fiction discussed do just that—seek out fantasies embedded in stayed ideologies. For now, though, consider the ways notions of fragmented and flawed identities are projected onto contemporary discourses of the body. Today, many women’s lives are governed by a “pedagogy

⁶⁸ Anthony Elliott, *Concepts of the Self* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008), 82.

⁶⁹ In a word, Lacanian psychoanalysis teaches that there is no “core” subjectivity. Rather, the self (subject) and the ego (which is not part of the self) are divided and one’s sense of self gets lost in the “gap” in between. Because we do not really know who we are, we gravitate toward ideologies—“the Big Other”—in order to better understand ourselves; ideologies tell us what to do, what to believe, how to behave; in fact, they do these things for us. Žižek gives several easily accessible examples of “the Big Other” at work. Canned laughter on certain sit-coms, for example, is not only an indication that something is funny; it is actual laughter laughing so that we, the viewers, do not have to laugh. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (New York: Verso, 1997), 110-111, 122.

of defect,” a language that chastises physical imperfections and demands that they be corrected.⁷⁰ In a sense, these lives are embedded in a cultural and even global beauty ideology that is both explicit vis-à-vis Japan’s “beauty culture” and implicit within hegemonic notions of femininity.

Although both men and women are “defective,” R.W. Connell and other feminist scholars have demonstrated that, because they are taught to “accommodat[e] the interests and desires of men” and view their bodies accordingly, women are presumably more flawed than men, and therefore must devote a greater amount of their lives to correcting or masking their defects.⁷¹ (Scholars typically discuss Western women in this light, but their observations are no less applicable to Japan and other parts of East Asia where diets and plastic surgery are commonplace. Zara Stone explains that South Korea, where one in five women have undergone cosmetic surgery, “is now synonymous with medical tourism.” In the US, the figure is one in twenty.)⁷² As a corollary, consider that to Žižek “the self is always falling short, falling apart, fading or failing to live up to some imagined version of identity.”⁷³ This rhetoric sounds very similar to the state of the female body today, which is held to its own imagined version of (unattainable) truth.

Thus in a way, today the body is a cipher, an external projection of wandering and inadequate subjectivity: control over the body constitutes control over the self, a historical

⁷⁰ Susan Bordo, *The Twilight Zone: The Hidden Life of Cultural Images from Plato to O.J.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 37.

⁷¹ R. W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 183.

⁷² Zara Stone, “The K-Pop Plastic Surgery Obsession,” *The Atlantic*, May 24, 2013, <http://m.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/05/the-k-pop-plastic-surgery-obsession/276215/> (May 27, 2013)

⁷³ Elliott, 83.

genealogy briefly traced later on, and bodily improvement is self improvement. Joan Jacobs Brumberg says this about American girls: “Like many adults in American society, girls today are concerned with the shape and appearance of their bodies as a primary expression of their individual identity.”⁷⁴ This triangular relationship between self, body, and identity, she continues, “is a symptom of historical changes that are only now beginning to be understood.”⁷⁵ Brumberg means that although history has been in charge of women’s bodies—binding feet, cinching waists, etc.—it is only now reaching critical mass because of the ways cultural and even biological factors (early onset of menstruation, for example) have coalesced around women’s experiences of their bodies. Miller corroborates, positing that “[t]here have always been writings specifying what beautifully gendered bodies should look like, but never the type or quantity of visual forms today.”⁷⁶



The body is coded in symbols and sliding signifiers, and today the female body has been coded in largely homogenous terms. As Bordo contends, ours is an unprecedented cultural moment “in which girls and women...come to believe that they are nothing (and frequently treated as nothing) unless they are trim, tight, lineless, bulgeless, and sagless.”⁷⁷ The descriptors Bordo uses here are all heavily symbolic and meant to reflect a refined subjectivity on several levels. On the one hand, as numerous scholars have illustrated, in the US the current demand for

⁷⁴ Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (New York: Random House, 1997), xxi.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, xxv.

⁷⁶ Miller, 7.

⁷⁷ Bordo, (2003), 32.

thinness achieved prominence amidst the feminist movements of the 1960s when the (large, motherly) maternal and reproductive body was replaced by one whose streamlined qualities seemed to reject any prospect of motherhood and “a domestic destiny.”⁷⁸ This was a body that did not want or need anything or anybody; it was self-sufficient, master of its own domain, and therein reflected residual bourgeois concerns over body discipline—namely, size and shape of the body—that took root in the late 1800s when middle-class women gravitated toward causes of the body rather than the mind. Although it was unseemly to discuss corporeal matters within a social dictum toward the spiritual, girls and women of this socioeconomic class became increasingly concerned with the size of certain body parts: “To be too large or too robust was a sign of indelicacy that suggested lower-class origins and a rough way of life.”⁷⁹

Too-largeness has not always implied incivility and trashiness, though there is a historically vivified legacy in both the East and the West of coding fat and thin bodies in dichotomous ways. The large belly is pregnant with implication, for it has at various moments in history been associated with gluttony, wealth, laziness, and even evil. In this respect, so, too is the taut belly. Take, for example, Christian iconography that has long taught an opposition between the ascetic, stoic thin man and the unseemly, corpulent one. The former, master of his urges (sexual and otherwise), was famously channeled by St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas into an image of a saint;⁸⁰ the latter, an indulgent epicurean, was by default the antithesis—a

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁷⁹ Brumberg, xix-xx.

⁸⁰ Both St. Augustine and St. Aquinas craft their visions of slim, holy bodies from their readings of the book of Paul. In his *Confessions*, Augustine, following Paul, ties the gluttonous body to one in which the Devil resides. He says, “Behold, food and drink and clothing, and all the other needs appertaining to the support of the body, are burdensome to the devout spirit.” He goes further in *City of God*, claiming that those who give into desire, no matter its form, are not men

sinner, a glutton (*gula*). Christ was thin—extremely so; in “A Litany of Satans,” Baudelaire writes of two Satans, the first being of “an ambiguous sex” and soft body, and the second “a large man, with a fat face and no eyes; his heavy paunch hung down over his thighs...”⁸¹

The distended belly (the paunch) is found, too, in Japanese depictions of the hungry ghosts (*gaki*) that occupy one of the six realms of existence (*rokudô*) in Buddhist philosophy.⁸² As William LaFleur elucidates, this “taxonomy was not...indigenous to Japan. It has been integral to the Buddhism the Japanese absorbed from the Chinese and Koreans.”⁸³ He also explains that these hungry ghosts were taken lightly until the medieval period, which was marked by heavy Buddhist influence, during which time they became more prominent in “textual and visual” discourse, illustrated poignantly in *Gaki sôshi* (*zôshi*), or Hungry Ghost Scrolls.⁸⁴ In contrast to the secluded monk, such as Genjô who could survive on “a grain of millet per day,” for instance, the hungry ghosts, who occupy the realm right above Hell (*jigoku*), and “remain

of God. Citing extensively from Paul, Augustine asserts that the ideal body is a slim one, for it is beyond temptation and the hand of the Devil. St. Thomas Aquinas argues in the same light: “...let us not give our minds to delights, but to what is the end of delights. Here on earth it is excrement and obesity, hereafter it is fire and the worm.” See St. Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine; the Imitation of Christ*, trans. Edward B. Pusey and Thomas a Kempis (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909), 302; St. Augustine. *The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2:247, 3:37; W.F. Toal, ed., vol. 3 of *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers* (Chicago: Regnery, 1957-63), 315.

⁸¹ Joseph M. Bernstein, ed. *Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine: Selected Verse and Prose Poems* (New York: Citadel Press, 2000), 123, 124.

⁸² The six realms are: Gods—Asuras—Humans—Animals—Hungry Ghosts—Demons.

⁸³ William LaFleur, *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 28.

⁸⁴ William LaFleur, “The Eccentric Tree: *Kami* and *Gaki* in the Botanical Imagination of the Medieval Japanese,” vol. 1 of *Rethinking Japan: Literature, Visual Arts & Linguistics*, ed. Adriana Boscaro, Franco Gatti, and Massimo Raveri (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990-1991), 124.

gripped in their worldly passion,” consume feverishly but never grow full.⁸⁵ “The epitome of cravings,” these ghosts are forever hungry, and with their distended bellies and “throats as thin as needles,” represent frustration and pain.⁸⁶ The scrolls capture the hungry ghosts in a variety of situations, and in more than a few they are feeding. In “Shieiji-ben gaki,” one looks to feast on a newborn baby; in “Shi-ben gaki” and “Shokufun gaki,” hungry ghosts are devouring excrement; in “Shokuto gaki,” a hungry ghost, surrounded by several empty plates, is being made to vomit by a red *rasetsu*, or rakshasa, a kind of demon that resides in hell.⁸⁷ It is clear that their torment derives from being unable to satiate their hunger; other scrolls in the series show hungry ghosts praying for salvation.

Hunger is perhaps our basest of desires, and the degree to which we give into it can be a deeply symbolic act. Fasting—the conscious resistance of hunger—began as a way to humble oneself before the powers of nature, which punished or rewarded on whim; it brought the body closer to the natural world by symbolically embracing famine, which threaten all living things, and pushed the body beyond its “corporeal limits by denying bodily needs.”⁸⁸ To deny the body its needs—and even its desires—is the cornerstone of the fast in religious and non-religious

⁸⁵ Janet R. Goodwin, *Alms and Vagabonds: Buddhist Temples and Popular Patronage in Medieval Japan* (Honolulu, University of Hawai’i Press, 1994), 29; Anne Page Brooks, “*Mizuko Kuyô* and Japanese Buddhism,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 8, no. 3-4 (Sept.-Dec., 1981): 135.

⁸⁶ LaFleur, 124.

⁸⁷ See Komatsu Shigemi, ed. *Nihon emaki taisei* [Japanese Illustrated Hand Scrolls], vol. 7 of *Gaki sôshi, Jigoku sôshi, Yamai no sôshi, Kusôshi emaki* [Hungry Ghost Scrolls, Hell Scrolls, Sickness Scrolls, Picture Scrolls](Tokyo: Chûo Kôronsha, 1977), 4-7, 10-11, 16-17.

⁸⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Fast and Holy Feast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 34.

contexts. When the body takes only what it needs, it is more spiritually open. In the words of Greek physician Athenaeus, the fast “raises man to the throne of God.”⁸⁹

Food abstention and its inverse are of course important in many religious contexts. Fasting, naturally, has a variety of purposes—to atone for sin, to aid in prayer, to express grief—and was, indeed still is, also done in preparation for feast. Caroline Bynum tells us that when one fasts, one provides; in fourth century Christianity, for instance, “...what one denied to oneself in fact was given to Christ’s own body.”⁹⁰ Moreover, fasting often preceded Sunday Eucharist, when Christ’s body was taken in as nourishment—an inversion of the symbolism of the fast. Ramadan, too, is an apt example of the interplay between fast and feast. During the month-long fast, Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset, breaking it with a feast at the end of each day. And in Judaism, during Yom Kippur fasting is undertaken as atonement for sin. Thus the body moves between moments of fullness and emptiness, both of which represent a spiritual cleansing and renewal.

Divorced from religious context, though, the opposition between fat and skinny remains dynamic.⁹¹ Perhaps now more than ever, popular culture in the West and elsewhere offers the thin body as quantifiably *better* than the fat body, as a body that is under the control of the mind.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁹¹ Scholars trace the secularization (and the concurrent medicalization) of the Western body to the Enlightenment. In an essay that is part exegesis on dietetics and part reflection on his failing health, Kant writes that under the aegis of rationality and moderation the body will receive a critical makeover, “when the mere power of reason in mankind, in overcoming sensations by a governing principle determines their manner of living.” Kant found that the control of the body was important in maintaining one’s health, though he was saddened by his observation that even the greatest mastery of the body could not prevent its decline in old age. See Sander L. Gilman, *Fat Boys: A Slim Book* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 60-61.

Although no longer a matter of good versus evil or enlightenment versus ignorance, the thin/fat battle nevertheless still pivots on capitulation of bodily desires: “Whereas in the immoderate individual, the force that desires usurps the highest place and rules tyrannically, in the individual who is *sophron*, it is reason that commands and prescribes.”⁹² Indeed, the thin body is reasonable, sensible (*sophron*), while the fat body is unreasonable, nonsensical.⁹³ Although long purged of its ties to Satanic indulgence, the fat body continues to stand for things that the skinny body does not.

What has been added to the discussion since the Victorian era is a consideration of the ways socioeconomic class is bound to body size. This is where the body resides today, too; it is a literal and figurative barrier between the haves and have-nots: “The body itself...has become a way of conspicuous distinction between the lower and upper classes.”⁹⁴ The whole notion of the body as a “project,” in fact, is a bourgeois institution, according to Pierre Bourdieu. In his analysis of sports, he argues that different socioeconomic classes view the body differently. The upper or “dominant” classes, who have no need for the body’s “functionality,” see it as “an *end in itself*,” something to indoctrinate into “the...cult of health” or something to sculpt for aesthetic

⁹² Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 86-87.

⁹³ This has not always been the case, however. Historically, when food is scarce, a fat body—male or female—reflects affluence and is most desirable. But in most industrialized societies, where food is plentiful, the opposite is usually the case—a thin or muscular body is prized, signifying status and wealth.

⁹⁴ Sarah Grogan, *Body Image: Understanding Body Dissatisfaction in Men, Women and Children* (New York: Psychology Press, 2008), 165-166; see also April Fallon, “Culture in the Mirror: Sociocultural Determinants of Body Image,” in *Body Images: Development, Deviance, and Change*, ed. Thomas F. Cash and Thomas Pruzinsky (New York: Guilford Press, 1990), 80-109.

reasons—what he calls “the body-for-others.”⁹⁵ The lower or working classes, meanwhile, take a more utilitarian approach and use sport for strength- or community-building—a means to an end. Because the dominant classes tend to view the body as a barometer of wealth and status—the “body-for-others”—it is under constant refinement and scrutiny, ultimately reflecting accumulated cultural capital. Care of the self/body is an egress to greater symbolic worth.

And as this chapter has argued, when the body is gendered, the *things* these bodies stand for take on greater implications. Because of the importance of current “body projects” many women’s livelihoods are dependent on and defined by the size of their bodies. For women, the thin body is still reasonable and the fat body is still not. But today these bodies are much more than that, and the old associations of fatness with gluttony and greed and skinniness with ascetism and propriety have given way to an emotional lexicon that feeds into social and private concerns over the body. Why are advertisements and commercials for dieting methods and low-fat foods aimed primarily at women? Is it that they tap into latent anxieties over the gendered body? Bordo describes an advertisement for ice cream as follows: “A husband returns home to discover that in his absence his wife, sitting on the floor, has eaten all the Frusen Glädjé; her voice is mildly defiant, although soft—‘I ate all the Frusen Glädjé’—but her face is sheepish and her glance averted.”⁹⁶ Bordo argues that in contrast to depictions of men’s cravings, which are

⁹⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, “How Can One Be a Sports Fan?” in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Simon During (New York: Taylor and Francis e-library, 2001), 437-439. Current research shows that socioeconomic status is a determining factor in diet, with those in higher income brackets eating “better” than those in lower brackets. See, for example, Nicole Darmon and Adam Drewnowski, “Does Social Class Predict Diet Quality?” *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 87, no. 5 (2008): 1107-1117.

⁹⁶ Bordo (2003), 129.

often boisterous, messy, and public, women are more often than not shown eating behind closed doors and when nobody is looking, if eating at all.⁹⁷

The point is that when it comes to food, eating becomes a closeted act for many women, reaffirmed by images in print and on TV; recall that the body today is meant to be a pinnacle of restraint, and it is shameful to give in to its desires, or even its needs. For fat women, especially, eating is something often done alone and in secret because it is so shameful. In contrast, the skinny women in the advertisements I have mentioned are allowed to indulge because on the one hand they seem to be offering sexual services to men, and on the other their indulgence is not reflected on their svelte bodies. Later in this dissertation, I suggest that the taboo of women eating is not only about the collapse of self-control, but also about male anxiety over the “hungry” and ravenous woman that is potentially countered in patriarchal society by reflecting that anxiety back onto women’s appetites, as evident in popular media today. Some argue, in fact, that the subtext to today’s “heroin chic” look is a patriarchal agenda intended to rob women of their agency by keeping them in frail and weak bodies.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ In Japan, the association between female hunger and danger has deep roots. The legend of “Kuwazu nyôbô” (The Wife Who Ate Nothing), for example, begins: “Long ago there was a stingy man who proclaimed, ‘It costs a lot to feed women, so whoever becomes my wife will not be eating.’ One day, a woman came calling who said, ‘I do not eat so I will be your wife.’ She ate nothing but worked hard, so the man was pleased. But one night, he watched as she pried her head open and poured a cup of rice into it.” Later in the legend, she devours her husband’s friend whole. Here, as in the ice cream commercial Bordo discusses, eating takes place “off screen” and the aftermath is startling. Quoted in Matsumoto Hiroyuki, “Sesshoku shôgai to wa” [What is an Eating Disorder?], in *Taberarenai yamerarenai/Sessoku shôgai* [Unable to Eat, Unable to Stop: Eating Disorders], ed. Kuboki Tomifusa, Fuan Yoku-utsu, Rinshiyô Kenkyûkai (Tokyo: Nihon Hyôronsha, 2002), 4.

⁹⁸ “Heroin chic” is a term derived from the fashion industry in the 1990s when models became increasingly skinny and designers often featured drug paraphernalia in their ad campaigns. The “gaunt, frame, androgynous features, and discarded glamour” of model Kate Moss captured the feel of the movement. Interestingly, however, the fashion itself was secondary to the drug-induced look of the models and the affluence and recklessness suggested in their supposed



Body size, then, is not just about rejecting the implications of the maternal body as it was thought to be several decades ago. And neither is thinness simply a way to transcend one's socioeconomic status.⁹⁹ It is tied up in larger concerns of women's place in patriarchal society as well as self- and sociocultural worth that reflects women's historically documented proximity to the body. Feminist theory has shown that women are often subsumed under the label of "body" by patriarchal discourse and therein robbed of will or intellect vis-à-vis the intellectual male. Summing up an essentialist argument that has implications in both Western and Japanese discussions on gender, Japan scholar Jan Bardsley says that "it is women who are gendered" and who are forced to occupy "sexed bodies" while men "are ultimately allowed to soar in the transcendent space of the intellect[.]"¹⁰⁰

Interestingly, it is largely the same body type that women are sculpting. Although Miller is spot on in her assertion that trends in "beauty ideology" can afford a space for the cultivation of a "subcultural" aesthetic (see my discussion of *Snakes and Earrings*),¹⁰¹ there is no denying that many women face "free choice under pressure" to celebrate a particular look and body

heroine binges. Here, I am not using the term to imply anything about drugs, but instead to capture the physicality of the age as defined by Moss' slight frame. Alphonso D. McClendon, "Fashionable Addiction: The Path to Heroin Chic," in *Fashion in Popular Culture: Literature, Media and Contemporary Studies*, ed. Joseph H. Hancock III, Toni Johnson-Woods, and Vicki Karaminas (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 80-81.

⁹⁹ When Twiggy, a 97-pound model who did not shy from her lower-class origins, became famous, many young women saw the potential to transcend their own socioeconomic status through a similarly small physique. See Susie Orbach, *Hunger Strike: The Anorectic's Struggle As a Metaphor For Our Age*, 2nd ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 54.

¹⁰⁰ Jan Bardsley, "The Essential Woman Writer," in *Woman Critiqued: Translated Essays on Japanese Women's Writing*, ed. Rebecca Copeland (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 55.

¹⁰¹ Miller, 7.

type.¹⁰² Beauty regimes and ideologies change over time, of course. (Miller’s account of the changing face of beauty in modern Japanese history is outstanding in this regard.) But bodies must adapt accordingly or risk being socially ostracized and excommunicated. There is a contradictory discourse that hangs over many body projects, then, complicating the “plasticity”—an implicit freedom—of the body itself: while the body can be sculpted in many different ways through diet, exercise, and plastic surgery, it is often sculpted in the same or similar ways across cultures. “No one is holding a gun to our heads,” comments Bordo on the increasingly normalization of the body and the “choice” that drives it.¹⁰³

Here Alan Hyde’s words are relevant, as they illustrate the illusion of bodily freedom today:

Thus, attempts to figure a pure or inviolable body, pure *because* or *insofar as* it is “natural” and “immutable,” are doomed to fail, are deeply out of touch with the complicated circuits of will, control, and power that condemn the modern body to constant mutability as to weight, appearance, and muscle tone.¹⁰⁴

As Hyde acknowledges elsewhere, there are of course exceptions to this rule of body mutability.¹⁰⁵ But those exceptions are few and far between because of the nature of social indoctrination of bodily dos and don’ts. Foucault has famously shown that cultural norms, including those of the body, are reified through disciplinary practices that both reward and punish particular behaviors. He has shown, too, through the metaphor of Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon, how certain practices become internalized—panopticism inculcates docility and self-

¹⁰² Bordo (1997), 44.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Alan Hyde, *Bodies of Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 129-130.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

regulation through the illusion of permanent surveillance that gradually gives way to self-surveillance. Foucault explains that power becomes subtly embodied so that it feels natural or right to conduct oneself in a certain manner. These behaviors then become unconscious or habitual. Although Foucault was not concerned with the ways gender norms operate, feminist scholars have continued his work by illuminating the ways that femininity (and recently masculinity) produces “docile bodies.”¹⁰⁶

So Bordo is right: nobody is holding a gun to her head. But this is not how disciplinary power operates—it is not top down, but rather courses through the discursive practices of everyday life blurring the boundaries between consent and coercion; in other words, power is not possessed—it exists. “There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints,” Foucault says. “Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising his surveillance over and against himself.”¹⁰⁷ On the one hand, the bodies conveyed by popular media—“absolutely tight, contained, bolted down, firm”—all look the same and equalize heterogeneity and difference: in the US, they are primarily white or purposefully “exotic” when non-white.¹⁰⁸ They are cultural mirrors reflecting increasingly unattainable selves. These bodies

¹⁰⁶ Sandra Bartky has demonstrated that femininity requires constant self-discipline of the body. Calling femininity an “artifice,” she suggests that hair and skin, posture and voice, appetite and exercise, facial expressions and manners of speech are all part of a hegemonic discourse of femininity. See Sandra Lee Bartky, “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power,” in *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*, ed. Diana Tietjens Meyers (New York: Routledge, 1997).

¹⁰⁷ Michel Foucault, “The Eye of Power,” in Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977). 155.

¹⁰⁸ Bordo (2003), 24-25, 190.

are also signifiers propelled by the symbolic capital of their physique, telling the world: *if you look like this...* As Žižek illustrates, the repetition of images of glamorous bodies doing glamorous things offer a rich tapestry for “imaginary identification” in which the images “represent ‘what we would like to be.’”¹⁰⁹ The underside of this identification is a mandate not for what we would like to be but rather for what we should/must be—a fantasy of autonomy. Refusal is possible, of course, but to do so is to invite criticism and sanction.



The body is enmeshed in its own ideological web that is spun by discourses of socioeconomic and -cultural worth. The thin body promises *something* to those who have it (all ideologies seem to do this). Therefore, there are considerable risks in failing to adhere to the body’s ideology, particularly in recent years given the drastic importance of the physical body and body size. In this chapter I have discussed thinness as an expression of cultural disenfranchisement among the younger generation of Japanese, and have argued that the rise of the thin body is not unrelated to the fall of more important things. In other words, perhaps there is a social “hunger” for meaning in Japan that is grafted onto the thin (hungry?) body.

The inability to find oneself in the world, exemplified by *kogyaru*, *otaku*, and other subcultural groups, may also allude to the importance of the body. With nothing to believe in and no real outlet for identity and self-expression, the body is something tangible to cling to, even a safe haven, an unending “project” that demands continual maintenance and self/public scrutiny. (In a way, it is something to do.) Scholars have referred to the body as a canvas or slate, something to decorate and adorn, sculpt and fashion with the endless choices available. This is

¹⁰⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso Books, 1989), 105.

true, though it is important to be attuned to the ways some of those choices have already been made for us.

CHAPTER TWO: Repurposing Panic

If there is an ulterior motive at work it is one which goes far beyond sex. Its purpose is to awaken, to usher in a sense of reality.

--Henry Miller, "Obscenity and the Law of Reflection"

I think everyone has a deep sexuality, and sometimes it's good to use a little of it—and sometimes a lot of it—like a masquerade.

--Alexander McQueen

Normal love isn't interesting. I assure you that it's incredibly boring.

--Roman Polanski

REPURPOSING PANIC

As Japanese culture and society underwent a series of blistering paradigm shifts and social and economic changes in the 1990s, "moral panic" became a buzzword that academics and Japan scholars used opaquely to capture the troubling aura of the times.¹ While *morality* as such found a new home in discourses directed at the stratification of Japanese youth into a handful of cliques that alluded to the erosion, and indeed dismissal, of important social bonds that had until then held firm,² its proximity to concerns over women and their uses of their bodies was unsurprising. That sexually defiant young women known as *kogyaru* would cultivate a sugar daddy/sugar baby

¹ According to Kenneth Thompson, the term "moral panic" was introduced into scholarly discourse by Stanley Cohen in his 1972 study *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*. In subsequent editions of his monograph, Cohen finds that "moral panic" emerged from the tumult of the late 1960s and found a home among burgeoning scholarship on social deviance and youth subcultures. The term fell out of circulation during the 1970s and 80s due to the supposed bias toward deviancy by those who studied it. But Thompson explains, "moral panic" has had a resurgence in recent years in light of scholars' attempts to tie it into other avenues of study to shed light on a particular cultural moment. Given its latent "symptomatic" character, moral panic surfaces at particular historical moments and "alert us to possible underlying social trends that may be a cause of individual anxiety and social pathology." Kenneth Thompson, "Foreword," in *Moral Panics and the Politics of Anxiety*, ed. Sean Hier (New York: Routledge, 2011), viii.

² *Otaku*, for example (see Chapter One).

relationship with older men (*enjo kôσαι*, or “compensated dating”) suggested to some cultural critics that the moral panic had sunk to portentous depths. Young women auctioning off their attentions and sexuality to the highest bidder “[w]as a sign of the moral turpitude of the time [that] confirmed the worst societal fears.”³ As Chapter One notes, the young women rather than their older, adult clientele were often blamed for any wrongdoing. This double standard emerges from an essentialist ideology in which men are presumed to be *naturally* sexual, and therefore pardoned for their behavior, while women are presumed to belong to a static and well-behaved femininity. In other words, good girls don’t have or want sex. And they certainly don’t sell it.⁴

Women whose sexuality fails to live up to these expectations have historically been perceived as aberrant and pathological. In Western discourse and culture, for instance, “nymphomania” continues to haunt social constructions of sexual women. While the term itself—derived from the Greek *nymphē* (“bride”) and *mania* (“madness”)—was originally used by nineteenth-century physicians to identify “excessive female desire,” and seemed to reach its zenith by the 1950s,⁵ it was dropped from the medical lexicon by the mid 1980s when the

³ Christine R. Yano, *Pink Globalization: Hello Kitty’s Trek Across the Pacific* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 54.

⁴ The legacy of the chaste, proper young woman (*otome*, or maiden) can be traced to the end of the nineteenth century when a new code of femininity was established that borrowed from Confucian notions of filial piety as well as Victorian-era sexual mores. Around this time, *daigaku*, or Greater Learning for Women (published 1716 and attributed to Kaibara Ekken [1630-1714]), which had originally been intended for wealthy and samurai women, was widely circulated and preached a femininity grounded in “piety, chastity, and valorization of motherhood.” Mark McLelland, *Love, Sex, and Democracy in Japan During the American Occupation* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 20.

⁵ Carole Groneman points out that in a girl’s magazine from 1956, an anonymously published article warns against such a woman. She analyzes the article thus:

From the very beginning, [the anonymous author] wrote, he should have known that something was wrong with her, because [she] kissed him with a frightening passion on their first date, “clinging to him like a drowning person.” His male ego was too flattered

gender-neutral “sexual addiction” became the norm.⁶ Nevertheless, nymphomania is part of a cultural pathologizing of women’s bodies that includes “PMS, PND and menopausal syndrome where women’s ‘raging hormones’ are construed as a cause of madness.”⁷ In light of recent and liberal developments in Western attitudes toward sex, contemporary notions of nymphomania stand out for signifying both moral uncertainty and deviance in popular discussion about women’s sexuality.

The vicissitudes of female sexual excess have been cloaked in other discursive constructions. The image of the sexually ravenous woman often plays out vis-à-vis the mythic “man-eater,” whose insatiable hunger resides in both derivations of the *vagina dentada*—the toothed vagina; part mouth, part sex organ, and all-devouring orifice. The woman who eats haunts the social imaginary, and, as discussed in Chapter Three, is at least partially responsible for the antagonism often directed at overweight women. As Susan Bordo notes in *Unbearable Weight*, the man-eater is a hallmark of Western culture and lore and represents a larger discursive condemnation of sexual women.⁸ At the same time, this trope has corollaries in Japanese mythology and tradition that similarly villainize female hunger and sexuality/appetite.

for him to resist, even when she took the sexual initiative. Her bold approach, he later realized, should have alerted him to the danger she posed.
Carole Groneman, *Nymphomania: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2000), 84.

⁶ The term “sex addiction” is not without its critics either, and seems to be a fashionable disorder in light of a number of Hollywood stars claiming to be addicted to sex. See, for instance, David J. Ley, *The Myth of Sex Addiction* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2012).

⁷ Helen Mason, *The Thin Woman: Feminism, Post-Structuralism and the Social Psychology of Anorexia Nervosa* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 137.

⁸ Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, 10th ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 116-117.

Japanese literature abounds with representations of the mythic *yamamba*, usually a mountain crone, but sometimes a beguiling and beautiful woman. She is most often a “man-eater” who gobbles down hapless men who might wander through her wood. Ôba Minako (1930-2007) is one author who breathes new life into the aged *yamamba* trope. In “Rôsoku no uo” (Candlefish, 1980), for example, a woman, inspired by the memory of a friend who left her abusive husband, imagines herself as a powerful *yamamba*. In her study of Ôba’s fiction, Meera Viswanathan suggests that the abundance of devouring female figures in Japanese literature and folklore points to, among other things, “the danger posed by female consumption.”⁹ It points, too, to the long history of such female figures in Japanese lore, beginning, maybe, with the primeval Izanami, one of two central figures in the Japanese creation myth, whose banishment to the underworld (Yomi) and terrorization of the male Izanagi has nurtured any number of didactic and anecdotal reworkings. It has been widely postulated that *yamamba* stories function as retellings of these Izanami tales, and while they are all slightly different in scope and content, they nevertheless capture “the engulfing [and threatening] nature of female physiology.”¹⁰

Rebecca Copeland demonstrates that in Japan women were not always a source of danger and anxiety. Archaeological evidence suggests that Japan was originally a matriarchal society in which shamanism was at the cultural core. In this environment, the female body was extolled for the very reasons it would later be persecuted—“its ability to transform, to engulf, to invite.”¹¹ Buddhism, however, which was introduced in the sixth century, marginalized women while

⁹ Meera Viswanathan, “In Pursuit of Yamamba: The Question of Female Resistance,” in *The Woman’s Hand: Gender and Theory in Japanese Women’s Writing*, ed. Paul Gordon Schalow and Janet A. Walker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 243.

¹⁰ Rebecca Copeland, “Mythic Bad Girls: The Corpse, the Crone, and the Snake,” in *Bad Girls of Japan*, ed. Laura Miller and Jan Bardsley (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 22.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

placing the male ascete at the center of a religious discourse that did not see women as sources of power but as loci of pollution and “the very embodiment of all that bound humanity to the wheel of fate.”¹² In contrast to Western religious experiences that equated sex and sexuality with a base animal impulse that ought to be transcended, Buddhism found fault not in sexuality *per se* but in women.¹³ That is, although desire in general was considered to be an obstacle to enlightenment and enrichment, women were typically blamed for their potential to entice impure thoughts in men. The trope transcends cultures. Muslim scholar Fatima Mernissi shows that Islam is similar in this regard and is a religious tradition in which “...woman is *fitna*, the epitome of the uncontrollable, a living representative of the dangers of sexuality and its rampant disruptive potential.”¹⁴

Because female sexuality has been marginalized, controlled, and imbued with so much “disruptive potential” across historical and cultural lines, it also becomes a discursive weapon that is central to both philosophical and literary enterprises that seek to give sexuality back to

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ This difference may be informed by various approaches to selfhood. Western philosophy and theology has traditionally taught an ontological body-mind independence and even antinomy in which the mind (soul) should triumph over the urges and impulses of the body. Plato and Aristotle wrestled with the problem of how to reconcile instinct and intellect, but with Descartes, the mind and the body would reach an impasse; Cartesian dualism seeks to splinter the intellect from the corporeal and therefore places the needs and desires of the body in opposition to—and indeed interfering with—the mind. In contrast, Eastern philosophy has not traditionally embraced this mind-body dualism, which envisions the two as a union. To briefly explain, philosopher Yuasa Yasuo contends that Eastern (Japanese) conceptualizations of the relationship between mind and body are grounded in the Buddhist concept of *shugyo* (self-cultivation), in which knowledge, and ultimately enlightenment, occurs through experience rather than pure intellect. See Yuasa Yasuo, *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory*, ed. Thomas P. Kasulis; trans. Shigenori Nagatomo and Thomas P. Kasulis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 25-28.

¹⁴ Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), 44.

women. None of the above is meant to negate or ignore present-day experiences of sex and sexuality for women that speaks to a historically unprecedented and complicated sexual freedom. Since the late 1980s, some feminists have pushed for a new discourse of sex and sexuality for women. Emerging from and in response to radical feminist claims that sex is by and for men—captured in Andrea Dworkin’s famous but often misinterpreted claim that all sex is rape—and in conjunction with the “sex wars” that were going on at this time, this feminism celebrates women’s sexuality as a vehicle of empowerment. This includes the over-sexualization of women that is prominent in popular media today. The central tenant of “sex-positive feminism,” as it is most often called, is that sexual freedom is an integral part of individual freedom.¹⁵ Stéphanie Genze and Benjamin A. Brabon see this feminist mode at work in the HBO series *Sex and the City* as well as in popular icons such as Paris Hilton and other celebrities whose fame ostensibly demands that a “sex tape” surface at some point.¹⁶ Genze and Brabon astutely place this feminism within the context of the hypersexual milieu in which we are living, where sexual empowerment has taken on new meaning and importance since its emergence in the 1980s. Ariel Levy, meanwhile, sees pornography as a way for celebrities to bolster their images. She uses Vanessa Williams as an example, who in 1983 was stripped of her Miss America crown after appearing in *Penthouse*. Since appearing in pornography, Williams has been able to market

¹⁵ This “brand” of feminism goes by a number of different names depending on the context: pro-sex feminism, porno chic, bimbo feminism, do-me feminism, sex-radical feminism, and even whore feminism.

¹⁶ See Stéphanie Genze and Benjamin A. Brabon, *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 91-105.

herself as both a celebrity and sex symbol.¹⁷ The seeming contradiction here in the role of sexuality in the public consciousness points to a greater cultural “repurposing of pornography.”¹⁸

Because of the new sex culture in the United States, sex-positive feminism has become more complicated than it once was. As the above scholars demonstrate, in a patriarchal society in which women are seen as sexual objects, the idea that a woman’s sexuality is her source of power is controversial. Some say that the line between objectification and subjectification becomes too blurry for these women. Rosalind Gill, for example, channels Foucault when she argues that the result is “a shift from an external, male judging gaze to a self-policing narcissistic gaze.”¹⁹ Levy further typifies sex-positive feminism as more “raunch” than politics, calling these feminists “Female Chauvinist Pigs” who behave like “caricatures” of the embodiment of male desire: “big cartoon breasts, little cartoon outfits, and [only able to] express [their] sexuality by spinning around a pole.”²⁰ Elisa Glick is even more blunt, suggesting that there is something wrong with a mode of feminism that “encourages us...to fuck our way to freedom.”²¹

But as Glick points out, we ought to be attuned to the trappings of an *either/or* binary. Instead of arguing for or against pornography, for or against raunch, it is important to

¹⁷ Ariel Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (New York: Free Press, 2005), 27. See also Genze and Brabon, 104.

¹⁸ Genze and Brabon, 103.

¹⁹ Rosalind Gill, *Gender and the Media* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), 258. Also quoted in Genze and Brabon, 102.

²⁰ Ariel Levy, quoted in *Ibid.*, 103. See Levy, 107.

²¹ Elisa Glick, “Sex Positive: Feminism, Queer Theory, and the Politics of Transgression,” *Feminist Review: Feminism 2000: One Step Beyond* no. 64 (Spring 2000): 19.

“interrogate the claims we are making about such cultural practices.”²² In the fiction analyzed in the next section, it may seem as though the teenage protagonists are indeed “fucking their way to freedom;” or are trying to. Theirs is a very “politically incorrect sexuality” that is firmly entrenched in the triangulation of transgression, taboo, and obscenity, and might very well contribute to a discussion of the importance of politically incorrect sexualities in general, such as queer or “genderfuck.”²³ We need not necessarily concern ourselves with asking whether or not these are feminist works of literature, but rather how transgression, taboo, and obscenity factor into a reconceptualization and reinscription of bodily pleasure for women.

In Japan as well as the United States, women’s bodies are on display everywhere, but the visual and carnal spectacle is primarily one-sided. Female sexuality is permitted, in other words, but intended for male enjoyment. Japan has a long erotic tradition that is often said to excuse as well as predate the currently saturated pornographic marketplace and sex industry (*mizushôbai*), and has created a space for a level of social acceptance of sex not seen in the US.²⁴ Sharon Kinsella points out that in contrast to the United States or Britain, “pornography has not been as

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 21; Elaine Lawless explains that “genderfuck is used in both lesbian and gay communities...[and] generally refers to a self-conscious effort to mess [or “fuck”] with people’s notions of ‘gender.’” Elaine J. Lawless, “Claiming Inversion: Lesbian Constructions of Female Identity as Claims for Authority,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 111, no. 439 (Winter, 1998): 9.

²⁴ The erotic prints (*shunga*) of the mid-17th century are often identified as precursors to today’s pornography. Including “pillow pictures” (*makura-e*), “books of sexual desire” (*koshokubon*), and “smiling pictures” (*warai-e*), these prints frequently depicted sexual intercourse or autoeroticism. Although mildly regulated by the Japanese government during the early to mid-18th century, *shunga* was still widely consumed until the mid-19th century. See Sandra Buckley, “Pornography,” in *The Encyclopedia of Contemporary Japanese Culture*, ed. Sandra Buckley (New York: Routledge, 2002), 401-402; Tadashi Suzuki, “Frame Diffusion from the U.S. to Japan: Japanese Arguments Against Porn Comics, 1989-1992,” in *How Claims Spread: Cross-National Diffusion of Social Problems*, ed. Joel Best (Walter de Gruyter, Inc., 2001), 129-130.

strongly compartmentalized” in Japan and exists in tandem with other circulated media “as well as in specifically pornographic productions.”²⁵ Thus pornographic comics and related literature are often consumed in public locales such as trains or convenience stores, something unheard of in societies where pornography is a private matter. While Japanese society affords a space for discursive and pictorial representations of women’s erotic desire through “ladies comics” and “boys’ love comics” (BL)—both of which came to prominence in the 1990s²⁶—the primary audience for pornographic media remains largely male.²⁷ As in heterosexual pornography for men, representations of the female body tend to be grounded in fantasy while privileging and presupposing a male viewer. And the ways in which this body is depicted—highly sexual, seductive, and not so far from Levy’s characterization of cartooned women—contradicts many women’s lived realities. In other words, the women whose bodies are intended for erotic consumption seem to exist on a plane outside of normative femininity and respectability. In “normal” society, women continue to struggle for autonomous control over their own bodies and subject positions as sexual beings. In light of Japan’s declining birthrate (1.4 as of 2011),

²⁵ Sharon Kinsella, *Adult Manga: Culture and Power in Contemporary Japanese Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2000), 46.

²⁶ Mori Naoko, *Onna wa poruno o yumu: josei no seiyoku to feminizumu* [Women Reading Porn: Women’s Sexual Desire and Feminism] (Tokyo: Seikyûsha, 2010), 9.

²⁷ So-called “ladies comics” (*redîsu komikku*) are a subgenre of *shôjo manga*, or comics for girls, that has been popular since the 1950s. Ladies comics are mostly written by women and for women, and feature the traditional romantic narrative trajectory. Ladies comics often feature scenes in which the female protagonists—usually with exaggerated breasts—are brutally raped or humiliated by their male counterparts. Boys love comics are also a form of *manga*. While still authored by women, these comics focus on sexual relationships between men. For further reading, see Gretchen I. Jones, “Bad Girls Like to Watch: Writing and Reading Ladies’ Comics,” in *Bad Girls of Japan*, ed. Laura Miller and Jan Bardsley (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 97-109; for a more compressive look at boys love comics, consult Antonia Levi, Mark McHarry, and Dru Pagliassotti, eds. *Boys’ Love Manga: Essays on the Sexual Ambiguity and Cross-Cultural Fandom of the Genre* (McFarland & Company Inc., 2008).

nonreproductive sex continues to vex male lawmakers and politicians who are pushing for repopulation. Although out of date by now, the 1999 debate on contraception has a palpable urgency given the rate at which Japanese society is aging. That year both Viagra and “the pill” were approved, but what took Viagra six months took oral contraception for women sixty years. Dismayed over the entrenched opposition to the pill, lawmaker Fukushima Mizuho had this to say: “The drug that lets you get pregnant is approved [Viagra], but the one that would prevent pregnancy is not.”²⁸

The political web in which women’s sexuality has been and continues to be ensnared, due at least in part to the residual effects of old political ideologies and notions of femininity, has angered many women. As briefly noted in the Introduction, women writers have used their pens to fight for a creative space in which they can enjoy unfettered explorations of sexuality. Lesbianism, bestiality, interracial sex, interspecies sex, gender queer sex, sadomasochism, incest, lesbian pederasty, recreational heterosexual sex, and sex that is just bizarre are some of the myriad expression of sexuality these authors have employed since the 1960s. Julia Bullock astutely points out that fighting for sexual expression constitutes an implicit fight against static articulations of female subjectivity and “the way the power dynamics that structure [male/female] relationships suppress or manipulate women’s sexuality in order to harness it toward goals of a patriarchal order.”²⁹

Women’s fiction from this era by Kôno Taeko (b. 1926), Takahashi Takako (b. 1932), Kurahashi Yumiko (b. 1935), Kanai Mieko (b. 1947), and the previously mentioned Ôba Minako

²⁸ Quoted in Jonathan Watts, “When Impotence Leads Contraception,” *The Lancet* 353, no. 9155 (March, 1999): 819.

²⁹ Julia Bullock, *The Other Women’s Lib: Gender and Body in Japanese Women’s Fiction* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2010), 4-5.

represented a new direction for fiction by women that had previously been dictated by “autobiography, confession, and realistic or historical fiction.”³⁰ These authors drew from a repertoire that included single protagonists who chose not to get married or have children; women who fantasized about murdering small children; women who enjoyed being beaten by men; and women who fawned over young boys. The shock value aside, this literature had a fierce point to make, as Gretchen Jones explains:

Women’s writing from the 1960s and 1970s seems to be a search for delineating a revised identity more befitting *the new age*. The quests on which these women embark range from self-discovery to outright rejection of social or cultural norms. The use of deviant modes of behavior seems intentional, however, and reflects a deliberate effort to defy norms or at least force readers to reconsider preconceived notions of femininity and womanhood.³¹

The italicized phrase in the quotation is key. What these authors wrote—and, admittedly, not all women wrote about sex then (or even now)—and the explicitness with which they did sent a clear message to a predominantly male and old-fashioned literary community (*bundan*) and to a public that was accustomed to particular conventions regarding sex. At the core of these conventions were binary ways of thinking about gender, sex, and sexuality. Bullock demonstrates in her study of Kôno, Takahashi, and Kurahashi that their subject matter foregrounded the radical feminist movements of the late 1960s and 1970s, and contributed to an

³⁰ Gretchen Jones, “The 1960s and 1970s Boom in Women’s Writing,” in *The Columbia Companion to East Asian Literature*, ed. Joshua Mostow (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 223.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 224. Emphasis added.

“emerging feminist discourse” that fed into the “‘women’s lib’ movement in the following decade.”³²

Feminism has made great headway since then, and much has changed for women in a variety of avenues. But as we have seen, sex and sexuality persists as a volatile subject. Feminists continue to talk about it and argue for it, and authors continue to write about it. The fiction presented in this chapter by Sakurai Ami (b. 1972) and Kanehara Hitomi (b. 1983) contributes to the struggle by offering portraits of women whose lives seemingly revolve around aberrant, nonnormative sexuality.³³ In a way, their fiction would have found a home among the authors mentioned above, if only for unsettling scenes of brother-sister and father-daughter incest and scenes of violent rape-fantasy sex. What has changed, however, is the social climate. Thus, in trying to understand the point of all the sex in these authors’ respective novellas, particularly the *kinds* of sex, we need to look to an interpretive model that places these modes of sexual expression within a larger cultural framework in which public consumption of sex is at a historical high.

³² Bullock, 5. During this same period in Japan, pornography began to surface publicly in the form of magazines for men featuring nude women, film genres called “Roman Pornography” and “Pink Movies,” and the emergence of a number of “porn comics.” Mori, 68-70.

³³ Defining pornography requires some finesse. In one sense, it does not necessarily need defining—we tend to know it when we see it, to paraphrase US Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart. Jane Juffer takes this route in her analysis of the ways in which women are consuming pornography today; she does not explain what she means by pornography. In another sense, some scholars are trying to differentiate between “porn” and “pornography,” categorizing the first as what is hip and fashionable and consumed by the forty and under crowd and the latter as a historically stigmatized medium that is quickly fading from public consumption. See Jane Juffer, *At Home with Pornography: Women, Sex, and Everyday Life* (New York: New York University Press, 1998) and Carmine Sarracino and Kevin M. Scott, *The Porning of America: The Rise of Porn Culture, What It Means, and Where We Go from Here* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2008), ix-xv.

On the one hand, readers are used to sex now in a manner previous generations were not; what was shocking *then* might not be shocking *now*. When these authors saturate their texts in sex, it is part of a rhetorical move to allow women to have recreational sex that runs counter to the traditions that have promulgated procreative sex exclusively. Furthermore, it is a way to force readers into uncomfortable positions. Obscenity, especially when used by women, upsets the foundation of the male gaze by offering women in sexual positions but not those that are necessarily erotic or even pleasurable to look at. On the other hand, these texts emerge from a different feminist landscape than that of women writers of the 1960s and 70s, one that affords sexuality as a legitimate and familiar discursive mechanism, one that finds subversive value in pornography and other outlets of sexual expression, particularly the transgressive, the taboo, and the obscene. Central to the pro-sex feminism agenda has been the pursuit of sexual pleasure. Curiously, despite their focus on sex, Genze and Brabon do not discuss women's pleasure at any length (and do not discuss orgasm at all), almost casting pro-sex feminism as performance in which sex comes secondary to the appearance of it. In Sakurai's *Innocent World* and Kanehara's *Snakes and Earrings*, to which I now turn, there is a hint of performance—sex always demands performance to some degree—but the focus is on the pleasure these protagonists find in sex. It is genital pleasure, of course, but there is a greater politics of ecstasy at work that drives their respective narratives as well as their protagonists' sexual desires. For Ami and Lui, sexual pleasure becomes a medium through which they find other outlets for affective living. In a chaotic milieu hemmed by “panic” and uncertainty, sex is a diegetic mechanism that ultimately criticizes the very culture that demands it.



The texts share a number of similarities. Protagonists Ami and Lui are teenagers; the former is nineteen and the latter seventeen. Their lives unfold on the fringes and in society's gutters, reflecting the precarious position of Japan's post-economic generation: lost, apathetic, and even a little angry. Ami is a high school student who turns tricks in her spare time, a stereotypical depiction of the *kogyaru* discussed in Chapter One; Lui is a freeter,³⁴ somebody whose livelihood is sustained by interchangeable and menial part time jobs, and who works temporarily as a hostess. Both texts are intended to capture a moment in the lives of young women stuck in the lingering aftermath of economic collapse and are predicated on an explicit and uninhibited unveiling of the female body's place in a sexual economy that survives in the face of economic stagnation. *Innocent World* and *Snakes and Earrings* unfold vis-à-vis the protagonists' bodies and the innumerable and uncomfortable sex scenes that fill the pages. This chapter argues that the authors deploy sex—incestuous, violent—to elucidate the ways in which the female body is an infallible moneymaker for women who seem to have no other options. It argues further, and more importantly, that within a gendered paradigm that stresses obedience, the sex these protagonists have is intended to unleash a radical sense of justice and rage against social mandates of passive female sexuality, echoing the literary concerns of their predecessors. At the same time, these works repurpose sex that has often been maligned or dismissed in order to shatter readers' preconceptions of it.

Above, I offered that sex has historically been acceptable when part of a binary model of gender that emphasizes the active male role that is complemented by female stasis. In this model,

³⁴ A freeter is a temp worker. The term itself is a portmanteau of the English "free" and the German "arbeit," meaning job, and originated during the bubble economy in light of the high number of full-time jobs available and the even higher number of young people who refused to take them.

the female body is but an object of sexual desire, reflecting male-authored ideological truths that have stripped women of everything but their flesh while granting men intellectual transcendence. Sakurai, who also writes under the penname Hayami Yukiko, and Kanehara are but two of many Japanese women writers who use their fiction to (re)ignite female sexual desire and sexual subjectivity by rhetorically exploiting social anxieties over women who have sex and who have lots of it. Their protagonists, in the works discussed here and in others in their respective *oeuvres*, are girls gone wild, fully aware that in spite of philosophical truisms that claim otherwise, men tend to think with their penises.³⁵ As elaborated in greater detail below, Ami and Lui both use their bodies to get what they want from men—money, designer bags, tattoos, pleasure, security, warmth—and do so in uncomfortable fashion, challenging us to decide when sex is just sex and when it is something more. The incestuous sex Ami has first with her handicapped half-brother and then with her father, the sadomasochistic sex Lui has with her tattooist Shiba—these scenes are difficult to endure, but they are also important discursive generational mechanisms that go beyond a youth culture for whom normal sex just won't cut it anymore. As Ami explains to a friend, “When you grow up on porn mags...there's no way you'll be satisfied with starry-eyed sex.”³⁶

There is more to it, however. Sakurai and Kanehara evoke a poetics of obscenity in their works that is meant to sublimate the gaze. It is a poetics that depends on the abject and the repulsive, one that is meant to simultaneously draw the (male) viewer in and cast him out. Henry

³⁵ In the 1997 film *Bounce Ko Gals*, which explores *enjo kôσαι*, one young woman equates the older men looking for sex to infants, and explains further that part of the draw is the satisfaction of using them for their money.

³⁶ Ami Sakurai, *Innocent World*, trans. Stephen Clark (New York: Vertical Books, 2004), 10. Published translation used throughout this chapter unless otherwise noted.

Miller argues that obscenity is “a technical device” void of “sexual excitation,” in contrast to pornography or other erotic mediums.³⁷ George Bataille, meanwhile, uncovers (erotic) attraction in the obscene. He writes: “I can link my revulsion at the decay [of a corpse]...with the feelings that obscenity arouse in me. I can tell myself that repugnance and horror are the mainsprings of my desire, that such desire is only aroused as long as its object causes a chasm no less deep than death to yawn within me, and that this desire originates in its opposite, horror.”³⁸ Obscenity, then, is ensnaring. This is especially so in the case of works by women who might offer their female subjects as eroticized women who supplant the gaze by ruining what is potentially erotic. As Hal Foster observes, obscenity is “an attack on the scene of representation...[and] also suggests a way to understand...aggression against the visual[.]”³⁹

Foster contends that the body is the locus of obscenity. He cites the artwork of Cindy Sherman, whose paintings, portraits, and illustrations are often populated by disfigured and ugly “bodies [that] break down the upright lines of proper representation, indeed of proper subjecthood,” as evidence of the destabilizing nature of the obscene body.⁴⁰ The bodies in her art are entrenched in “menstrual blood and sexual discharge, vomit and shit, decay and death. Such images tend toward a representation of the body turned inside out, of the subject literally

³⁷ Henry Miller, *Henry Miller on Writing* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1964.), 186.

³⁸ Georges Bataille, *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality* (New York: Walker, 1962), 59.

³⁹ Hal Foster, “Obscene, Abject, Traumatic,” *October* 78 (Autumn, 1996): 114.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 112.

abjected, thrown out. But this is also the condition of the outside turned in, of the invasion of the subject-as-picture by the object-gaze.”⁴¹

Because of its emphasis on the body’s corporeality, excretions and borders, as well as the visceral reactions that accompany it, both Foster and Bataille argue that obscenity reminds us that we are alive. To Foster, obscenity “suggests...an impossible opening onto the real” that contradicts postmodern discourse on the body’s escape into the simulacra.⁴² Bataille locates obscenity within customs of death and carnal mortality; burial rites provide a final resting place for the dead, but also protect the living from the corpse. Similarly, obscenity and eroticism are linked: “The sexual channels are also the body’s sewers; we think of them as shameful...”⁴³ For Bataille, then, death, eroticism, and obscenity form a triad of sorts that engenders an awareness of life by bringing death closer.

Sakurai and Kanehara turn to the obscene in their fiction to destabilize the gaze and woman’s place within it. These authors exaggerate the extent to which their protagonists are sexual objects through uncomfortable sex acts, demanding to be looked at as both sex objects and sexually desiring subjects, desiring to use men and be used by them, to violate norms by exposing their bodies to violation. Foster argues, “The violated body is often the evidentiary basis of important witnessings to truth, of necessary testimonials against power.”⁴⁴ In the fiction analyzed in this chapter, women’s bodies are subject to physical and sexual abuse, as well as emotional abuse. Yet these same bodies also violate in the sense that they have the potential to

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 115.

⁴³ Bataille, 57.

⁴⁴ Foster, 123.

disrupt power structures and subvert binaries. In this fiction, the obscene is a powerful tool of transgression, a “testimonial” against historical legacies demanding passivity and reserved sexuality. It is part of a larger discourse of “repurposed” sexuality that speaks to current feminist debates on pornography and sex, as well as the emergence of teenage prostitutes and call girls in the 1990s. These authors call for a moral moratorium, agitating the rules governing contemporary Japan, particularly those directed at women’s uses of their own bodies.

TOTEM...

I begin with Sakurai’s text because its publication date (1996) coincides with the rise of compensated dating, and sheds light on the tumultuous post-economic milieu and the larger moral panic. The text tells the story of Ami, a seventeen-year-old high school student who founds a call-girl business with several of her classmates. Armed with cell phones (a relatively new technology at the time and one that revolutionized trick turning) and desirable bodies in high school sailor uniforms,⁴⁵ and motivated by the latest fashions and awareness of the undeniable lure of the street value of their bodies, the young women moonlight as college-bound students but spend the majority of their days running Telephux, the name of their business and a not so subtle wordplay on “telephone” and “fucks.” Indeed, the text opens onto a quiet scene in the school library where “disinfected-and-vacuum-packed students” are all studying diligently (1). But the “viscous quiet that coated” the library is interrupted by the sound of Ami’s pager—the telltale sign that she has a client on the books and that school will have to wait—which earns her disapproving looks from the students around her. “My plan had been to breeze through [an]

⁴⁵ The sailor uniforms are a “dominant trope in pornography, comics and sex culture in Japan in general.” Anne Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 133-134.

article [for class] today—so much for that,” she explains. “My study schedule for all my classes [was] about to get fucked, again” (1).⁴⁶ School, in other words, is not all that important.

The milieu in which the narrative takes place is one in which nothing is important and nothing is stable. “We were all bored and starved for money and stimulation,” Ami says in reference to how Telephux got started. “We wanted some deal that was a little more engaging than flipping burgers at McDonald’s at less than a thousand yen an hour. Something that totally mocked our parents and our school” (10). Her words reflect Suga Shûmi’s concern that Japanese today suffer from pathological ennui (*taikutsusa*).⁴⁷ As explained in Chapter One, the success of Aum Shinrikyô and the concurrent emergence of a number of subcultures, including teenage prostitutes, can be linked to collective boredom and free-fall. Telephux, like Aum, offers Ami and her friends a context for self-identification and meaning based primarily in the money economy and male-female dynamics.

Ami and Maki, her closest friend in the business, limit themselves to high-end clients so they can maximize profit with minimal effort. Which is just as well, because Ami owes her friend Kaori 100,000 yen she borrowed to buy a jacket and sweater—nearly a thousand dollars. So when Ami is offered 80,000 yen at the last minute to see a new client, she can hardly resist. For her, this new client is just another “insensitive, mediocre, and selfish” man whose “warped, filthy desires control...[his] psyche...to the very core” (20-21). The anonymity, disposability,

⁴⁶ I have modified this translation slightly. Sakurai uses the verb *kurû*, which means to go amiss or become screwy. Clark remains faithful to the original text, translating it as “screwed.” Given the text’s emphasis on sex, the pun may have been intentional, though it seems to be lacking in the Japanese. I find that “fucked” is more congruent with the text’s content while retaining the linguistic pun. See Sakura Ami, *Inosento Wârudo* (Tokyo: Gentosha, 1996), 5.

⁴⁷ Suga Shûmi, “Gendaisei to iu Shinwa” [The Contemporary Moment as Myth], in *Happy Jack: nezumi no kokoro* [Happy Jack: The Mouse’s Heart], ed. Takahashi Teimiko (Tokyo: Hokusôsha, 1991), 87.

and general ineptness of this particular client reflect the latent feeling she has toward most all men. The only exception is her mentally handicapped elder half-brother Takuya, with whom she develops an extremely intense sexual relationship.

Sociological studies of young women who engage in *enjo kôsai* typically suggest that in contrast to other instances of prostitution, they come from decent, middle class homes. The draw is often the easy money, evident in Ami's case. We could argue further that the primarily older clientele become temporary father figures for girls who have not otherwise grown up with familial stability. Maruta Kôji reports that *enjo kôsai* is about more than “just” prostitution or boredom; it also exposes ruptures in familial and educational ideologies.⁴⁸ Murata has analyzed the reasons *men* are drawn to these compensated relationships, suggesting that in addition to the inherent sexual pleasure, some men—particularly older men—are drawn to *enjo kôsai* in order to enact (*enjiru*; perform) familial father-daughter fantasies. He is cautious to note that these fantasies are not fetishistic. They are intended to be substitutive—the men are not out to recreate *their own* family dynamics, but rather one unmarred by the struggles of domestic life.⁴⁹

Although some sources suggest that girls turn to *enjo kôsai* out of spite or anger,⁵⁰ the reasons are more complex and are driven by the same breakdown of familial relationships that,

⁴⁸ Maruta Kôji, “Chichi to musume no doramaturugû: enjo kôsai no shakaigaku” [Dad, Daughter, Dramaturgy: The Sociology of *Enjo Kôsai*], *Kansai Gakuin shakai gakubu kiyô* [Journal of the Faculty of the Department of Sociology, Kansai Gakuin] no. 83 (Nov., 1999): 127.

⁴⁹ See *Ibid.*, 130-137.

⁵⁰ Journalist William Sparrow, for instance, states:

...many girls in the *enjo kosai* (sic) trade do so out of spite caused by their own father's behavior. Many of whom are slavishly devoted to long working hours and spend time drinking at hostess clubs, having extramarital affairs and turning up late and drunk at home. Many of these girls think their fathers have their own kogals for *enjo kosai* (sic), so why shouldn't they reap some reward from the practice?

according to Murata, drive men to purchase sex from teenage girls. In the Bubble Economy, many families lacked fathers, who commuted long hours from their homes in the suburbs into the city center and back again, and who were frequently overworked, sometimes to the point of death.⁵¹ The burdens shouldered by the “salaryman” were great, and the time away from home had a number of repercussions. Romit Dasgupta demonstrates that an entire lexicon of salaryman-specific concerns emerged in the public discourse, including: “*karôshi* (literally “death from overwork”), *kitaku-kyohi* (inability or reluctance to go home, partly due to a lack of communication between the salaryman and his family), [and] *tanshin funin* (workers forced to live away from their families, sometime for years, due to job transfers.”⁵²

On the other side of the gender divide was the *kyôiku mama*, or “education mama,” a mainstay of Japanese family life since the post-war era. Given the economic and financial demands that had fallen on the father/husband, the wife/mother was almost single-handedly responsible for the educational welfare of their children. Anne Alison states that *kyôiku mama*

is a term both of respect and reprobation: it conveys respect for mothers who are successful in seeing children through the competitive Japanese school system and reprobation for the pressure they consequently exert on children whose days, nights, and energies are consumed by study. *Mamagon* or “mother Godzilla” is another term

William Sparrow, “The Young Ones,” *Asia Times Online*, May 10, 2008, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Japan/JE10Dh01.html> (December 3, 2013)

⁵¹ After the post-war years, families relocated from rural to urban locations in light of economic shifts away from agriculture and animal husbandry and toward business and finance. With Tokyo’s growth during the 1980s and 1990s, however, office space was at a premium. And with the inflated price of land that accompanied the bubble economy, many families moved from the city into the suburbs.

⁵² Romit Dasgupta, *Re-reading the Salaryman in Japan: Crafting Masculinities* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 37.

encoding only the second half of the *kyôiku mama* relation, condemning mother who relentlessly police their children's study habits.⁵³

Allison notes that despite the *kyôiku mama*'s best efforts, or perhaps because of them, some children rebelled, either intentionally performing poorly in school or refusing to go to school entirely. The more over-zealous mothers made an already stressful educational environment all the more unbearable.⁵⁴

Given the gendered division of labor within the Japanese household, the perpetual absentee-ness of the father seemed to cause a permanent rift in family relations. Unflattering monikers such as *sodai gomi* (oversized garbage), a colloquialism for a useless husband, or *nureochiba* (wet fallen leaves) followed him home and underscored his uselessness if he was not out earning an income for the family. Indeed, *nureochiba* refers to stubborn wet leaves that are difficult to rake up or dispose of. Yet another derogatory term was *teishu kampaku*, a term with a long history but one that became popular during the Bubble years. With an approximate meaning of "master of the household," the expression was used to refer to "autocratic, dictatorial husband[s]" who came home from long days at work and ordered their wives to cook dinner, draw a bath, and so on—domestic chores that reinforced the binaristic nature of the Japanese household.⁵⁵

The fractured Japanese household is the locale from which Sakurai's text emerges. Although cloaked as the story of a reckless teenager who is of the reckless teenager generation, *Innocent World* is ultimately about Ami's relationship with anonymous men who are surrogates

⁵³ Anne Allison, "Producing Mothers," in *Re-imagining Japanese Women*, ed. Anne E. Imamura (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 136.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Laura Miller, *Beauty Up* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 154.

for the father she does not know. Ami learns early in the text that she was the in-vitro product of an anonymous sperm donor. Her mother, convinced Takuya's handicap was the fault of her husband's bad DNA, had vowed not to make the same mistake twice and keeps the truth hidden from Ami until she accidentally comes across hospital documents that refer obliquely to "Sperm Donor No. 307." Ami is not necessarily surprised:

All sorts of peculiar doubts I'd had from my earliest days finally made sense. My father's looks and personality were never mine at all. Ever the pale A student no matter how old he gets, my father is one of those introverted research types, with raptorial eyes as expressionless as a Jurassic-era dinosaur. (30)

She then goes on to recount a memory from early childhood in which her father attempts to abandon her at Disneyland, a place children often associate with positive memories. "The first time I felt like he didn't like me was back when I was five years old," she explains. "From that day on I never trusted my father, nor any other adult. No matter how kind they were, you never knew, their gaze could turn distant and cruel like my father's did that day" (31-32).

The failure of father-/manhood in the above passage is encoded into other systemic failures, particularly that of "salaryman masculinity," to use Dasgupta's phrase, and the pervasive social ruptures that culminated in the "lost decade." Dasgupta suggests that the collapse of the economy threatened the integrity of masculinity, which had been built around Japan's postwar capitalistic vision, as corporate masculinity. The end of the corporate vision portended the end of masculinity for many men. As Mark McLelland writes: "There has been a fundamental shift in popular discourse about masculinity—from "salary man" to "family man"—a shift that has left some men of the older generation feeling stranded and many younger men

confused about what is expected of them.”⁵⁶ Men were not the only ones confused by the plight of their fathers, for what happened to the salaryman was emblematic of what was happening to Japanese society at large. McLelland notes elsewhere: “Once Japan's remarkable boom years came to an end, a new generation of men and women were wondering whether the sacrifices made by their parents, in both their professional and personal lives, were really worth it.”⁵⁷ It would be tempting to read this failure of masculinity into Sakurai’s characterizations of the men in her text. They are all deficient in some way: her “father” is nearly a complete failure; her (half) brother is mentally handicapped; her biological father turns out to be unable to get an erection. Sakurai does not stop there, however. For her, *everybody* and *every body* is flawed, damaged, and broken.

In this respect, Ami’s venture into prostitution is more complicated than she makes it out to be and challenges feminist theories of *enjo kōsai* that portray the practice as young women “consciously packaging and cashing in on their bodies as domesticated *and* sexualized subjects/objects” in order to “turn...the patriarchal and capitalist laws of the fathers and the bosses on their heads.”⁵⁸ It is somewhat tempting but also potentially distracting to look at Ami as a case study, as a girl with serious daddy issues and antagonism toward male authority figures who nevertheless pursues a vocation in which she caters to older men. Moreover, Ami was exposed to her father’s hardcore pornography collection as a child (here another failure on his

⁵⁶ Mark McLelland, “Review of *Masculinities in Contemporary Japan: Dislocating the Salaryman Doxa*,” *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context* 9 (2003), http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue9/mclelland_review.html (December 3, 2013).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Yau Ching, “Performing Contradictions, Performing Bad-Girlness in Japan,” in *Gender and Globalization in Asia and the Pacific: Method, Practice, Theory*, ed. Kathy E. Ferguson and Monique Mironesco (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008), 144.

part) and developed an inventory of masturbatory fantasies including rape and sadomasochism by grade school. And her sexual relationship with Takuya has been ongoing since her middle school years. Thus her sexual history seems all the more to be a determining factor—or at least something to consider—in her decision to prostitute herself. In fact, Ami feels guilty because in spite of herself, she derives a certain amount of “pleasure” from her varied and vacant sexual encounters which are not *supposed* to be pleasurable at all, but rather ways to make money (18).

Indeed, given the importance of the economy during the bubble years and the adage that personal success is defined by accumulated income, one wonders if *enjo kôsai* was at least partially a manifestation of taking money-making opportunities too far. Murata shows that women would not shy from indulging their older clientele in father/daughter fantasies because, as one interviewee explained, “So long as I get paid, it’s fine.”⁵⁹ It seems that the discourse of blame that fell on the young women stems not only from their implicit responsibilities to protect their bodies/chastity/femininity. Sharon Kinsella states that the *enjo kôsai* narrative was also framed in terms of “greedy” and “opportunist” girls who “extorted...Japanese men.”⁶⁰ This narrative casts the compensatory relationship as a capitalistic plot masterminded by cunning young women and carried out against helpless men. As demonstrated in the opening pages of this chapter, some young women *did* enjoy taking money from their male patrons, but the transaction was hardly one sided in all cases, and hardly a simple transaction.

⁵⁹ Maruta, 135.

⁶⁰ Sharon Kinsella, *Schoolgirls, Money and Rebellion in Japan* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 191.



Ami and Takuya began having sex when Ami was in her second year of middle school. The first time happens when Takuya is sick with a fever and Ami is changing his underwear. Even though his body is frigid with chills, he has an erection, which Ami immediately puts in her mouth. Takuya is confused, but his sister comforts him and guides him, and before long he is the orchestrator of the sexual experience:

Since it was my first time, I didn't really know how to move my body. Takuya bent my knees and gently lifted my hips so that he would be rubbing the back of my most naïve aperture. Keeping cool watch over my fraying breathing, he soon mastered the movement that sends the strongest waves of pleasure through a woman. (7)

For Takuya, who has the vocabulary of a child and undeveloped motor skills, sex comes naturally; in other words, his erect penis seems to be the only part of him that functions properly. Sex between brother and sister is great, as they climax simultaneously. The two then have sex nearly everyday, behind their parents' backs, which "[gives] Takuya a greater sheen of life than he'd ever had before" (8).

Their parents eventually catch on, however, and send Takuya to stay with relatives in Yokohama. But Ami makes up an excuse to visit him so they can continue to have sex. "He wanted it," she says, referring to intercourse, "and as for me, I became emotionally unstable if I didn't have him for a while" (9). Elizabeth Grosz argues that the greatest sexual experience occurs in an environment outside of normalcy, where the body gives way to an ecstasy produced by blurred borders. She says:

Modes of greatest intensification of bodily zones occur, not through the operations of habitual activities, but through the unexpected, through the connection, conjunction and construction of unusual interfaces, though a kind of wild and experimental free play that re-marks, reinscribes orifices, glands, sinews, muscles differently, giving organs and

bodily organization up to the intensities that threaten to overtake them, seeking the alien, otherness, the disparate in its extremes, to bring into play these other intensities.⁶¹

Incestuous sex engenders such an environment for Ami and her brother. “I didn’t really think of him as someone of the opposite sex. My feelings for him were more ‘unitary,’ I guess. It was about loving the boy in myself—uniting with the other half of a single androgynous being” (9).

Here, the text calls to mind Kurahashi Yumiko’s “The Extra Terrestrial” (Uchûjin, 1964), in which siblings discover a hermaphroditic alien in their beds and eventually escape into its “womb.” In this story, the male narrator K wakes one morning to find an egg beside his bed. He and his sister L eventually break the egg open to discover a hermaphroditic alien whose genitalia appear almost in answer to their own sexual interests. The siblings initially take turns having sex with it, after which they have sex with the alien at the same time. The subtext to the story is K’s secret desire to have sex with his sister, who is engaged to a man named S, and K’s use of the alien’s body as a substitute for that of his sister. One night K confesses his secret to L, who suggests that they escape into the alien’s womb where they have the freedom to consummate their incestuous desires free from social persecution.

“The Extra Terrestrial is just one of several works in which Kurahashi explores the possibilities of androgyny and hermaphroditism in a fantastic and indeed otherworldly setting. In this story, K and L explore their awareness of sexual difference through the alien’s body, which develops breasts when K thinks about L’s, as well as an erect penis when K expresses reverie about L’s breasts. Atsuko Sakaki has suggested that in Kurahashi’s works, characters are sustained by their relationships with others, and that her continual engagement with non-normative sexuality—such as incest and hermaphroditism in “The Extra Terrestrial,” but also

⁶¹ Elizabeth Grosz, “Animal Sex: Libido as Desire and Death,” in *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism*, ed. Elizabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn (New York: Routledge, 1995), 289.

masturbation and partner swapping in other works—points to Kurahashi’s intent to “question the romantic view of the self as an autonomous, substantive individual being.”⁶²

With Sakaki’s comments in mind, the relationship between sex and autonomy in *Innocent World* is worth exploring. The intercourse Ami has with strangers and that which she has with Takuya and later with her biological father are at opposite extremes. With the men she sleeps with for money, it is unemotional, deadened sex:

[The client] leaned towards me, grabbed me by my shoulders, and pushed me flat onto the bed. I avoided his gaze and stared vacantly at the ceiling. This was the moment when the guy became the faceless man of my masturbatory fantasies and I became a drifting sexual entity unmoored from the name ‘Ami.’ I’d float through the locked window and peep in on the obscene goings-on. (18)

While proponents of the legalization of prostitution (in this country) argue that autonomy is first and foremost about consent, there is something constricting and subordinating about the sexual experience itself for Ami.⁶³ It drains her of life and splits her subjectivity in two. And the split-off, “other” Ami is not at all pleased with what she sees. “You’re hopelessly conceited, aren’t you, bitch. . . . Splitting yourself to protect your pride and nurse it,” she admonishes herself (18). Shannon Bell has articulated an “othering” that takes place in Western discourses on prostitution in which the prostitute exists in an either/or purgatory—either virgin or whore, agent or victim, deviant or normal, etc.⁶⁴ In our text, the othering that occurs takes place within Ami’s psyche as

⁶² Atsuko Sakaki, “(Re)Cannonizing Kurahashi Yumiko: Toward Alternative Perspectives For ‘Modern’ ‘Japanese’ ‘Literature,’” in *Ôe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*, ed. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999), 168.

⁶³ See, for example, Jody Freeman, “The Feminist Debate Over Prostitution Reform: Prostitutes’ Rights Groups, Radical Feminists, and the (Im)possibility of Consent,” in *Applications of Feminist Legal Theory to Women’s Lives: Sex, Violence, Work, and Reproduction*, ed. D. Kelly Weisberg (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 237-249.

⁶⁴ Shannon Bell, *Reading, Writing, and Rewriting the Prostitute Body* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 4.

a defense against potential psychological or emotional trauma. As the text unfolds, and as she encounters more and more men who want sex from her, she finds that her emotional self—the self that watches from outside the window when she is having intercourse with strangers—has gone missing. Thus she feels that “[t]hrough anonymous sex, men were slowly depleting my store of some valuable element. What remained with me was more or less the sadness of a spent space probe drifting forever in the vacuum beyond” (40). In a manner of speaking, after being with men who break her in half, Ami needs the bodies of her brother and father to suture herself whole again. She confides in her brother one night: “Takuya, I get lonely and want to cry when you’re not with me. We’re like two little trees growing from the same roots. That’s why when we split, my heart aches and starts bleeding” (50).

Everything changes for her, however, when she realizes she is pregnant with Takuya’s child. She attempts to explain the situation to him but because he had never been taught sex education in school he does not understand “the abstract concept” of how two people can create a baby (64). Ami feels let down. Until this moment she had vacillated over her role in Takuya’s life—was she his guardian? sister? lover? savior? Now, however, she sees that “[i]t was actually me who was always being saved by him” (65). At a loss of what to do, she seduces him into sex. “We were no longer a hermaphroditic chimera without a clear boundary between our selves, but two ravenous panthers trying to gorge more deeply on each other. The awareness was like a drug and sharpened my senses” (65).

Hereafter, the narrative takes a violent, if brief, turn. Ami is drugged at a party and beaten and gang raped by a famous DJ named Kim and his entourage. She tries to fend off her assailants and is convinced that the violent assault has caused her to lose her baby. “My uterus must have been a bloody mess with a tiny head and limbs and umbilical cord all mangled up,”

she says (86). Kim begins to choke her. Just as Ami is ready to surrender to her fate, she sees an image of Takuya. “Naked solitude with nothing in the world to protect him awaited Takuya if I disappeared,” Ami explains, renewed with a sense of purpose. She manages to stomp on Kim’s genitals and escape (90). The rapists are arrested. And on her visit to the OB-GYN Ami learns that in spite of the horrible trauma she suffered, her child remains unharmed and safe in her womb.

Ami’s attention then turns to a response she received from an internet bulletin board post asking Donor No. 307 to come forward to discuss his decision to donate sperm. She arranges to meet him in a hotel room, pretending to be someone else, a “friend” of Ami’s. Ami immediately tries to seduce him, but to no avail. Astonished that any man can resist her, she presses No. 307 for an explanation. “Why’re you pretending to be Mr. Rigid?” she scoffs. “I’m not being rigid. I can’t get it up. Not for the last two years,” he replies (100). No. 307 then takes Ami to a cemetery where he shows her the grave of Asami Keiko, a woman with whom he lived for two years until she hurled herself from the roof of their apartment building (102). No. 307 goes on to explain that Keiko had had a miscarriage and had recurring nightmares about her dead baby up until her death. Since then, he continues, he has not been able to sustain an erection. As Ami listens to such honesty pouring from the mouth of her biological father, she finds that she had “never been so sexually aroused” in her life (107). “What was it about his story that turned on the switch?” she asks herself. “I’m not sure, but as with Takuya, I wanted us to heal each other by conjoining our bodies—and it was not a gentle impulse” (107-108). Ami pulls No. 307 into the weeds and begins kissing him and pleasuring him. He is, in Ami’s words, “[r]eleased from his spell” as his penis comes to life (109). Ami says: “No. 307 sat up, held my back in his arms,

and spun my hips around a half-turn, A white orb burst open in my head, and a bliss that nearly liquefied my brain cells shot through my spine” (109).

Their sex, like what she experiences with Takuya, is out of this world, literally, turning Ami into “a lithe, magical, unknown beast from outer space consisting only of sensory organs” (109). Broken bodies—physically and emotionally—are healed, at least momentarily while in the thralls of climax. It is not a surprise that everybody in the story is “defective,” as Ami says of one of her friends named Masaki, who runs the business side of Telephux (13). Takuya, of course, is mentally deficient. No. 307 has suffered serious emotional anguish that affected his sexual performance. And Ami feels empty and lost; recall that to her own dismay, she discovers that *she* is the one who needs the affections of her brother. Nigel Thrift’s discussion of “fractal people” is pertinent here—those individuals who are “both singular and plural,” “dividual rather than...individual.”⁶⁵ He posits that all people are fractal, incomplete, and “do not exist as autonomous entities but have the capacity to act directly upon one another.”⁶⁶ Thus people seek out in others what they cannot find in themselves. No. 307 explains to Ami that he and Keiko were drawn to each other out of a mutual desire for completeness and to fill a void (103).⁶⁷ It is a common refrain throughout the text that demands bodies come together in erotic and meaningful fashion to survive.

⁶⁵ Nigel Swift, “Understanding the Material Practices of Glamour,” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 302-303.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 303.

⁶⁷ Relationships often unfold from this space of mutual completeness. Tom Cruise’s famous—and often lampooned—line in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* comes to mind: “You complete me.”



While the brother/sister incestuous act may remind us of Kurahashi's texts, the father/daughter bond is not unfounded in Japanese letters. This was particularly so during the Heian era (794-1185), in which marriage politics demanded that fathers and daughters cultivate and maintain close emotional ties. Esperanza Ramirez-Christensen argues that "the [Freudian] family romance... may be said to be the ubiquitous subtext of Heian women's writing."⁶⁸ She offers *Genji monogatari* (Tale of Genji, 11th c.), among other women-authored texts from the period, as an example of a narrative in which "the oedipal plot is variously at work in the unconscious[.]"⁶⁹ Genji simultaneously plays father and wife to Murasaki, who is cast into the dual role of daughter and wife. Ramirez-Christensen states: "One of the most disturbing scenes in this narrative is surely the night [Genji] deflowers the still childlike girl whom he has been rearing as an adopted daughter, making her his wife."⁷⁰

Other scholars have offered examples of the ways in which the father-daughter romance surfaces in various works of more recent Japanese literature. *Amai mitsu no heya* (The sweet honey room, 1975) by Mori Mari (1903-1987) is the story of a father's love for his daughter. The following passage is particularly illustrative:

For Rinsaku, Moira was like a little lover, and he sees her more often than anyone else. He would, of course, have to give this lover away in ten and a few years' time. ... Underneath the father's love that he felt for her, he had a sweet "honey-like" premonition

⁶⁸ Esperanza Ramirez-Christensen, "Introduction," in *The Father Daughter Plot: Japanese Literary Women and the Law of the Father*, ed. Rebecca L. Copeland and Esperanza Ramirez-Christensen (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 4.

⁶⁹ Quoted in *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Ramirez-Christensen, 4.

that she would maintain this close love with him and would never be able to slip out of its deep tenderness.⁷¹

As Tomoko Aoyama observes, although Moira takes different lovers, the affections of these other men only solidify the bond between her and her father.⁷² Moira does get married, but her father's presence remains strong. And after the son-in-law commits suicide at the end of the novel, Rinsaku cannot help but take pleasure in the fact that his daughter will once again be his.

Kanai Mieko, mentioned briefly above, published two stories in 1972 in which father-daughter love is an important theme. Although the title of "Boshizô" (Portrait of mother and child) is framed in terms of a mother/son dynamic, its primary concern is the narrator's life-long attraction to *ano hito*, "that man" or "him." "[F]rom the beginning, there was no distinction between my love for him and my being alive," the narrator says, "my life was nothing other than my love, and my love was my life."⁷³ So strong is her love for "him," in fact, that she is committed to remaining a virgin. Nevertheless, she tries hard to earn the attention of every man who crosses her path, which makes her commitment all the more meaningful. Sharalyn Orbaugh

⁷¹ Quoted in Tomoko Aoyama, "A Room Sweet as Honey: Father-Daughter Love in Mori Mari," in *The Father Daughter Plot: Japanese Literary Women and the Law of the Father*, ed. Rebecca L. Copeland and Esperanza Ramirez-Christensen (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 179.

⁷² Tomoko Aoyama, "A Room Sweet as Honey: Father-Daughter Love in Mori Mari," in *The Father Daughter Plot: Japanese Literary Women and the Law of the Father*, ed. Rebecca L. Copeland and Esperanza Ramirez-Christensen (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 182.

⁷³ Quoted in Sharalyn Orbaugh, "The Body in Contemporary Japanese Women's Fiction," in *The Woman's Hand: Gender and Theory in Japanese Women's Writing*, ed. Paul Gordon Schalow and Janet A. Walker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 141.

shows that in this story, the father forbids a physical relationship to happen between the two of them, though he allows desire to take over both of their minds.⁷⁴

In “Usagi” (Rabbits), father and daughter share a similarly close bond, which blossoms after the rest of the family inexplicably disappears. The narrator/protagonist and her father enjoy cooking and eating rabbit, which they do every night. Father had been in charge of butchering rabbits for their nightly feasts, but soon he succumbs to health problems and his daughter is left to do the work. Although she struggles at first with the act of slaughtering, she grows to take sexual pleasure in it and starts to do so completely naked. The narrator/protagonist decides she wants to dress up as a rabbit and have her father enact a fantasy of strangling and butchering her—she wants to become the object of his consumption, in which eating is a euphemism for sexual intercourse. The daughter’s plan does not come to fruition. When she dresses in a large rabbit suit and hops into his room, her father panics. He throws something at her, wounding her eye, and then promptly dies of a heart attack.



In the above examples, father and daughter do not *explicitly* consummate or enact their desires, which are woven into suggestive metaphors or confined to the mind. What makes Sakurai’s text different, it hardly needs to be pointed out, is the explicitness with which consummation happens. Consider the scene in which Ami and No. 307 have sex after Ami succeeds in seducing him:

The movement of his hips got more aggressive until he was like a demon teasing me, penetrating me all the way up into my heart. The two life forms were coated in mucus, moving rhythmically, enshrouded in fever. They transformed from genitalia into spirits

⁷⁴ Sharalyn Orbaugh, “The Body in Contemporary Japanese Women’s Fiction,” in *The Woman’s Hand: Gender and Theory in Japanese Women’s Writing*, ed. Paul Gordon Schalow and Janet A. Walker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 143-144.

seeking fusion, mutually, intensely. Let him come and coat my inside with sperm, let it mix with Takuya's seed inside my uterus. Let all be one, cells, genes, blood. (110)

Sakurai does not leave anything to the imagination here or hint subtly at the taboo the way her predecessors do. While, Kanai's "Rabbits" is certainly suggestive, as Susan Napier observes the text "does not explicitly admit a sexual relationship between the girl and the father[.]"⁷⁵ She further remarks that in the story the girl's willingness to please her father by killing "soft, vulnerable" creatures that are "not unlike the girl herself" points to her willingness to be "complicit...in her own abjection."⁷⁶ In *Innocent World*, the sex is raw, in your face, and difficult to read at times (which is the point). Ami is not complicit because she is explicit, both the initiator and conductor of the sexual relationships.

After having sex, father and daughter part ways. And Ami is convinced that No. 307—whose name is actually Takamori Kazuya—knows that she is his daughter. She is also convinced that she will never see him again. The novel ends as Ami wraps up loose ends. She tells us that she has left home and has been kicked out of school. She is also still ambivalent about her baby—"It felt like an unknown virus had flown in from outer space and taken control over my body, and was turning me into a monster" (121)—and continues to work as a prostitute, but has an exclusive commitment with a wealthy client. Appended to the end of the text is a brief note to her friend Masaki. "I'm publishing a novel, are you surprised?" she writes, referring to the novella in our hands. "There's this man named Miyadai who's doing research at his university on girls who turn tricks, and when I told him about you and Kaori and everybody, he told me to just

⁷⁵ Susan Jolliffe Napier, *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature: The Subversion of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 86.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

write it down” (123).⁷⁷ Ami goes on to claim that “[t]his whole thing about prostitution changing you is just a fantasy adults made up for themselves. Maybe there’s a little bit of a strange feeling left afterwards, kind of like after you get a buzz off cough syrup” (123). In *Innocent World*, it is the combination of prostitution and incestuous sex that changes Ami. Ami talks about turning into creatures of various sorts—those without definitive sex organs, those from a different world—probably as a way to escape.

Because incest is particularly taboo, it cannot happen in “the real world” without repercussions. It is doubly taboo because the instigator of these relationships is the female; it is Ami who first takes her brother’s penis in her mouth, and it is also Ami who pulls her father into the weeds. Allison draws our attention to a number of sensationalized incestuous affairs that took place in Japan in the 1980s involving mothers and their sons. The catalysts for these relationships, she notes, was the extremely stressful “exam hell” in which adolescent males found themselves, as well as the pressure mothers faced to be good, supportive parents to their sons.⁷⁸ Allison’s main point is that media attention to these stories ignored the centrality of the mother as the primary caregiver, the absence of the father in Japanese households, and the stressful environment of the educational system. Instead, the media villainized the mother as a sexual deviant unable to control her “misdirected” sexual urges that landed unfortunately on her

⁷⁷ She means Miyadai Shinji, a sociologist and popular critic at Tokyo Metropolitan University, who is known for his scholarship on underage prostitution. In contrast to some of his colleagues who see *enjo kôsai* as the result of ethical fallout among Japan’s youth, Miyadai argues that the men buying the sex should be blamed rather than the young women selling it (see Chapter One). (Miyadai and Sakurai were romantically involved until 2004.)

⁷⁸ “Exam hell” (*shiken jigoku*) can last up to two years as high school students prepare for university entrance exams. Students (and their mothers) face tremendous pressure because, as Allison explains, “exam results largely determine adult identity, social status, and job security, at least for males.” Allison (1996), 123.

adolescent son.⁷⁹ Our text takes place somewhere between the fantastic worlds of Kurahashi's incest narratives and the kind of real-life accounts Allison describes. Early, Ami briefly acknowledges the socially unacceptable nature of her relationship with Takuya, and admits that he would be the one to get in trouble if/when their parents found out (7)—yet he does not have the mental capacities to understand why incest is socially unacceptable, but nevertheless is subject to a double-standard in which men are expected to be sexual aggressors.⁸⁰ Ami is right, because he is sent away after their parents find out, but not before their mother exclaims, “I don't know which of you is the worse devil, but you will not turn this house into a den of monsters. This is a home for human beings” (9). Thus Ami has to escape persecution by imagining herself to be beyond it, immersed in fantasy and immune to the social laws that govern sex and sexual desire.

As Allison notes, from a psychoanalytic perspective fantasy as such is grounded in prohibition and taboo. Drawing from Freud, Lacan, and other psychoanalysts, she summarizes fantasy as that which “is normally and normatively repressed and what is realistically or socially denied. Fantasy is not mere or random escapist fancy, as the term is often used colloquially, but rather is constituted in relationship to specific milieus in which people live and to which they refer even when constructing imaginary worlds.”⁸¹ In other words, for Ami fantasy is a space where she can deal with life, for even sex with Telephux clients happens somewhere else, as she imagines herself elsewhere in order to get through it. Regarding one man, who wants to tie her

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 129-130.

⁸⁰ We might speculate that if Takuya were “normal,” it would be Ami who would be sent away for tempting the primary son, much as the mothers were blamed in Allison's accounts.

⁸¹ Allison (1996), 125.

up, she says: “So we were in a room of imaginary numbers, a different dimension that didn’t exist in real space. An ugly castle built on shifting sand where images, decomposing and stinking, collided with one another” (19). Ami’s world is sustained by different fantasy modes, one in which fantasy counters sex. She splinters herself from herself during these latter moments, re-members, and goes somewhere else. When she is raped, she does the same thing—and she has to. As Lauren Berlant argues, “Fantasy makes it possible not to be destroyed[.]”⁸²

Fantasy functions on different levels in the text. First, there are the fantasy moments built into the sexual exchange between Ami and her Telephux clients. She notes that one john probably entertains the same escapist ideas that she does, though for different reasons:

The customer took off my dress and stared at me in just my underwear. I didn’t mind being looked at like that...But the guy probably wasn’t looking at me, he was admiring some crystallization of Eros that had formed in his head, just like I did. His girl probably didn’t have a face or a name, or parents or siblings or any ties to the world, being no more than a virtual-reality image that complied with any simulation of his. (18-19)

The man then puts on a “black and purple metallic bodysuit” and has Ami wear a pair of lacy, transparent pajamas—“the kind that ‘transforms prim young ladies into insatiable sex machines’” (19). He wraps her up in a cord and after pushing her forcefully to the bed, readies a vibrator “shaped like some weird crypogamic plant” (20). But the man inadvertently climaxes here, unable to sustain his fantasy as he is repositioned from spectator of it to participant within it. Or in Ami’s words: “Moved that the scene of his dreams was actually unfolding before his eyes, he’d come too soon. Totally pathetic” (20).

Ami has her own “virtual-reality-game,” however, and inside it she executes all of the adults who wrong Takuya. Their aunt, “who shot smiles that were as merciful as the Virgin Mary’s but also profoundly condescending;” the manager at a department store where Takuya

⁸² Lauren Berlant, *Desire/Love* (New York: Punctum Books, 2012), 70.

destroys expensive glass artwork, who chastises him for being “anti-social;” their mother, who gives Takuya a concussion after the department store incident; and their father, who grows more distant as relations between mother and Takuya worsen (24)—Ami kills them all in her mind, “mother...three times and father twice” (24). Ami’s intent to protect her brother bleeds into her distrust of adults in general. Even the woman who picks Takuya up after he wanders away from his aunt’s home in Yokohama is less than savory. She takes him from Yokohama to Shinjuku, where the police later find him wandering the streets. Afterward, Takuya confesses to Ami: “She told me to do something strange and I was going to say no and she hit me. ... In a place with trees where it was dark she took off her underpants...she told me to lick [the place where I put it in when we do it]. When I didn’t she hit me again on the head to make it hurt...” (36). At a loss for words, Ami says simply, “I’ll kill that woman for you” (36). The violence and hatred that informs this particular imaginary world is necessary to preserve Takuya’s innocence.

The most important fantasy being constructed is that which is evident in the novella’s title: innocence; it is also the most fragile. There is obviously no innocence in Ami’s innocent world. It is something she nurtures in Takuya’s subjectivity, and something she is bent on protecting. Only he, unmarred by the cynicism of adulthood because of his handicap, can exist in a kind of innocent and indeed childlike misunderstanding of the world. Ami desires a moratorium on adulthood, a petulant Peter Pan existence. She is in late adolescence, however, so her time is running out, and at seventeen years of age has already realized that life is not full of the limitless possibilities of youth. Ami has already become disillusioned by family, adults, and especially men; even No. 307 is ultimately another socially and sexually inept older man who seems to know all along that Ami is his daughter but has sex with her anyway. It appears that nothing is sacred in this world, and Ami’s arrival into adulthood has come too soon, predicated

on her early exposure to pornography and nurtured by her awareness of men's reactions to her body. If she can protect Takuya from adults, then perhaps her fantasy will remain intact. In her letter to her friend Maki, she notes that Takuya has moved in with her; "he's happiest living with me," she writes (123). In a twisted disruption of the Oedipus story, Ami fantasizes about killing both parents and marrying (in a sense) her brother.



Is Sakurai arguing for, or even mourning, "a primitive or lost state to which the child has special access?"⁸³ Is she likewise condemning the post-bubble world, its social downfalls and emphasis on economic/capitalist primacy? Through Takuya, is she trying to preserve a border between innocence and awareness, between purity and impurity? Of all the boundaries (or taboos) that are transgressed in the text, particularly those between individuals, this is the one that matters the most. It is the most fragile as well as the most transient. Foucault wrote of transgression:

Transgression contains nothing negative, but...affirms the limitlessness into which it leaps as it opens this zone to existence for the first time. ... Perhaps it is simply an affirmation of division; but only insofar as division is not understood to mean a cutting gesture, or the establishment of a separation or the measuring of a distance, only retaining that in it which may designate the existence of difference."⁸⁴

In other words, transgression creates new limits, boundaries, and possibilities. At the same time, however, it reaffirms established limits, stabilizes old boundaries, and stresses impossibilities. Thus transgression and taboo coexist, each encouraging and demanding the other. Ami and Takuya can unite through sexual contact until orgasm, after which they are pulled apart. Theirs

⁸³ Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1984), 9.

⁸⁴ Michel Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (New York: New Press, 1998), 74.

may very be a “primitive or lost state” in which their *kind* of sex is only possible by embracing the obscene.

Mary Caputi’s conceptualization of obscenity as desire that transcends what is merely sexual resonates with Sakurai’s use of it. She explains:

[Obscenity] highlights the distinction between the domain of everyday life...and the [D]ionysian realm of irrational abandon. ... Largely sexual, scatological, and eschatological, obscenity combines our immediate impulse for pleasure with a deeper, more complicated desire...to bypass our socially imposed boundaries and apprehend a psychic death. Obscenity is essential to our culture because it calls into question the limits of that culture, unmasking our impulse to transgress, even deny, the orderly realm and to be in contact with something both primally within us and necessarily beyond our reach. In obscene expression, we both uncover and rediscover an unmediated, “bodily” relationship to reality.⁸⁵

Caputi further argues that obscenity can best be understood in relation to taboo and transgression, which compartmentalize lived experience into “sanctioned and unsanctioned realms.”⁸⁶ Taboos and transgressions keep “life well ordered, civil, and predictable,” while obscenity “assures us that there exists a realm of being beyond the everyday, beyond the commonplace, beyond the temperate and socially conditioned.”⁸⁷ Freud posited that incest is an instinctual drive that must be controlled in the name of civility—it is the primary law around which other laws are built; he further claimed that the ability to maintain this taboo is “what separates us from animals.”⁸⁸ For Freud, incestuous desire flows between parent and child (his

⁸⁵ Mary Caputi, *Voluptuous Yearnings: A Feminist Theory of the Obscene* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994), 5.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Neville Hoad, “Cosmetic Surgeons of the Social: Darwin, Freud, and Wells and the Limits of Sympathy on *The Island of Dr. Moreau*,” in *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*, ed. Lauren Gail Berlant (New York: Routledge, 2004), 195.

Oedipal complex). It is a desire that must be attenuated so that the sexual bond between mother and father can come to fruition.

According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, acceptance of the Oedipus complex is predicated on recognizing the father as “law,” which facilitates entry into language and culture and, more importantly, the Symbolic Order. For Lacan, the Symbolic Order—“the internalization of cultural norms through identification with figures of symbolic authority” such as one’s father⁸⁹—works in tandem with but also challenges the Real and the imaginary order, the three of which form a developmental triptych. The Real precedes the orderly world of the Symbolic and is marked by primal and primordial urges that are inexpressible through language. The imaginary order refers to an imaginary identification of and with oneself that depends on misrecognition (similar to the “mirror stage”). Both the Real and the imaginary order are lost to the Symbolic (the “father”) and the realm of order and culture as one develops as a culturally literate subject.

Sakurai recasts this family drama by removing the father almost entirely. The result is that the mother is left to enforce the ethical imperatives, most importantly the incest taboo, in his stead. It is her law if only because it cannot be his—as her husband has lost control on account of his bad DNA. And so the mother is the domestic villain, bent on driving brother and sister apart in the name of protecting sexual and civil integrity. Interestingly, Ami and Takuya are half-siblings, sharing only their mother’s genes.

In *The Sibling Bond*, Stephen Bank and Michael Kahn turn to Freud’s theory of sibling incest. Drawing on extensive occurrences of sexual relationships between siblings in world myth and literature, they conclude that sibling incest exposes failures in parental care and attention.

⁸⁹ Matthew Sharpe and Geoff Boucher, *Žižek and Politics: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd., 2010), 47.

They state further that through sexual intercourse, brother and sister seek out a primitive state in which they were merged. In a way, transgression of taboo through obscenity is intended to do the same thing—to revert to a time when the rules did not apply and to express disdain toward the way things are through the use of one’s body in unsanctioned ways. “Thus, sexual subversions and inversions are emotional violations towards self and society.”⁹⁰ The incest in *Innocent World*, then, is a form of sibling “play” that disrupts the rules of the adult morals. Adults police the borders of the narrative, and their authority is undercut by the relationship between Ami and Takuya. In this sense, their world *is* innocent—or at least an attempt to forestay what follows innocence.

...AND TATTOO

The violation of self and body as social violation is at the core of Kanehara’s text. As in *Innocent World*, Kanehara’s *Snakes and Earrings* is propped up by a teenager’s efforts to find her way in the world by embracing what is sexually taboo or abnormal, while also exposing us to the boredom endemic to contemporary Japanese society. *Snakes and Earrings* is not concerned with incest and its potential ramifications. It is, however, concerned with narrator/protagonist Lui’s interest in unconventional sexual experiences, particularly sadomasochism as well as an inexplicable interest in body modification. As with *Innocent World*, the narrative raises a number of other important issues, the most central of which are the plight of Japan’s “lost generation,” those who grew up after Japan’s post-economic turn, and the implicit desire to abandon the promises and trappings of contemporary Japan because things just aren’t working out. This novella offers the tattooed and pierced and sexually violated body as another means to explore

⁹⁰ Fiona Magowan, “Courting Transgression: Customary Law and Sexual Violence in Aboriginal Australia,” in *Transgressive Sex: Subversion and Control in Erotic Encounters*, ed. Hastings Donnan and Fiona Magowan (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 214.

the possibilities of a more “primitive” state of being. In this text, as in Sakurai’s, taboo, transgression, and obscenity are methods through which the rules are bent and maybe even broken vis-à-vis a gendered discourse of pain and unsanctioned uses of the body.

The narrative happens because Lui meets a man named Ama in a club and is immediately “mesmerized” by his forked tongue, deciding then and there that she must have a tongue stud. “Know what a forked tongue is?” he shouts to her over the din of techno music when they first meet, and while he succeeds in getting her to go home with him that night, Lui is more interested in getting closer to his tongue than she is in getting closer to Ama himself.⁹¹ The next day she has a stud put in her tongue that she systematically stretches throughout the novel, intent on splitting it down the middle so that it looks like his. Later, she makes plans to have a dragon and kirin tattooed across her back, images that remind her of Ama and her tattoo artist Shiba, who becomes increasingly possessive of her and her body, going so far as to (probably) murder Ama in order to have her for his own.

The rules of the body—its borders, its integrity—come under fire immediately. Above, Ama’s question has no referent. In Japanese, the text reads: *Supuritto tan tte shitteru?*⁹² The reader is placed in Lui’s position and asked to think about the integrity of the body, not necessarily as a social object or construct but as a kind of meat. Ami responds to his question the way we might, rendered in the published English translation as: “One that’s split in two?” (1). In the original text, Lui is even more incredulous: “What the hell is that? Like, a tongue that’s been

⁹¹ Hitomi Kanehara, *Snakes and Earrings* trans. David James Karashima (New York: Plume, 2005), 1. Page citations will hereafter occur in-text. Karashima’s translation used throughout this chapter unless otherwise noted.

⁹² Kanehara Hitomi, *Hebi ni piasu* [Snakes and Earrings] (Tokyo: Shûeisha, 2006), 5.

split in two?” (*Nani? Sore. Wakaretta shita tte koto?*⁹³) While I am dubious that Kanehara’s protagonist, who is no body-modification novice, as the reader learns later, would not know what a split tongue is, what is interesting in this exchange is the juxtaposition of tongue as *shita* and tongue as *tan*. In the Japanese, Ama uses the term *supuritto tan* when discussing his serpentine organ. It is a transliteration of “split tongue” (“forked tongue” in the translation), and will be unfamiliar to some native readers. Notice that he does not use a Japanese term, such as *wakare shita*, *ware shita*, or *wake shita*, all terms that connote a (human) tongue split down the middle.⁹⁴ *Tan* has a visceral, carno-centric feel absent from the native. One orders *tan* at yakiniku restaurants, for instance. We are asked, then, to consider the body as the site of modification and aberration, of queasiness and fascination, as product—meat, edible, digestible. Here, the body is just that, a vessel stripped of its subjectivity and reduced to its flesh.

That the narrative begins this way invites a critical devaluation of the body as social construct and the ways in which its integrity is bound to social constrictions and taboos. The narrative demands a literal and figurative “rewriting” of the body vis-à-vis tattoos, piercings, and libidinal pleasure/pain cast through the negotiation of physical pain and sexual ecstasy. For Lui a split tongue and tattoos are part of a larger and unstable fantasy of psychic and bodily liberation that plays into latent body modification theories of claiming one’s body for oneself, reducing it to nothing and starting again. As Nigel Swift argues, “*every surface communicates*,” and in this

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Yamada Yûichirô, *Gairaigo no shakai: ingokasuru komyunikêshon* [The Loanword Society: Communication in Code] (Yokohama: Shunpûsha, 2005), 288.

text the tattooed and pierced body conveys a certain discontent with life and a desire for something more, something beyond the constrictions of contemporary life.⁹⁵

Lui does not really seem like the type, though, to be drawn to body modification or to tattooed and pierced men, which is part of the point of her body project. Her friend Maki calls her a “Barbie-girl,” or *gyaru* in Japanese, and with her “camisole dress and blond curls” and name that is derived from a French fashion house (Louis Vuitton, she tells Ama), the moniker apparently fits (19). *Gyaru* is a catchall categorization to denote young women who are “sexual, self-aware and pushy.”⁹⁶ Their most famous permutation may be the *kogyaru*, or truant and sexualized schoolgirl who, as explained in Chapter One, emerged in tandem with other “anonymous social type[s]” in the 1990s, and who used their bodies as billboards, fashion statements, or sex objects simply because they could and because they had nothing better to do.⁹⁷ Lui has embraced this lifestyle already, to a degree: she bounces from one part-time job to another, parties a lot, and seems to have no responsibilities. Moreover, Lui is fully aware of the sexual draw of her body, working as a part-time hostess (“companion,” in her words) and paying for the tattoos she eventually receives from Shiba, her sadistic tattoo artist and piercer, with “one fuck” per session because she knows what she can get by using her body to her advantage (34).

⁹⁵ Nigel Swift, “Understanding the Material Practices of Glamour,” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 296. Emphasis in original.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Sharon Kinsella, “Narratives and Statistics: How Compensated Dating (*enjo kôsai*) was Sold,” in *A Sociology of Japanese Youth: From Returnees to NEETs*, ed. Roger Goodman, Yuki Imoto and Tuuka Toivonen (New York: Routledge, 2012), 73.

⁹⁷ Yumiko Iida, *Rethinking Identity in Modern Japan: Nationalism as Aesthetics* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 232.

Literary critic and Akutagawa award-winning author/poet Matsuura Hisaki suggests that this is what is important about the text. Lui does not care what you, the reader, think about what she does or what she has done; as the narrator, her delivery is level, even “indifferent.”⁹⁸ In the original Japanese, Lui’s narrative voice is steady and “detached” throughout and her lexicon is hip and exclusive, reflecting the demographic of the teenage characters, the author (Kanehara’s was twenty when she wrote the novella), and perhaps the target audience.⁹⁹ As Yamada Yûichi points out, the language of the novel is exclusive and limiting. The previously mentioned *supuritto tan* forbids entry into Lui’s world for all but the most up to date readers, as it is derived from the English “split tongue,” which circulates within body modification circles in the West. In addition, Yamada observes that this is one of several terms/words of foreign origin (*gairaigo*, and written in *katakana*, the syllabary for loan words) that stand out in an otherwise predictable (*goku heikinteki*) and even text. *Supuritto tan* is flanked by other terms like *panku* (punk), *gyaru* (girl/gal, translated as Barbie-girl), and *kyacchi* (catch, a word meaning roughly “to be hit on”), all of which are used primarily by young people.¹⁰⁰

Kanehara has been widely praised for being an *au courant* street-culture informant bringing the masses into pockets of youth rebellion and subculture through her fiction. In Japan, subculture does not necessarily carry the same oppositional connotation that it does in the West. Rather, it appears to refer to the same fragmented narrative and flight from tradition that is so important to postmodern academic discourse in which individuals gather around a particular mode of expression—comics, fashion, etc. As Tomiko Yoda reports, “It has widely been

⁹⁸ Matsuura Hisaki, *Kuronikuru* [Chronicle] (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppan Kai, 2007), 19.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Yamada, 286-287.

commented that the agents of subculture in the 1990s were characteristically numb to the gaze of others outside of their specific ‘tribes,’ indifferent to the collective imagination beyond highly segmented and immediate social relations in which they resided.”¹⁰¹ As discussed in the Introduction, *otaku* were one such insulated tribe who seemingly existed within their own bubble. Tattoo/body modification enthusiasts constitute their own “tribe” as well, whose lexicon—borrowing heavily from Western body modification terminology—and body stylings create a distinct border between the in-group and the out-group. Kanehara cracks that barrier in this work (and revisits it again in her 2009 short story “Piasu,” or “Piercing,” about a woman who stops to get a tongue ring on her way to a therapy session¹⁰²). Kanehara, with Lui as her voice, acts as a guide into this world. To be sure, Lui is no body modification tourist when she meets Ama that night in the club, telling her readers that she wears some serious jewelry in her ears already. “My thing until now has been earrings,” she says, and goes on to elaborate on the ways that body jewelry is measured (for the benefit of unfamiliar readers): “The thickness of body jewelry is generally measured in gauges; the lower the number, the larger the hole....As for me, I have two 0g [gauge] earrings in my right ear, and my left ear is lined with 0g, 2g, and 4g earrings from the bottom up” (3).

Subcultures, even in a non anti-authoritarian context, still maintain exclusionary properties that are easily compromised by the interplay between *subculture* and mass culture. In 1979, Dick Hebdige stated that “as soon as the original innovations which signify ‘subculture’ are translated into commodities and made generally available, they become ‘frozen.’ Once

¹⁰¹ Tomiko Yoda, “A Roadmap to Millennial Japan,” in *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 37.

¹⁰² The work appears in her collection *Yûutsu-tachi* (The Depressed). See Kanehara Hitomi, *Yûutsu-tachi* (Tokyo: Bungeishunju ,2009), 119-150.

removed from their private contexts by the small entrepreneurs and big fashion interests who produce them on a mass scale, they become codified, made comprehensible, rendered at once public property and profitable merchandise.”¹⁰³ Although he does not discuss Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” the influential essay addresses similar concerns over the effects of commodity and authenticity on expressive mediums—in Benjamin’s essay, art specifically, but similarly applicable to cultural expressions. Although some of his contemporaries mourned the spread of mass culture, particularly Theodor Adorno, Benjamin argued that the reproduction of art is not an inherently negative technological development, as it potentially liberates a work of art (as well as other aspects of culture) from specific contexts and/or interpretations, making it more accessible in the process. “By making many reproductions [technological reproduction] it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique experience,” he argued. “And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener of his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced.”¹⁰⁴ Subcultures depend on their very inaccessibility—their “private contexts”—and those within them tend to scorn the kind of exposure Benjamin discusses. But the private discourse of subculture leaves them vulnerable, and sometimes they become part of the cultural lexicon (tattoos for example, or punk music).

We might argue that the success of Kanehara’s novella—which sold nearly one million copies in its first six months and for which she shared the prestigious Akutagawa prize with author Wataya Risa—can be at least partially attributed to her exposure of Japanese body modification subcultures and the reasons why young people gravitate toward them. In 1977

¹⁰³ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1979), 96.

¹⁰⁴ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Visual Culture: The Reader*, ed. Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Ltd., 1999), 74.

author Murakami Ryû won the Akutagawa prize for a work of little more than sex, violence, and youth culture called *Kagirinaku tômei ni chikai burû* (Almost Transparent Blue). “[V]ulgar and derivative,” the work seemingly impressed nobody, especially not literary critic Etô Jun, who blasted it for its complete lack of literary merit and overdependence on a cache of “ready-made elements of youth culture clichés.”¹⁰⁵ Miriam Kingsberg claims that Murakami’s work won the Akutagawa prize because of “its depiction of drug use as an inevitable outcome of Japan’s participation in the global economy and (counter)culture” that outweighed its failure as a legitimate work of literature.¹⁰⁶ Murakami’s *modus operandi* is capturing and potentially capitalizing on the alienation of Japan’s younger generation. Incidentally, Murakami is on the Akutagawa prize committee and was a staunch supporter of Kanehara’s work. In the afterword to her novella, written by Murakami, he explains that *Snakes and Earrings* would have been an easier work to discuss had it *not* won the prize. It is decidedly more complicated when thought about as a cultural product rather than a “cult novel,” he says.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, Murakami suggests that like his own Akutagawa-prize winning work, *Snakes and Earrings* will stand the test of time because young people who “live for” tattoos, piercings, and sadomasochism sex will read it for generations to come.¹⁰⁸ His point is arguable, if only because those involved in body modification subculture (of which sadomasochism is a part) would likely avoid contributing to

¹⁰⁵ Anne McKnight, “Frenchness and Transformation in Japanese Subculture, 1972-2004,” in *Fanthropologies*, ed. Frenchy Lunning (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 126.

¹⁰⁶ Miriam Kingsberg, *Moral Nation: Modern Japan and Narcotics in Global History* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014), 199.

¹⁰⁷ Murakami Ryû, “Kaisetsu” [Afterword], in *Hebi ni piasu* [Snakes and Earrings] by Kanehara Hitomi (Tokyo: Shûeisha, 2006), 117.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 118.

its continued diffusion. Indeed, although Murakami does not say so, Kanehara's text is difficult terrain because it is a commodity, and some suggest that Kanehara herself is too. Young, hip, and attractive, Kanehara has a packagable and sellable aura. And it is probably not a coincidence that she and Wataya took the prize at a time in which interest in books was lagging. Giving the prize to young and fashionable women who are not interested in traditional portrayals of women or femininity was a way for the award committee to galvanize national interest in reading.

Consumers have been critical of the committee's refusal to acknowledge the appearances and gender of these authors, as well as those of other young women who have claimed the award in recent years.¹⁰⁹

Kanehara is not the first Japanese author to write about tattooing, though she stands out for examining the allure of body modification within a rocky sociocultural terrain predicated on alienation, isolation, and ways in which people cope. Although *Snakes and Earrings* is sometimes discussed in the same breath as author Tanizaki Jun'ichirô's (1886-1965) short story "Shisei" (The Tattooer, 1910), it has more in common with Fujisawa Shû's little known novel of the same name. Before turning to Fujisawa's novel, a word about Tanizaki's work is in order. "Shisei," about an apprentice geisha's transformation at the hands of a tattoo artist, has been widely praised as launching what would turn into a prolific and heralded career in writing for

¹⁰⁹ Regarding Kawakami Mieko, the internet is not lacking for passive-aggressive comments such as the following, found on "Meta *no* tame," a blog for internet journal *Néojaponisme*: "You'd have found it hard to take a train through Tokyo this week without running into Kawakami Mieko [on the cover of her new book], chin in hands and gazing pensively down at you as if to say, 'How much more smokey do my eyes have to get before you buy my Akutagawa prize-winning book *Chichi to ran* (Breasts and eggs), citizen?'" This comment eclipses Kawakami's literary talent, but it does call attention to the ways in which the gender and appearance of recent authors factor into the marketability of their products, even if the marketers themselves will not admit it. (<http://meta.neojaponisme.com/2008/02/15/kawakami-mieko-wins-138th-akutagawa-prize-hearts-of-bookish-men-everywhere/>)

Tanizaki. Ken Itô praises the “highly polished prose” and “elegiac” quality with which Tanizaki crafts the fictional Edo (1600-1868) period setting.¹¹⁰ “Against the ‘harsh struggle’ of today,” he writes, quoting from the opening lines of the text, “Tanizaki poses a realm of the senses where gaudy patterns of line and color determine human worth, where beauty holds all the authority of a sole and unquestionable cultural value.”¹¹¹ The work, as Itô demonstrates, owes an immense debt to Western literature while simultaneously showcasing the young Tanizaki’s fondness for women, sadomasochism, and economies of power. “[I]n a fictional world where beauty equals authority,” the tattoo artist reigns supreme.¹¹² He spends all day and night tattooing a spider on the back of the young woman, and awakens within her a dormant sexual desire that ruptures her previous demure and reserved façade. “All my old fears have been swept away—and you are my first victim,” she says to the artist who is prostrate at her feet, reveling in his creative genius and desire to be destroyed.¹¹³

Tattoo narratives will always be informed by transformation, transfiguration, and power dynamics. Of course, Tanizaki is concerned with a man’s desire to tattoo a woman, not a woman’s desire to be tattooed by a man. But the kind of sensibility and subtlety Tanizaki evokes in his short story is of secondary importance to contemporary evocations of the tattoo tale, which seem to be driven by a psychological imperative. In Fujisawa’s text, written in 1996, high schooler protagonist Aya wanders into a back-alley tattoo shop and meets an artist named Hori-

¹¹⁰ Ken Kenneth Itô, *Visions of Desire: Tanizaki’s Fictional Worlds* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 53.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 56.

¹¹³ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 56. See also Jun’ichirô Tanizaki, “The Tattooer,” in Jun’ichirô Tanizaki, *Seven Japanese Tales*, trans. Howard S. Hibbett (New York: Vintage, 1996), 169.

Ami who is on the verge of closing his shop permanently. The character *Ami* in his name has religious significance in Buddhism: the principal Buddha of the Pure Land Sect (a stream of Mahayana Buddhism) is Amida Butsu. *Ami* is also a homophone of the term meaning “net,” and may allude to the saving net of Amida. As numerous scholars have pointed out, the same play on words occurs in Chikamatsu Monzaemon’s (1653-1724) masterpiece, *The Love Suicides at Amijima* (Shinjû Ten no Amijima), a puppet play about the real-life murder-suicide of a young couple on holy grounds in 1720.

Aya expresses interest in having an image of Kannon, a Buddhist deity of compassion and mercy, tattooed on her back, a not subtle hint at Aya’s own cry for help and need for compassion. From a broken home in nearly every sense of the word, Aya’s sister kills herself and Aya is raped by their father. For Aya, this tattoo is restorative, transcendent, and protective. “I need it,” she explains to Hori-Ami, to keep her safe from her father.¹¹⁴ Not insignificantly, Kannon is also said to protect the souls of children. The text can be read in conjunction with a push for women’s rights and increased governmental and political responses to assaults against women, including incest, that began in the mid 1990s. As such, it is not about a fictional world so much as it is exposing the harsh realities of this one, and tattoos become less about the motif and design than what they seemingly promise.

Kanehara’s text happens here, too, at the intersection of tattoos and other forms of body modification as more than skin deep. A split tongue and tattoos are endemic of the natural progression of Lui’s interest in this particular “microcosmic” tribe and the men associated with it. In this way, the text is less about body modification than what it seemingly promises, and a forked tongue becomes Lui’s “object of desire,” in Lauren Berlant’s words, “a cluster of

¹¹⁴ Fujisawa Shû, *Irezumi* [Tattoo] (Tokyo: Kawade Shobô Shinsha, 1996), 58.

promises we want someone or something to make possible for us.” “Proximity to the object means proximity to the cluster of things that the object promises,” Berlant explains.¹¹⁵ Lui admits to her friend Maki that there is nothing she finds particularly attractive about Ama except for his forked appendage—“...I fell for the tongue rather than the actual guy” (56). Throughout the novella, Lui leans on Ama for a physical reinscription of her subjectivity. He is her gateway into a new affective and embodied experience, what theorist Kathleen Stewart calls a “bloom-space,” a term intended to convey the instability of the world, the ways it affects us, and its potential for “little world[s]” that can make things better or make things worse—and we never really know which it is until it has already happened and until we are firmly entrenched within it.”¹¹⁶ Stewart understands that the world quakes and shifts and that we adjust accordingly, trying to keep our footing: “This is why there is nothing dead or inconsequential in even the flightiest of lifestyles or the starkest of circumstances.”¹¹⁷ These words resonate because if there is one charge we might presumably level against the protagonists of the fiction presented in this study—and the texts analyzed in this chapter in particular—and the lives they lead, it is that they are “flighty” and inconsequential, concerned with momentary pleasures and little else. Chapter One elaborated on some of the important social changes that convinced a generation of young Japanese to abandon the mores and values of their parents and grandparents and embrace lives that seemed to be grounded in the pursuit of momentary pleasures, quick fixes, and transient existences. The chapter argued that scholars have made much of this “moral decay,” interpreting the actions (or

¹¹⁵ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 23.

¹¹⁶ Kathleen Stewart, “Worlding Refrains,” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 341.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 340.

inactions) of young Japanese as pathological laziness and ennui, a collective surrendering of sorts to grave inertia. The lives of these protagonists should not be uncritically discounted, in other words, but rather looked at vis-à-vis an inhospitable social and cultural climate—a bloom space—that has forced many to look for new “modes of living.”

Both Ami and Lui are looking for new modes of living in the fiction analyzed here. Subcultures are by their very nature “little worlds,” and involvement in them often requires that an individual forgo one identity for the promise of another. Lui’s friends call her a “Barbie girl,” and while it is a label she vehemently denies, her appearance and fashion choices preclude any claims of non-Barbie status. Becoming involved with Ama offers her membership by proxy, a way to distance herself from the airheaded Barbie label while not committing to something as permanent as body modification. But Lui’s decision to split her tongue and get tattooed is a bold statement, an offering up of herself and her body to membership in a group to which she will be permanently wedded.

In his analysis of *Snakes and Earrings*, Mark Driscoll erroneously argues that Lui just wants “new modes of sensation that will lift her out of a generalized post-bubble anomie.”¹¹⁸ He does not explicitly say so, but Driscoll’s concern is with Lui’s relationship with her own body, and the sensations he speaks of are bodily sensations—particularly pain. Tattoo discourse is primed by pain as the primary affect, but Lui’s venture into that world leaves her vulnerable to physical and emotional pain. Being somewhat of a body modification aficionado already, Lui is no stranger to the pain that accompanies it. Lui explains that when she stretched the holes in her ears, “[b]lood oozed from the hole and [her] earlobes became swollen and red. The constant,

¹¹⁸ Mark Driscoll, “Debt and Denunciation in Post-Bubble Japan: On the Two Freeters,” *Cultural Critique* 65 (Winter, 2007): 182.

thumping pain lasted for two or three days” (3-4). She admits, too, to wondering what having her tongue split will feel like if it hurt so badly *just* to stretch her ears (3). Later on, she finds out, ignoring Shiba’s advice, who warns that the tongue cannot be stretched as quickly as the ears: “On every day where I’d move up to a bigger stud, I found I couldn’t even taste anything for the rest of the day. The constant pain also made me irritable and made me wish that everybody would just die,” she says (80).

Pain is naturally an integral part of body modification, but for Lui it is something more, a language unto itself. “There was nothing for me to believe and nothing for me to feel,” Lui poignantly explains at one point. “In fact the only feeling with the power to kick me back to life was...acute pain” (91-92). Her pursuit of pain can be partially attributed to what Frederick Jameson calls “the waning of affect,” or the loss of feeling that characterizes the postmodern condition.¹¹⁹ He points to artists and authors whose works fail to compare to their more sophisticated and deeper modernist counterparts as evidence of “a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense.”¹²⁰ Jameson’s words have deeper reverberations through the ways that feelings and emotions are being franchised, packaged, and sold by media corporations as part of a mimetic discourse. Kathleen Woodward suggests that “thrill” or “panic” has been co-opted by Hollywood and television, which reserves these sensations for “good action films” or “the omnipresent discourse of statistical risks to one’s health.”¹²¹ Indeed, to Jameson, feelings and affects have become “free-floating and impersonal,”

¹¹⁹ Frederick Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 10.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹²¹ Kathleen Woodward, “Calculating Compassion,” *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*, ed. Lauren Gail Berlant (New York: Routledge, 2004), 61.

bound to a late-capitalist mentality to which subjectivity itself has been lost: “there is no longer a self to do the feeling,” he laments.¹²² For Lui, pain is a way to feel something authentic, while privileging the body as the site where feeling takes place.

Lui’s courtship of pain is not just a sensation, but a new affective idiom for managing life that begins with her tongue stud and tattoo, spreads to her sexual relationship with Shiba, and finally culminates in Ama’s gruesome and sexually depraved death—presumably at the hands of Shiba. In this way, pain is important for Lui because it reinvigorates corporeality at a historical moment in which the body itself is disappearing, and it is something she actively seeks. From the moment she meets Shiba to have him pierce her tongue, she is drawn to a latent sadistic side of his character. Pain and (sexual) pleasure flirt during the tongue piercing process. He warns her of the impending sting of the needle with a “[h]ere it comes.” Lui says:

His words made me picture him having sex. I wondered if he warned girls of his climax with the same soft voice. The next moment there was a clamping sound, and shivers much greater than those of an orgasm shot through my entire body. Goose bumps shot up my arms, and my body went into a slight spasm. My stomach tightened and for some reason so did my crotch, where I felt an ecstatic, tingling sensation. (9-10)

This is the first of many scenes in which body modification and sex are layered in the text, culminating most explicitly at the end when Shiba rapes and then mutilates Ama’s body before killing him. After Shiba pierces Lui’s tongue, the two flirt heavily. “Looking at your face gets the sadist in me all revved up,” Shiba says. Lui counters:

Well, I’m a masochist, so perhaps I’m giving off that kind of vibe[.][...]
I’d just love to stab [your] neck with a needle[.] [...]
Sounds like you’re more of a savage than a sadist[.] [...]
You’re right there.

Ama interrupts their exchange, but not before Lui and Shiba have implicitly agreed on a sadomasochistic pact. “Completely mad,” Lui admits to her readers, referring to Shiba, “but I

¹²² Jameson, 15, 16.

couldn't suppress my desire to let him do with me whatever he wanted" (13). Soon they make plans to begin her tattoo, payment for which he requires but "one fuck" after each session (34).

That night, Lui and Ama have sex back at his apartment, but thoughts of Shiba dominate her mind. Ama proves to be sexually bland, mistiming his ejaculation, sucking on Lui's nipples "like a baby," and "arous[ing] a hint of maternal instinct" inside Lui (18). The scene is brief and mildly comedic, with Lui reprimanding Ama for his misfire. Nevertheless, it codes Lui in a maternal role, and establishes the first leg of a familial/incestuous triangle involving Ama, Lui, and Shiba, in which Ama is child, Lui is mother, and Shiba is father. Shiba possesses a degree of paternal authority that surfaces through his displays of masculinity and demonstration of ownership of the female—Lui's—body.

Tattoo theory often privileges an interpretation of the marked body as that which has been "reclaimed." This is especially the case regarding the relationship between gender and body modification, in which women's body modification projects are considered especially political vis-à-vis the always already marked female body in patriarchal society. As Victoria Pitts demonstrates, the discourse of reclamation is not without its shortcomings, however,¹²³ and fails to consider the role of the tattoo artist or piercer. Although Lui allows her skin to be marked and her body to be opened, it is Shiba who takes the active role; it is his designs that mark her skin. They are not just any designs. She elects to have a dragon and a mythical kirin tattooed on her back, the former because Ama has a dragon tattooed on his body (placed there by Shiba), and the latter because she is drawn to one Shiba has on his. This becomes a problem, because in having her body engraved with what we might see as their rival insignia (a dragon and a Kirin), Lui incites a turf war that Shiba eventually wins in gruesome fashion, carving up (modifying) Ama's

¹²³ See Victoria Pitts, *In the Flesh: The Cultural Politics of Body Modification* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 78-81.

body, sexually violating it, and jamming an incense stick into his penis. Not only does Shiba kill off his “competition,” but the manner in which he murders Ama displays his dominance: in raping Ama, he feminizes him, and in shoving an incense stick up his penis, he essentially castrates him.

Sara Ahmed says that “[p]ain matters...it matters in so far as the experience of pain is precisely about the bodily life of the process of harm and being harmed...Harm does not simply happen; it is overdetermined as well as contingent.”¹²⁴ Pain is complicated, of course, but one’s (personal or private) physical pain can be read and understood as part of a communal public—“a collective politics” of pain.¹²⁵ Ahmed suggests that much of feminist theory is dedicated to deciphering women’s pain under a patriarchal regime, the conditions of which demand that “one’s own pain (be interpreted) as an aspect of a broader and structural violence.”¹²⁶ The notion of “women’s pain” complicates a tattoo narrative about a woman’s desire for painful body modification at the hands of a sadistic male tattoo artist. Yet Kanehara’s novella is about more than just the female perspective of physical pain. While it is primarily shaped by Lui’s desire for physical pain, first through body modification and then through sadomasochistic sex, after Ama’s death, the novella is recast in terms of emotional hurt.



Shiba and Lui have sex for the first time after she stops by his shop to discuss her tattoo designs.

Lui recounts part of the scene thus:

¹²⁴ Sara Ahmed, “Feminist Futures,” in *A Concise Companion to Feminist Theory*, ed. Mary Eagleton (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003), 244.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

Shiba-san stubbed out his cigarette in the ashtray and stepped up toward the bed, undoing his belt as he walked. He stopped at the edge of the bed and pushed me down roughly with one hand, then brought his palm up against my neck. His fingers traced my veins and his grip tightened until his fingertips began to dig into my flesh. ... The veins on his right arm bulged to the surface. My body was screaming out for air, and I began twitching. My face tightened and my throat felt like it would crack. ... Shiba-san looked down at me with a blank expression, grabbed hold of my hair, and pulled on it in a rough rhythm—fucking my face. I could feel myself getting wet, though he hadn't even laid a finger on me. (35-36) [. ...]

After I'd come, I could hardly move. But Shiba-san simply pushed me over, climbed on top, then slammed himself into me in a hard, unforgiving rhythm—grabbing my hair, choking me, and smiling all the while from the cruel pleasure it gave him. Then he said, "Here it comes," just the way he had when he pierced my tongue, shoving his cock in deep, pulling out, then climbing up my body to dump his cum in my mouth. I felt a strange combination of relief and excitement, like I'd been released from Hell, but exiled from Heaven at the same time. (39-40)

Body modification and sadomasochism are often aligned in body modification discourse through the shared experiences of pain and pleasure, control and consent. And in the above passage, Lui draws a parallel between being pierced by Shiba and penetrated by him. A superficial reading of this passage would correspond with some feminist interpretations of body modification that malign the practice as yet another sadistic and degrading beauty practice demanded of women by men, another way that men literally inscribe the female body. But such an interpretation takes a lot for granted and both neutralizes and essentializes individual experience and desire. Sheila Jeffreys, for instance, contends that the desire to be hurt during sex and the desire to be pierced or tattooed are but cries for help, the externalization of invisible trauma for both men and women. She says:

Some of the enthusiasm for piercing...arises from the experience of child sexual abuse. Self-mutilation in the form of stubbing out cigarettes on the body, arm slashing and even garroting are forms of self-injury that abuse non-survivors so sometimes employ. ... Sadomasochism and the current fashionability of piercing and tattooing provide an apparently acceptable form for...attacks on the [already] abused body. Young women and men are walking around showing us the effects of the abuse that they have tried to

turn into a badge of pride, a savage embrace of the most grave attacks they can make on their bodies.¹²⁷

In a round about way, Jeffreys is arguing that courtship of pain can offer reprieve for those already living with it: body modification and sadomasochism are expressions of controllable and containable violence while systemic and structural violence are not. Yet here Jeffreys reaches into the rhetoric of self-harm to minimize individual body modification projects and sexual tastes as psychological pathology. In doing so, she disregards any role of individual agency in making the choice to be hurt, casting it instead as psychological imperative. What is important in the sex scene above is Lui's role in her own subjugation, her willingness to be degraded and debased, and the sexual pleasure she derives from it. In other words, sadomasochism and body modification work as affective mediums because of the *usefulness* of pain.

Jeffreys is correct about the “fashionability” of tattoos and piercings, but she misses the nuances between tattoos/piercings as decoration and as more than skin deep. Today, because tattoos are a fashionable consumer product—even in Japan where they are nevertheless controversial at times¹²⁸— it is becoming increasingly difficult to say with any certainty when body modification is not *just* body modification. Lui's friend Maki represents the subcultural tourist, holding firm to her Barbie girl image while maintaining a superficial appreciation of body modification as ornamentation. “I think tattoos can be cute. Like a little butterfly or rose or something like that, you know,” she tells Lui, evoking traditionally “feminine” tattoo design

¹²⁷ Sheila Jeffreys, “Sadomasochism, Art and the Lesbian Sexual Revolution,” *Artlink* 14, no. 1 (1994): 21.

¹²⁸ For example, in May, 2012, Osaka mayor Hashimoto Tôru (the son of a supposed gangster) created controversy by asking all government workers to confess to having tattoos or not. And in December, 2011, a bill was submitted in Saitama Prefecture banning tattoos on those under eighteen years of age. (By comparison, the legal age in the US is eighteen, or younger with parental consent.)

imagery (19). While these “cute” designs are deemed (socially) acceptable by their very cuteness, there is something upsetting about pursuing designs that fall outside of that discourse. Lui is not into, as she says, “the cutesy stuff,” but rather “dragons, tribal patterns, ukiyoe woodblock prints, that kind of thing” (20). When she first tells Maki that she’s seeing a tattooed man with a “face full of piercings” and a red Mohawk, Maki is incredulous: “You’ve got to be kidding” (21). And when she tells Maki that she intends to modify her body in a similar fashion, Maki can only assume that she has been “brainwashed” by Ama (20). Maki’s is an unfortunate though understandable reaction that stems from the presumption that body modification is something undertaken by the marginal or deviant, and not by Barbie girls “like her” who find tattoos to be a trendy fashion accessory.

Critics of those who try to inscribe aesthetic-oriented body modification with deeper purpose point out that many turn to the practice not in pursuit of deep spiritual meaning or self-expressive symbolism, but because they are bored, looking for excitement. Georg Simmel finds that the anonymity and impersonality of the urban experience has created a state in which people are, in Elizabeth Goodstein’s words, “always already bored with everything” and must go to greater and greater lengths to counteract their boredom.¹²⁹ He states that this “crystallized and impersonalized” culture leaves people trapped, in that they have everything they need and want—but that’s the problem:

On the one hand, life is made infinitely easy...in that stimulations, interests, uses of time and consciousness are offered...from all sides. They carry the person as if in a stream, and one needs hardly swim for oneself. On the other hand, however, life is composed more and more of these impersonal contents and offerings which tend to displace the genuine personal colorations and incomparabilities. This results in the individual’s summoning the utmost uniqueness and particularization, in order to preserve his most

¹²⁹ Elizabeth S. Goodstein, *Experiences Without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 409.

personal core. He has to exaggerate this personal element in order to remain audible even to himself.¹³⁰

In our text, the very conventionality of life pushes Lui to seek what is unconventional—and extremely so. Body modification, as an “object of desire” seems to promise this: the pierced or tattooed body is “unique” and “particular,” “exaggerated,” to use Simmel’s language; it stands out in a sea of bodies that are otherwise all the same while providing the painful jolt Lui needs to feel alive.

But Lui and her friends are casualties of anonymity as well as boredom. Brian Turner has conceptualized the postmodern world in which we live as an airport departure lounge, a leisurely and consumer-oriented marketplace in which bodies bump into each other in passing while on their way to someplace else. These travelers are “blasé, indifferent to traditional signs of commitment and remote from the conventional signs of caring.”¹³¹ In a way, Turner’s airport lounge sounds a lot like *Snakes and Earrings* insofar as here we have a world framed by momentary relationships established by people who do not really know each other and who are all hiding behind aliases and deliberately contrived appearances—a masquerade: Lui Vuitton, Amadeus, and the “son of God” (Shiba’s way of describing himself). Such a world cannot sustain itself. Late in the novella, Ama fails to come home one night after work and although Lui rushes to the police station to report him gone the next day, she realizes that she can’t because she doesn’t even know his name (94). “I knew nothing about Ama. Until yesterday, I’d thought that all I needed to know about Ama was what I saw with my own eyes. But now I

¹³⁰ Georg Simmel, *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*, ed. David Frisby and Mike Featherstone (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1997), 184. Emphasis added.

¹³¹ Brian S. Turner, “The Possibility of Primitiveness: Towards a Sociology of Body Marks in Cool Societies,” *Body and Society* 5 (June, 1995): 49.

realized that I was blind because that's all I looked for" (102). There is some irony here, because in a novella propped up by emphasis on the skin, superficiality proves to be Lui's kryptonite.

Driscoll suggests that because the characters in the novella "lack basic communication skills," they "are left to express themselves solely through [superficial] consumer fashion;" they are "closed-off" and "unwilling or unable" to engage those "outside their tribe."¹³² He is right, in a sense; there is indeed something tribal, even primitive, about the text, though this has less to do with the characters' communication skills and more to do with fighting to survive in the current moment. For these characters, tattoos and piercings are modes of living and dealing with life as it is, using the body itself as a way to protect oneself and to unite with others. Lui notices, for instance, that "everyone gets out of the way" whenever she is out with Ama, and the otherwise sleazy scouts keep their distance (21). Similarly, when she goes out with both Ama and Shiba, "[s]trangers move...out of our way as we walk...along the street" (61). In Tokyo, a crowded city in which people are in constant physical contact, an easy way to create personal space is to cultivate a socially suspect appearance. Modernist scholars who wrote on the city at the turn of the century saw it as a space "that created events and obstacles and forced fundamental changes in the new inhabitants' nervous systems so that they could process the ongoing work of the impact and intensities of the new infrastructure of the everyday."¹³³ We might argue something similar is at work in the minds of people today and that for Lui and her friends, the body, and the skin in particular, can be a barrier against the threat of what lurks within the everyday.

Body modification is about more than insulating oneself; it is also potentially about using the body to oppose contemporary norms. The primitive and the tribal can be antithetical to our

¹³² Driscoll, 183.

¹³³ Berlant (2011), 68.

notions of civility and progress. Within body modification circles, “modern primitivism” is considered a flight from the failings of the modern world by marking the body in suspect ways. Fakir Musafar is generally credited with inaugurating this movement in California in the 1960s and 70s in which he stressed that ritualized body modification—primarily piercings at this early stage but also encompassing aspects of tattooing and sadomasochistic sexuality—should engage political and colonial concerns, critiquing the progress of modern technology and the erosion of tradition and ritual while drawing attention to the exploitation of indigenous peoples and civilizations. For him, the pain of body modification affords spiritual and communal growth and healing, the desire for which springs from an instinctive “primal urge” to transform the body, an urge inherent in all people.¹³⁴ The volume of body modification enthusiasts who moonlight within the modern primitive movement has diluted its saliency somewhat; it is fashionable to retrofit one’s body modification projects with political and social allegiances, even within the subculture itself. Nevertheless, the philosophical underpinnings are useful in helping us theorize the pull of ritual practice within a highly mechanized and automated society.

In the above analysis of Sakurai Ami’s *Innocent World*, I argued that Sakurai’s use of incest is more deliberate than the shock value it provides. In that text, incest is part of an ongoing negotiation between prohibition, taboo, and obscenity meant to test the chains of contemporary Japanese society and push back at the adult world. As a political act, incest is an activity beyond the reach of patriarchal and social law. It is using the body in an obscene fashion to break the rules of normativity and create an unconfined subjective sexual experience; it is animalistic

¹³⁴ See Christian Kleese, “Modern Primitivism: Non-Mainstream Body Modification and Racialized Representation,” in *Body Modification*, ed. Mike Featherstone (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2000), 15-16; Bryan S. Turner, *Religion and Modern Society: Citizenship, Secularisation and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 94-96.

sexuality unbound by sociocultural hang-ups and prohibitions. In this sense, tattooing and sadomasochistic sex share an affinity with incest (at least in Sakurai's text), in so far as the body is forced into difficult and uncomfortable positions that deliberately agitate order and civility.

Driscoll holds that the sadomasochistic sex that takes place in the text is bound to other recreational and self-destructive hobbies characteristic of an "at risk" youth populace.¹³⁵ He sees Lui (and indeed Kanehara herself) as the poster child for "hip, alienated" youth who are into SM, body modification, "lots of casual sex" and not much else, and who could not care less about the dismal reality of "having no hope for a better tomorrow."¹³⁶ He contextualizes the sexual environment of *Snakes and Earrings* within a generational and ideological blind spot in which Lui's lack of sexual inhibitions corresponds with a pervasive reckless misunderstanding and overindulgence of sex in a world in which HIV/AIDS is a clear and present danger. Lui speaks of being with men with strange sexual fetishes, including one who "put a small glass bottle in [her], which he then tried to smash with a hammer. And there'd even been some real weirdos that got a kick out of poking [her] with needles" (37). She wants us to know, too, that she has "no qualms with spanking or anal [sex]" and that she has "had enemas, which were fine, and [has also] played around with toys" (37). Driscoll reads such revelations through a political lens in which recreational sex constitutes an exercise in individual freedom at odds with state interests, including the aging population ("Japan Shrink") and rates of STD transmission ("Japan Pink"¹³⁷), reflecting the libidinal priorities of young people.

¹³⁵ Driscoll, 185.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 183-185.

¹³⁷ Pink is a euphemism for Japan's sex industry.

His interpretation of the sexual slant of the novella seems partially based on his overall view of the text—that it portrays contemporary Tokyo as “a neoliberal utopia” in which young people roam wild.¹³⁸ But it also derives from Driscoll’s opinion of Kanehara herself, whom he sees as “a hybrid of fashion model and adult video actress” because of the way she looks—“bleached hair and eyebrows, Louis Vuitton bag, miniskirt, and heels.”¹³⁹ While we might disagree with his impression of Kanehara’s “look,” he does nevertheless bring up an important point: pornography, and even SM, has bled into the cultural fabric in ways not seen before. In other words, Kanehara’s novella, and apparently Kanehara herself, contribute to an ongoing negotiation between the everyday and the excess of sex of the contemporary moment evident in Japan, the US, and elsewhere. Fashion historian Valerie Steele has documented the infiltration of “the style, if not the spirit” of sadomasochism into women’s clothing, for instance.¹⁴⁰ “Corsets, bizarre shoes and boots, leather and rubber, and underwear as outer wear” are common elements in the influential collections of Dolce and Gabbana, Galliano, Anna Sui, Versace, and Vivienne Westwood.¹⁴¹ Consider, too, Alexander McQueen’s comment: “I’m not big on women looking naïve. There has to be a sinister aspect, whether it’s melancholy or sadomasochist.”¹⁴² It is important to note that most of the designers who incorporate SM into their fashion are (gay) men who cater directly to female clientele. When asked if he would ever try on one of his famous

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 184.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁴⁰ Valerie Steele, *Fetish, Fashion, Sex and Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Quoted in Andrew Bolton and Harold Koda, *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 80.

corsets, Jean-Paul Gaultier responded: “No. Oh, no. I am shy. That’s why I like the [women] who wear my clothes to be brave.”¹⁴³ Steele sees recent interest in tattoos and piercings (not to speak of cosmetic surgery¹⁴⁴) as an extension of the broader saturation of sadomasochism in women’s contemporary dress and body styles: male tattoo artists—like male fashion designers—decorating the female body, permanently, fitting it for a corset that cannot be removed. Hers is a minority view, corresponding with conservative feminist interpretations of body modification as deliberate acts of violence and oppression upon the female body that, like porn and SM, reaffirm women’s subjugated positions. Such arguments overlook and diminish one’s ability to find pleasure in pain and one’s agency in making the choice and taking the chance to do so. They seem to presume that women’s body modification projects, like women’s involvement in SM, are for male gratification or otherwise have no subversive potential.

Kanehara’s use of sadomasochistic sex is more complex and is not without its antecedents. Kôno deals with similar issues regularly in her fiction, such as in “Yôjigari” (Toddler Hunting, 1962), in which protagonist Akiko enjoys being beaten by her lover Sasaki. One evening, Akiko wants “to add a little variety to their usual routine.”¹⁴⁵ So she asks him to beat her with a vinyl washrope.

As he reached for it and started doubling it up, Akiko was already begging him to use the jagged metal hooks on her—they’d make a clicking sound.

¹⁴³ Quoted in Steele, 88.

¹⁴⁴ Some scholars argue that the accessibility of cosmetic surgery in many first-world countries speaks to the social anxiety over physical flaws, imperfections, or defects, which are becoming increasingly construed as “deformities” that need to be fixed. Deborah Covino, *Amending the Abject Body: Aesthetic Makeovers in Medicine and Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 42.

¹⁴⁵ Kôno Taeko, *Toddler Hunting and Other Stories*, trans. Lucy North (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1996), 62.

It depended on what they used, but they both enjoyed the sound things made whipped against her skin. The more excited the noises made them, the more they would have to suppress their cries. That night, however, Sasaki had been especially resourceful with that length of rope, and Akiko's screams smothered out the thrashing sound.¹⁴⁶

Their playtime is interrupted by a knock at the door and a curt reminder from the superintendent to keep the noise down. It is a timely interruption, because Akiko passes out and lies unconscious for nearly half an hour. Kôno approaches this theme again in "Rojô" (On the Road, 1964), but pushes it even further. Here, protagonist Tatsuko fantasizes about being murdered by her new husband Kanô:

Tatsuko often dreamed of death. Bound ever tighter by the rope, when her body would fall over with a thud, or when she felt her fingertips—the only part of her body that she could still move—grow cold behind her back, she felt as though she experienced the pleasure of death. ... She lost herself in dreaming of the pleasure of a death bestowed upon her by Kanô.¹⁴⁷

The imagery is jarring, as is the point the author is trying to make. When Kôno burst on the scene in the early 1960s with her stories of masochistic women and their sadistic lovers, nobody knew how to react. Critics have often wondered why Kôno's protagonists yearn to be beaten—or worse—by men. Middle-aged protagonists eschewing the family unit and domesticity in favor of chains and whips bespoke a number of concerns. Is the author a feminist, fighting for a space in which womanhood does not have to revolve around motherhood but can also include an active and "perverse" sex life? Is she anti-feminist, inflicting pain on her protagonists to pander to male fantasies of sexual domination? Or is she parodying social insistence on female submissiveness and self-loathing? Gretchen Jones succinctly summarizes these contending views, elucidating the ways in which Kôno's use of SM speaks to pressing issues facing women in Japan, particularly the primacy of motherhood (her protagonist are generally older women) and the subversion of

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in Bullock, 132.

desire through the anticipation of pain (rather than pain itself) as an expression of pleasure. While both Kôno and Kanai create graphic images in their texts, they avoid writing sex acts with similar explicitness. Kôno has a famous scene in which a young boy is strung up and disemboweled. And Kanai has one in which her young female narrator envisions herself as a rabbit whose entrails are yanked out by her father (see pg. 32). The reader must read between the lines to fill in the sexual aspects. Kanehara lays it all out, leaving nothing to the imagination. In a way, she writes her own version of pornography, which “attempts to unveil the sexualized body and present it in its *raw and carnal state*[.]”¹⁴⁸

As Lui’s tattoos take their final shape and as the hole in her tongue increases in size, Shiba becomes more sexually aggressive and domineering. While the first encounter, described above, is an enticing mixture of pleasure and pain, body modification and sex, what follows is an experience seemingly foreshadowing her death and, except for one mention of oral sex, hardly reads like a sex scene at all.

Shiba-san grabbed my hair and pulled it upward. My neck muscles twitched with the unexpected pressure. Shiba-san grabbed my chin and made look up.

“Want to suck it?”

I found myself nodding my head, as I didn’t feel like I could, or should say no to Shiba-san. I sat up and put my hand on his belt and he put his hands around my neck. He choked me so hard I thought he was going to kill me. (73)

Shortly after this, Lui becomes concerned that “time [is] running out” for her (82). She laments: “Simply put, there was just no light. My life and future were pitch black, and I couldn’t see anything at the end of the tunnel. It’s not as if I’d been expecting great things for myself before that, it’s just that now I could clearly imagine myself turning up dead in a gutter somewhere...” (82). Lui is convinced that either Ama or Shiba will kill her, and she is not really bothered by it.

¹⁴⁸ Rebecca Copeland, “Woman Uncovered: Pornography and Power in the Detective Fiction of Kirino Natsuo,” *Japan Forum* 16, no. 2 (2004): 264. Emphasis added.

Later, Lui confronts Shiba, asking if he has ever killed anybody. He replies that he has, and seeing Lui in so much misery at his revelation, is turned on and demands sex.

He unbuckled his belt, then picked me up and placed me on the bed. My crotch responded to his cold stare—like a weird sexual version of one of Pavlov’s dogs. Within seconds it felt like his fingers and penis were everywhere. Poking me, prodding me, making me gasp and grimace with pain and with pleasure. I felt as if his fingers were getting rougher each and every time we had sex. It was probably his passion, I thought, but if he continued like this, then one day he would end up killing me. (89-90)

Lui still responds to his touch in an erotic manner, but her response is increasingly cautious and guarded. Here, too, there is very little sex in the sex scene. But interestingly, after they finish, Shiba casually asks Lui, “Why don’t you marry me?” (90). Domesticity is forced in from the most unlikely of sources—Shiba, who is seemingly the most savage and “primitive” of the text’s major players. Indeed, after their exchange Lui goes home to wait for Ama. But he never comes home. Soon his body is discovered by the police, badly mutilated and sexually defaced. The police ask Lui to identify the body after it is recovered.

I almost fainted when I saw the photographs of how they’d found him. A weblike pattern was carved into his chest with a knife, and he had cigarette burns all over his body. All his nails had been pulled off, and something that looked like an incense stick was sticking out of the tip of his penis. His short hair had been torn out in places, and his scalp was all ripped and bloody. ... *I’d never experienced so much pain and despair as I did at that moment right then.* (104) (Emphasis added)

Neither the reader nor Lui ever learn the identity of Ama’s murderer, but it is presumably Shiba.

Musk Ecstasy, the brand of incense found jammed into Ama’s penis, is sold at his tattoo shop.

In the italicized sentence above, we see that this is the worst pain of all for Lui. In a novella filled with pain—tattooing, piercing, choking, beating, etc.—Ama’s death is the climax, and it is the only pain from which Lui does not derive pleasure, because it is the only pain that is not physical. In spite of herself, she realizes that she “had probably been falling in love with him” (107). Elaine Scarry states that “pain is not ‘of’ or ‘for’ anything—it is itself alone,” This

novella both draws from and challenges her statement; here, pain is of and for pleasure, of and for life. It is only Ama's death that seems to be of and for itself, a selfish kind of pain that causes Lui to lose complete interest in body modification because "now there wasn't anyone to praise me for it" (111). And so with Ama gone, she stops stretching her tongue and has Shiba add eyes to the creatures on her back so that, citing a Chinese legend, they can fly away if they want. "I wasn't just giving life to my dragon and Kirin," Lui explains afterward, "I was giving it to myself" (118). Perhaps most tellingly, she says that "the pain went away immediately" (119).

Which is what Lui wanted all along. The pain of normativity, of her everyday life, is what compelled her to get a tattoo and tongue stud in the first place; it is what compelled her to turn to pain to feel alive again. But the pain of Ama's death is so intense that it liberates, and pushes Lui further into a new mode of living in which her tattoos are just that—tattoos—and her tongue nothing more than "[a] useless, empty hole surrounded by raw flesh that glistened with spittle" (119). Of course, Lui's tattoos still do mean *something*, particularly her dragon, which is now an homage to Ama. She says, "I didn't know exactly why I'd decided to get a tattoo in the first place anymore, but I knew that this one had meaning for me" (118). It is as though the intense emotional pain of Ama's death releases Lui from her need for physical pain.

Driscoll offers that "minus the vanguardist piercing and S/M themes, the larger plot is fairly banal for metropolitan Japanese[.]"¹⁴⁹ His statement is overdetermined, but he is right in implying that the narrative itself is ultimately sustained by a love triangle. Love triangles are a relatively common narrative trope—evident in modern and contemporary fiction alike—but what is important about the trope in Kanehara's text is its jarring resolution: Shiba murders his competition. Moreover, Lui hides the evidence linking Shiba to Ama's murder. She knows that

¹⁴⁹ Driscoll, 183.

the brand of incense stick found sticking out of Ama's penis is the same kind Shiba sells. So she tells Shiba she is "going shopping," and comes back with coconut incense, claiming that she has grown tired of musk (115-116). She also tells Shiba that she "like[s] long hair on guys," and convinces him to grow his hair out, which will cover a distinct tattoo on his head (116). She had acted in a similar manner after Ama killed a gangster on the street who tried to pick Lui up, thinking quick on her feet and demanding that he change the color of his hair and keep his tattoos covered. Her plan worked the first time, because the police never did catch Ama, and the reader is left to assume they won't catch Shiba, either. The night she goes out to buy incense, she and Shiba lay down together in bed. Lui says:

I...got into bed with him and lay next to him until he fell asleep, all the time replaying sickening scenes of him strangling Ama as he raped him. I imagined a whole range of different, sickening things, like Ama laughing through it all, or Shiba-san crying. If Shiba-san was really the murderer, he must have choked Ama so much harder than he ever choked me. (117)

What compels Lui to lie silently next to the man who viciously murdered her boyfriend? She tells herself that she is confident "he wouldn't be able to carry on violating me like he had. And I knew he would take care of me. That everything would be alright. Even if Shiba-san had raped and killed Ama, it was somehow still alright" (118). She is taking a tremendous risk, both emotional and physical. Even so, she defends her choice: "I knew he would take care of me," Lui says (119).

Thus, there are overlapping stories of domesticity/civility and savagery here. The story may be "banal," but it is also shaped by a primitive "survival of the fittest" mentality in which the stronger, more masculine man gets the girl. The novella wraps up quickly after this, and the darkness that had enveloped her after Ama died gives way to sunny optimism. Literally. "I turned to the sun," Lui says at the very end, as she gets out of the bed she now shares with Shiba,

“and squinted into its unrelenting brightness” (120). The text is tricky, because it does not unfold according to our expectations or desires. But in trying to figure it all out, we might look to what Slavoj Žižek has said about the pain/pleasure register: “Pain and pleasure are not in themselves goals of activity but, rather, ... [are attempts to] regulate...the life process and promote...survival.”¹⁵⁰ This is what *Snakes and Earrings* is about as well; in the end, despite what the reader might think, and despite the sex and violence—or even because of it—Lui is doing her best at surviving and finding feeling in a post-affective world.



In these texts, it is not simply a rhetoric of recreational sex that is at work; it is sex between bodies that are marked and marginalized. Earlier I drew from Elizabeth Grosz, who conceptualizes the greatest and most fulfilling sexual experiences as those that are taboo and subversive. Chantal Nadeau goes further, arguing that certain sexual acts “tease...the established norms of domesticity[.]”¹⁵¹ In Sakurai and Kanehara’s texts, we have seen the ways in which teenage girls behaving badly go beyond “teasing” domesticity. They thwart, subvert, and destroy it. What is most upsetting, however, is what Nadeau calls “the individual quest for pleasure” that is at the heart of these works.¹⁵² It is not necessarily and strictly sexual pleasure—though that is, of course, the predominant medium of expression. Both Ami and Lui end up finding a greater transcendental pleasure than that which sexual contact offers. It is pleasure that allows both

¹⁵⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2006), 230.

¹⁵¹ Chantal Nadeau, “Girls on a Wired Screen: Cavani’s Cinema and Lesbian S/M,” in *Sexy Bodies: Strange Carnalities of Feminism*, ed. Elizabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn (New York: Routledge, 1995), 215.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 216

women to find their footing in a rocky sociocultural terrain. And it is a message that courses through all of the works analyzed in this dissertation: how women find happiness when their bodies do not belong to them.

The message is easy to lose in these two texts in light of all the sensationalistic sex. In the Introduction, I offered that Japanese women writers and others in creative avenues turn so frequently to sex because of a historical legacy that has not allowed them to do so. Expressions of sex and sexuality have been ways to challenge the status quo and gender ideologies. An important question to ask, though, is that with the prevalence of sex in contemporary society and an active discourse that continues to tap into it, are women writers such as Sakurai and Kanehara still subverting social expectation or playing into it? Are they part of a hegemony that continues to portray women as sex objects? I posit that these authors are doing both. As writers of popular fiction, they are writing popular elements (sex, violence, sensationalism), but do so in an overly determined fashion. Sex is not just sex in these works. It is beyond the realm of comfort. But we also need to keep in mind that these protagonists are still teenagers. I have discussed the ways in which these works contribute to a discourse and salvaging of sexuality, but the fact remains that Ami and Lui are both teenagers—seventeen and nineteen years old. Are they old enough to *have* a sexuality that needs reclaiming? The protagonists of Kôno's works are middle-aged, by contrast, and have grown up in a society in which their sexuality is not their own; in other words, by the time they reach middle-age, they want it back. Even so, despite their ages, Ami and Lui have experienced some of the worst aspects of patriarchy already. Part of my dissertation is devoted to exploring trauma at the private, individual level, and the ways in which social ordinances regarding women's bodies foster an environment that is traumatic. We can read Ami and Lui's experiences with men as part of their conditioning to exist as presupposed sexual

objects. Thus the texts are about how they are active participants in their own sexual destinies as well as how they find outlets for their own pleasure that is not limited to the bodily sensations that accompany sex.



In Chapter Three, we leave behind texts informed in aesthetics of obscenity and turn our attention to two narratives fully invested in the topos of thin and the fetishization of hunger. The authors I follow in the following chapter write of food and eating or starving, yet they do not write of hunger, because in an era of surfeit, their protagonists *are not* hungry—at least not in the usual sense. The texts bring to light the complexities and interwovenness of the nature of hunger and of the importance of being thin in contemporary Japan.

CHAPTER THREE: Abjection: Writing Size Zero

[The fashion industry] wanted models that looked like junkies...The more skinny and f—ed up you look, the more everyone thinks you're fabulous.

--Zoe Fleishauer (fashion model)¹

[Happiness] is quite incapable of being realized; all the institutions of the universe are opposed to it.

--Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*

HEROIN(E) CHIC

At about the same time Japan was experiencing its youth-driven “moral panic,” the United States was ensnared in its own version. The problem was not young women masquerading as prostitutes. Rather, important fashion houses were pushing a new look on their young consumers through the medium of high-powered runway models. “Heroin chic,” as the look was called, demanded matted hair, dark eyeliner, and, most importantly, a cultivated emaciation. The models, in *haute couture*, looked strung-out as they sashayed down the catwalk. President Bill Clinton was alarmed, for the rise of heroin chic coincided with the spread of heroin itself into upper- and middle-class suburbs.² In 1997 he lashed out at the designers behind the new trend, who in his mind promoted drug use: “The glorification of heroin is not creative, it’s destructive. It’s not beautiful[,] it is ugly. This is not about art, it’s about life and death. And glorifying death

¹ Quoted in Karen Schemer, “Rockers, Models and the New Allure of Heroin,” *Newsweek* 128, no. 9 (August 26, 1996): 51.

² Russil Durrant and Jo Thakker, *Substance Use and Abuse: Cultural and Historical Perspectives* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 87.

is not good for any society...As some of the [models] start to die now, it becomes obvious that...you do not need to glamorize addiction to sell clothes.”³

Rebecca Arnold has shown that Clinton’s words were “met with a mixed response from the fashion world”—some claimed that the heroin look was already over by the time the President caught on; others justified the look by saying that contemporary fashion was trying to portray “young people’s lives more honestly” than it had in the past through emphasis on airbrushed beauty.⁴ Regardless, the appeal of waifish models such as Kate Moss and Jamie King was the death knell for the “health and strength” look “that had characterized [the 1970s and] much of the 1980s.” Indeed, Arnold says that “sex, death, and ambiguity are the key figures of our times.”⁵ And while Maggie Wykes and Barrie Gunter suggest that strength was desirable in the 1980s as an embodied response to the AIDS “panic,”⁶ the topos of thin had already been making headway into the popular consciousness well before then; Twiggy’s “mascara-spiked stare and long, spindly legs,” and adolescent-like physique defined fashion in the 1960s.⁷ Moss, then, accentuated and popularized a trend several decades in the making.⁸

³ Quoted in Rebecca Arnold, *Fashion, Desire, and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the 20th Century* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 48.

⁴ Rebecca Arnold, *Fashion, Desire, and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the 20th Century* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 48, 52.

⁵ Rebecca Arnold, “Heroin Chic,” *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 3, no. 3 (Sept., 1999): 285.

⁶ Maggie Wykes and Barrie Gunter, *The Media and Body Image: If Looks Could Kill* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 65.

⁷ Susan Bordo, “Hunger as Ideology,” in *Feminism and Pedagogies of Everyday Life*, ed. Carmen Luke (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 119.

⁸ While Twiggy popularized the look for the masses, other women cultivated a thin, bird like physique even earlier. French singer Edith Piaf (1915-1963), whose stage name is a Parisian

Even when hollowed-out eyes and matted or tousled hair faded from the pages of fashion magazines in the 1990s as well as from the bodies of the young models who posed for them, their physiques remained stubbornly wan. Insiders may claim that “fashion...looks best on thin, young bodies,” but the resilience of the thin body on the runway speaks to more than just an ability to photograph well.⁹ Designer Jil Sander’s “glamorization of the cadaverous [and] starved look” aside,¹⁰ fashion’s fondness of this thin body taps into a culturally pervasive legacy that continues to code thinness and its permutations as the ideal body type for women. Feminist theorists contend that the fashion industry and its whims—from which men are generally immune—is implicated in the social coercion and control of women’s bodies. As we saw in Chapter Two, the “man-eater” is symbolically corpulent, the epitome of “uncontained desire, unrestrained hunger, uncontrolled impulses.”¹¹ The global branding and glorification of thinness, some feminists argue, has kept woman in check, providing the antidote for her unruly desire to consume, though cloaked in high-fashion clothing.¹²

But interestingly, the thin body initially became fashionable as a way to *reject* old norms of femininity, particularly the voluptuous “fat of wealth” represented by the old English

argot for sparrow, was as well known for her “waifish” physique as she is for her voice. See Carolyn Burke *No Regrets: The Life of Edith Piaf* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, Inc., 2011).

⁹ Abby Lillethun, “Part VIII: Fashion and the Body: Introduction,” in *The Fashion Reader*, 2nd ed. Linda Welters and Abby Lillethun (New York: Berg, 2011), 336.

¹⁰ Susan Bordo, *The Twilight Zone: The Hidden Life of Cultural Images from Plato to O.J.* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 108.

¹¹ Susan Bordo, “Reading the Slender,” in *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science*, ed. Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Sally Shuttleworth (New York: Routledge, 1990), 89.

¹² See Susan B. Kaiser, *Fashion and Cultural Studies* (New York: Berg, 2012), 21.

aristocracy and embodied in the curvy allure of icons Marilyn Monroe and Jayne Mansfield.¹³ It is true that fashion has typically been the province of the wealthy, and so it is a bit of a misnomer to say that thinness *made* fashion accessible. This is what it did, however. In the 1960s wealthy “Jet Setters” made it cool to be thin “horsey ectomorphs;”¹⁴ and while not everybody could travel the world the way thin and affluent young people did, *everybody* had the potential to be thin. Thinness was accessible fashion, and Susie Orbach sums up the cultural capital of the look this way: “...thinness signified a freedom, one which increasing numbers of people from all class backgrounds could take up. It was a break with the past and seemed to offer the possibility of transcendence of class itself.”¹⁵ When Twiggy, ninety-four pounds, and from a working-class background, became famous the connection between waist size and success seemed self-evident.

This was the beginning of the large-scale affective coding of thinness in the popular consciousness. In spite of the notion that the thin body would be the great socioeconomic equalizer in the fashion world, today consumer capitalism has pushed thinness away from the general populace and back into the realm of the wealth and leisure class. “[I]n United States culture, thinness is valued,” observes Carole Counihan:

“The dominant culture—manifest in advertising, fashion, and the media—projects a belief that thinness connotes control, power, wealth, competence, and success. Research has revealed that obesity for women varies directly with class status and ethnicity. Greater wealth and whiteness go along with thinness; poor Puerto Rican, Black, and Native American women have lower status and greater obesity rates than well-off Euro-

¹³ Susie Orbach, *Hunger Strike: The Anorectic's Struggle as a Metaphor for our Age* (London: Karnac, 1993), 54.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

American women. The standard of thinness upholds a class structure where men, whites, and the rich are superior to women, people of color, and the poor.¹⁶

Philosopher Susan Bordo concurs, suggesting that not only is thinness a wealthy, white woman's luxury, but that it is also a cornerstone of desirable and refined femininity. Generally speaking, men prefer thin women because of the implicit symbolism woven into their physiques: thinness and control of appetite is a demonstration of control of sexuality, emotions, and the desire for freedom—all of which are important factors in the economy of desirability.¹⁷

Bordo contends that within a patriarchal society, acute attention to one's body size is “a dominant element of the experience of being female in this culture.”¹⁸ She speaks specifically from a Western context (“this culture”), but her words resonate across the ocean as well. Laura Miller has identified countless diets in Japan including “the Video Diet, the Dumbbell Diet, the Walking Diet, the Bracelet or Earring Diet, the Sex Diet, the Bath Diet, the Reflexology Diet, the Massage Diet, the Mentholatum Diet, the Blood Type Diet, the Karaoke Diet, and the Manicure Diet,” most, if not all, of which are aimed at women.¹⁹ The number of diets available to the waist-conscious Japanese woman speaks to the inclusiveness of, or demand for, dieting itself—with so many options, everybody can, and should, do it! Miller's work on Japan's beauty industry is important and timely, as she bridges the gap between beauty regimes that have been

¹⁶ Carole M. Counihan, “Introduction—Food and Gender: Identity and Power,” in *Food and Gender: Identity and Power*, ed. Carole M. Counihan and Steven L. Kaplan (New York: Routledge, 1998), 8.

¹⁷ Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, 10th ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 171.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁹ Laura Miller, *Beauty Up: Exploring Contemporary Japanese Body Aesthetics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 165.

thought to be supposedly different. Studies have shown, in fact, that Japanese women are as concerned with their weight as Western women are, if not more so. “A quarter-century ago,” writes Blaine Harden for the *Washington Post*, “[Japanese women] were twice as likely to be thin as overweight; now they are four times more likely to be thin.”²⁰

Pathological thinness has bred unforeseen consequences on both sides of the ocean. It has been said that eating disorders are plagues of the Western mind,²¹ and that the infiltration of these disorders into non-Western arenas is the result of proximity to Western ideals of beauty.²² There has been a presumption in the West that what we think of as eating disorders—namely anorexia and bulimia—do not afflict the Japanese (or non-Westerners in general). In her study of Japan’s beauty industry, for example, Miller candidly admits that she once insisted to her students “that Japan was free of wretched implant foolishness and widespread anorexia,” and that Japanese women were exempt from the “body problem” that haunts Western women.²³ Miller cannot really be blamed for having thought as she did, for the notion that “Westernization” was/is to blame for many Japanese (and Asian) women’s body anxieties is relatively commonplace among scholars the world over. “As many Asian countries become Westernized and infused with

²⁰ Blaine Harden, “Big in Japan? Fat Chance for Nation’s Young Women, Obsessed with Being Skinny,” *Washington Post Foreign Services*, March 7, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/04/AR2010030401436.html> (November 9, 2012).

²¹ “The American disease spreads eastward,” laments Naomi Wolf. Naomi Wolf, “Hunger,” in *Feminist Perspectives on Eating Disorders*, ed. Patricia Fallon, Melanie A. Katzman, and Susan C. Wooley (New York: The Guilford Press, 1994), 94.

²² Aya Nishizono-Maher, “Eating Disorders in Japan: Finding the Right Context,” *Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences* 52 (1998) (Suppl): 320.

²³ Miller, 19.

the Western aesthetic of a tall, thin, lean body, a virtual tsunami of eating disorders has swamped Asian countries,” commented Eunice Park a decade ago.²⁴

It is true that Japan is experiencing an “unprecedented attention to thinness *for women*” today, but it would be unwise to presume that Western fashion models are solely to blame for the rise of eating disorders in recent years.²⁵ Indeed, we should disabuse ourselves of the presumption that Japanese women are now thinner than ever *because* of Western influence. The “tall, thin, lean body” is not a Western import, at least not in recent years. It represents a shift in body aesthetics that began in the 1920s and encompasses changes in beauty ideology and diet,²⁶ and is even reflected in the literature and art of the time.²⁷ Nevertheless, both Park and Miller

²⁴ Eunice Park, “Starving in Silence,” *Asian Week*, June 15-21, 2000, http://www.asianweek.com/2000_06_15/feature.html (October 10, 2012).

²⁵ Laura Spielvogel, *Working Out in Japan: Shaping the Body in Tokyo Fitness Clubs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 186. Emphasis in original.

²⁶ Miller, 22.

²⁷ In Tanizaki Jun’ichiro’s (1886-1965) novel *Chijin no ai* (A Fools Love, 1922; trans. Naomi 1985), for example, protagonist Jôji describes his love interest Naomi as follows: “In fact, [she] resembled the motion-picture actress Mary Pickford: there was definitely something Western about her appearance. This isn’t just my biased view. . . . And it’s not only her face—even her body has a distinct Western look when she’s naked” (4). Elsewhere in the novel, Jôji takes Naomi (whose name even has a Western flare) to the beach, going into rich detail about her body:

When she appeared on the beach at Yuigahama, wearing the dark green cap and bathing suit that we’d bought on the Ginza the evening before, I rejoiced at the beautiful proportions of her limbs. . . . [A] striking characteristic of Naomi’s frame was that her trunk was short and her legs long, so that from a distance she looked much taller than she was. Her short trunk tapered to a wonderfully slim waist, then swelled into richly feminine hips. . . . In sum, her shoulders were powerful and brimming with youth and beauty. When I surreptitiously compared her with the other girls on the beach, it seemed to me that none of them had her combination of healthy shoulders and graceful neck. (29-30).

Here, we get glimpses of the beginnings of the tall and lean body of which Park speaks, a body that was cultivated in Japan due, perhaps, to the influence of Western movie stars such as Pickford, and also and more importantly to the introduction of physical fitness into girls’

held views that were shaped by the notion that eating disorders were/are culture-specific and “spread” like other illnesses; anorexia is contagious, and even fashionable.²⁸ To be sure, because the term anorexia was developed in the West to account for the eating habits of Western women it has a certain degree of cultural-specificity; anorexia was and to a large extent remains the province of young upper-middle class white women.²⁹ This does not mean that other cultures or

secondary education (which coincided with the government’s push to strengthen the body politic for military reasons) and the dominance of Japan’s first female sports star, Kinue Hitomi, at international track and field events from 1926-1929. Around the same time, Shiseido cosmetics commissioned artist Takehisa Yumeji (1884-1934) to paint an advertisement for their new cosmetics line. He painted thin, wan women whose “sloping shoulders and small breasts...symbolized a skin without depth.” Takehisa’s women reflected an anxiety over the nation’s modern turn, an anxiety that would pass by the late 1920s when women were often depicted in a more confident manner. Citations from Jun’ichirō Tanizaki, *Naomi*, trans. Anthony H. Chambers (New York: Tuttle Publishing, 1985); Maeda Ai, “Tokyo 1925,” *Gendai shisō* [Contemporary Thought] 7, no. 8 (June 1979): 72.

²⁸ I mean that anorexia is fashionable in two ways. Richard Gordon argues that “during the late 1970s and early 1980s anorexia nervosa was widely publicized, glamorized, and to some extent romanticized” by popular media as a disease of the privileged class. Some estimate that up to thirty percent of diagnosed anorectics have what Hilde Bruch calls “me too” anorexia. For scholars, anorexia is a hip thing to study given its “double exoticism” as both social and medical disorder. Furthermore, for scholars with little training in medicine, anorexia is an accessible illness. Megan Warin, *Abject Relations: Everyday Worlds of Anorexia* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 192, n. 10; Joan Jacobs Brumberg, “From Psychiatric Syndrome to ‘Communicable Disease: The Case of Anorexia Nervosa,” in *Framing Disease: Studies in Cultural History*, ed. Charles Ernest Rosenberg and Janet Lynne Golden (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 138.

²⁹ Coined in 1873 by physician Sir William Gull to explain food refusal—*anorexia*—for what he felt were psychological reasons—*nervosa*—, anorexia emerged amidst the large-scale medicalization of European society that took place from the 17th century, in line with the rise of the insane and the asylums in which to house them. Anorexia, however, was by nature exempt from associations with insanity, for it was a label applied to wealthy girls who could afford to be treated at home, confined to the bed rather than the cell where they could recuperate. See Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Fasting Girls: The History of Anorexia Nervosa* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1988), 123. Interestingly, however, body image was not widely considered to be a contributing factor of anorexia until the 1960s, “the same decade in which the ideal of the thin female body significantly increased its hold in contemporary Western culture.” Helen Mason, *The Thin Woman: Feminism, Post-structuralism and the Social Psychology of Anorexia Nervosa* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 93.

ethnicities are excluded from the discussion, however, for aversion toward food and eating has been widely documented in the non-Western world as well and throughout history for reasons other than those most often associated with anorexia. As Joan Jacobs Brumberg cautions: “Just because a behavior occurs across cultures or time does not necessarily mean that it has the same cause” or diagnosis.³⁰ Thus, not only is it risky to equate someone’s “not-eating-ness” with anorexia, it is particularly inadvisable to do so when other sociocultural and –historical factors may be involved.

However, even if eating disorders are not discussed in conjunction with contemporary emphases on thinness and bodily perfection, it is hard to ignore the fact that thinness itself has become a global brand that exists confusingly within a paradigm of an obesity epidemic, and within a greater late-capitalist mentality that emphasizes consumerism. In Japan, as in the US, the topos of thin is at odds with and contradicts allegiance to consumer capitalism. As Bordo posits: “The slender body codes the tantalizing ideal of a well-managed self in which all is kept in order despite the contradictions of consumer culture” that demands the acquisition of any- and everything.³¹ The frustrations of this paradox become evident in the fiction I present here as the protagonists find their bodies increasingly out of bounds, in flux, and caught between a code of feminine restraint and a world of self-indulgence.

WRITING SIZE ZERO

In the following literary analyses, I discuss two works of fiction that provide haunting insight into lives governed by allegiance to the thin body and its myriad metaphors. In Matsumoto Yûko’s *Kyoshokushô no akenai yoake* (*The Excessive Overeater: An Endless Dawn*, 1991),

³⁰ Brumberg (1988), 5.

³¹ Bordo (2003), 201.

college student Tokiko struggles with binge eating, and seeks psychiatric help to understand why. Hasegawa Junko's *Kodoku no ii nari* (Prisoner of Solitude, 2006) concerns Mayuko, a thirty-five year old woman whose daily life revolves around violent episodes of bingeing and purging. Both texts address issues of hunger as a surrogate for sex and sexuality. But they do so from different angles. The former is explicitly concerned with eating disorder discourse, and its emphasis is on Yuiko's struggles to resolve psychological issues that drive her to binge, beginning with rocky relationships with boyfriends but eventually shifting to a focus on her absentee mother. *The Excessive Overeater*, written in 1991, addresses problems that were still just beginning to be recognized in Japan.³² By the time Hasegawa wrote *Prisoner of Solitude* in 2006, women struggling with their body image and eating disorders was an acknowledged facet of feminine subjective experience. Perhaps this is why the text is silent regarding Mayuko's bulimia—it is not a “disorder,” but part of life. Indeed, the narrative's focus is Mayuko's sex life and her failure to find a lasting relationship in contemporary Tokyo.

Central to both texts is a conscious evocation of the balance between giving in to hunger and cultivating an ethics of denial and erasure. Bulimia is an apt lens to consider this negotiation, as it embodies the cyclic nature of indulgence and denial. In *The Excessive Overeater*, although Tokiko does purge after eating, the text is primarily concerned with the consequences of her insatiable appetite—privately in terms of emotional familial anguish and publicly in terms of an inability to keep a boyfriend. *Prisoner of Solitude* exposes the reader to countless scenes in which Mayuko binges and then purges. Furthermore, much of the text takes place in the back

³² Matsumoto Hiroyuki suggests that between four and five percent of American female college students are bulimic. He goes on to state that until the mid 1960s there were almost no reports of bulimia in Japan. Matsumoto Hiroyuki, “Sesshoku shôgai to wa” [What is an Eating Disorder?], in *Taberarenai yamerarenai/Sessoku shôgai* [Unable to Eat, Unable to Stop: Eating Disorders], ed. Kuboki Tomifusa, Fuan Yoku-utsu, and Rinshiyô Kenkyûkai (Tokyo: Nihon Hyôronsha, 2002), 5.

alleys of seedy districts in urban Tokyo, and Mayuko's bouts of bulimia are reflected in the ways the city both takes her in and spits her out.

These texts share an abject quality, and the following analyses depart from an assumption that "writing size zero" demands attention to the ways in which femininity itself is an abjecting experience for many women. "[W]hy the concern over the body today," ask Arthur Kroker and Marilouise Kroker, "if not to emphasize the fact that the (natural) body in the postmodern condition has already disappeared, and what we experience as the body is only a fantastic simulacrum of body rhetorics?"³³ The texts analyzed in this dissertation are concerned with addressing the disappearance of the female body vis-à-vis ideologies that demand women play into their own subversion through a rhetoric of denial. The effect is a literary current in which women push back by embracing what I have called the obscene, the abject, and the traumatic. The texts in Chapter Two embrace obscenity by challenging the idea that women are not, or should not be, sexually feeling subjects. In the present chapter, *The Excessive Overeater* and *Prisoner of Solitude* are primed by abjection. As explained in the Introduction, all of these texts embrace the abject to some degree, in so far as the protagonists are all disobedient and break boundaries and borders between themselves and others. But abjection takes on a visceral and literal dimension in texts about eating disorders.

Julia Kristeva's work on abjection primarily centers on the maternal body, as one's first experience of abjection is separation from the mother.³⁴ Subjectivity is especially tenuous for

³³ Arthur Kroker and Marilouise Kroker, *Body Invaders: Sexuality and the Postmodern Condition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), 21-23.

³⁴ In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva's famous discourse on abjection, the corpse is held up as the pinnacle of the abject—namely, that which disrupts the boundaries/borders between subject and object, or self and other—and, more importantly, that which constitutes a feminine/female space. When we see a corpse, she holds, we are confronted with our own mortality; our living

women, then, for they are at once required to shed attachment to the maternal body in order to become autonomous subjects but simultaneously to identify with it. Given that in many patriarchal cultures and societies, including Japan, women's primary role is that of mother, Kristeva says that women are paradoxically required by the world around them to both abject and be subject to abjection of the maternal, that is, their own body.³⁵ Scholarship that links eating disorders to abjection typically suggests that although anorexia and bulimia are culturally-bound disorders that are fed by popular culture, for women they are also latently intended to prevent the body from maturing into a potentially maternal one. It is an evident theme in *The Excessive Overeater*, given that Tokiko's concerns over her body shift from the cultural importance of thinness through the patriarchal medium to her relationship with her mother.

My interest in the discursive construction of abjection in these texts has less to do with this particular psychoanalytic interpretation, and more to do with the ways in which Matsumoto and Hasegawa complicate and then distort contemporary ideologies of femininity. They do so by confronting us with the emotional and affective weight of the thin body and show us two

body (self) is placed along side our dead body (other); we are simultaneously alive and dead, as though we are having an out of body experience. Arguing from a psychoanalytic perspective, Kristeva contends that in psychosexual development, the abject represents the moment when one is able to distinguish oneself from one's mother, a crucial step for integration into the Symbolic Order (the societal laws, customs, and restrictions by which we live), which is defined by a rejection of the mother—more specifically the maternal body—in order to forge an independent subjectivity within the Symbolic Order. For Kristeva, the abject has feminist potential because it disrupts the social logic that is inherent to the masculine Symbolic Order, the realm of the father; in other words, abjection undermines the patriarchal logic of the social world. Thus the corpse, for example, which blurs the boundaries between life and death and self and other, does not follow the “normal” rules of the Symbolic Order and implicitly represents a feminine space beyond the reach of the Father. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 3-4.

³⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 364.

episodes—even case studies—of lives devoted to cultivating it. Kristeva contrasts the “clean and proper” with “violent, dark revolts of being” and that which is “shameful.”³⁶ In contemporary US culture, body size is tied closely to shame. In Marcia Millman’s *Such a Pretty Face: Being Fat in America* (1980), the following passage is illustrative and heartfelt:

I felt clumsy and huge. I felt that I would knock over furniture, bump into things, tip over chairs, not fit into VW’s, especially when people were trying to crowd into the backseat. I felt like I was taking over the whole room. ... I felt disgusting and like a slob. In the summer I felt hot and sweaty and I knew people saw my sweat as evidence that I was too fat.³⁷

Women share similar experiences in Japan, too. Matsuura Rieko captures this feeling in her short story “Himantai kyôfushô” (Fat Phobia, 1980), in which a slim college-aged woman is forced to room with three fat classmates. Her anxiety about the size of her roommates—captured in the title of the work itself—points to a larger cultural anxiety regarding body size in Japan.

Published at a time coinciding with a sharp increase in obesity in Japan (1980), the story provides interesting insight into social anxieties concerning the female body and foregrounds many of the contemporary pressures women face to be thin.³⁸ Protagonist Yuiko only abhors fat women. The narrator states:

Yuiko’s aversion to fat people was apparently an aversion to fat women. If you compare the gushing, corpulent fat of fat women, which seems to make fat women even fatter, to

³⁶ Kristeva, (1982), 1, 8.

³⁷ Quoted in Sandra Lee Bartky, “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power,” in *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*, ed. Diana Tietjens Meyers (New York: Routledge, 1997), 104.

³⁸ The Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare (Kôseiriodôshô) reports that during a thirty-year period from 1976 to 2006, the percentage of Japanese women classified as “too fat” [Body Mass Index of twenty five or above] reached an all-time high in 1982—twenty-three percent of the adult female population—before declining to twenty percent three years later. (The male corollary occurred in 2006.) Furugôri Tomoko, *Himan no keizaigaku* [The Politics of Fatness] (Tokyo: Kakukawagakugei Shuppan, 2010), 57.

the self-contained fat of fat men, it appeared to her that male fat was a personal issue while female fat was a public nuisance. Fat women stand out, and the more you try to ignore them the more conspicuous they become. By comparison, you might not even notice a fat man. ... To Yuiko, there were only two types of people: fat women and those who were not fat women.³⁹

Elsewhere in the text, we learn that she has a more detailed taxonomy: “Yuiko secretly categorized [women] in the following manner,” the narrator offers, “healthy ones were normal [*nômaru*], unhealthy ones were abnormal [*abunômaru*], and fat ones were flabnormal [*debu-nômaru*].”⁴⁰ These passages are striking because they reaffirm the notion that fatness as aberration applies only to women.

As a corollary, Bordo has shown that in the West “women are more obsessed with their bodies than men, less satisfied with them, and permitted less latitude with them by themselves, by men, and by the culture.”⁴¹ Men are allowed, even expected, to be less than perfect. In Japan, too, the thriving cosmetic and diet industries (or “diet culture”) are maintained by women looking to slim down and “beauty up” because of the pressures that echo the sociocultural landscape Bordo describes. Although recent studies have shown that men are not immune to the cultural images of masculinity and manhood that bombard them, and that eating disorders are no longer “for girls only,”⁴² fatness remains a highly gendered and highly political issue that often pits girl against girl, as evident in the excerpt above. Indeed, Dr. Hisako Watanabe of Keio

³⁹ Matsuura Rieko, “Himantai kyôfushô” [Fear of Fatness], in *Sôgi no hi* [The Day of the Funeral] by Matsuura Rieko (Tokyo: Kawade Shobô Shinsha, 1980), 199-200.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁴¹ Bordo (2003), 154.

⁴² Maruta Kôji, “Sesshoku-shôgai danseï no genin-ron” [On the Origin of Eating Disorders in Men], *Okinawa Daigaku jinbungaku-bu kiyô* [Okinawa University Department of Letters Bullitin] no. 5 (2004): 55. See also Ueno Chizuko, *Sayonara, gakkô-ka shakai* [Goodbye, Academic Society] (Tokyo: Tarô Jirôsha, 2002), 86.

University School of Medicine, who treats women with eating disorders, remarks, "There is a pervasive habit among women to monitor each other with a serious sharp eye to see what kind of slimness they have."⁴³

Women's bodies, then, are caught between two poles. The corpulent female body has been threatening to men, historically. But since the rise of thinness as a goal and the emergence of fatness as a stigma, the corpulent female body has become threatening and shameful to women. In terms of abjection, fatness appears to haunt female subjectivity, threatening to burst through. We see the fat body creep in countless times in both *The Obsessive Overeater* and *Prisoner of Solitude*. Both protagonists binge uncontrollably, giving in to desire and betraying the logic of the thin body. Moriko purges afterward; Tokiko just feels bad, disgusted with herself. Thus the affective coding of the body speaks to a discourse of abjection in which the female body is trapped.

Paradoxically, however, in order to achieve the desired "look" and body, the female body itself must be abjected. This is especially the case with bulimia. Marya Hornbacher puts it best: "There is nothing feminine, delicate, acclaimed, about sticking your fingers down your throat and spewing puke."⁴⁴ Yet Moriko does just that in the name of cultivating femininity, and in the process destroys herself emotionally and physically. Through her violent episodes of bingeing and purging, Moriko does away with herself; she erases herself as a subject. Tokiko, as an overeater, inverts the paradigm, surrendering to self-abjection. So much of contemporary femininity is dictated by subtraction and reduction: the shedding of pounds, the removing of

⁴³ Quoted in Harden.

⁴⁴ Marya Hornbacher, *Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998), 153.

body hair and wrinkles and grey hairs.⁴⁵ Through these activities, appropriately feminine subjects emerge. But for women who overeat and who gain weight, the self is hidden under flesh, buried and trapped. Thus through abjection, both protagonists erase themselves, but do so through polarized means.



Chieko Ariga noted in 1996 an increase in “literary works dealing with eating disorders.”⁴⁶ In the world of Japanese literature, a number of authors, most of whom are women,⁴⁷ have written of women struggling with weight and body image issues in contemporary Japan. Of the two texts I present here, Matsumoto’s stands out for explicitly evoking eating disorder discourse. She is vocal in drawing attention to what she considers to be a serious epidemic.⁴⁸ In the postscript to

⁴⁵ Not all feminine experiences are defined by subtraction. Hair extensions, press-on fingernails, false eyelashes, and breast augmentation, and the like suggest that *addition* is also a primer for femininity today.

⁴⁶ Chieko M. Ariga, “Text Versus Commentary: Struggles over the Cultural Meaning of ‘Woman,’” in *The Woman’s Hand: Gender and Theory in Japanese Women’s Writing*, ed. Paul Gordon Schalow and Janet A. Walker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 370.

⁴⁷ Indeed, we do not really find that men express anxieties over their bodies in recent Japanese fiction. Aside from modern author Mishima Yukiko (1925-1970), whose interest in the discourse of the body is well-documented, men have largely remained silent when addressing their own bodies. Scholars such as Sabine *Frühstück* have discussed constructions of masculinity and the male body from an anthropological standpoint, but intrigue into literary representations of the same have yet to take root.

⁴⁸ Until the 1940s, Japanese physicians and psychiatrists (and those in the US) followed the lead of German medical professionals in diagnosing cases of extreme emaciation as Simmond’s disease, which afflicts the pituitary gland. The term anorexia began appearing in Japanese medical journals in 1941, when one case was reported. By the late 1950s, physicians were treating patients in increasing numbers, emphasizing “family pathology” and fear of adulthood as the probable causes rather than failure of the body’s inner clockwork, as was customary with diagnoses of Simmond’s disease. Yoshimi Nogami, “Eating Disorders in Japan: A Review of the Literature,” *Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience* 51 (1997): 340-341.

her novel, the author expresses concern over the number of women caught in the grip of a culture that is a breeding ground for these disorders. She writes:

I believe that the way motherhood and female sexuality have been historically and culturally controlled, the political exploitation of female beauty, the lack of female self-esteem and self-importance in the sociopolitical arena, and the commercialization of female sexuality—all these realities permeate the environment, wherein these eating disorders can fester and flourish.⁴⁹

The author herself, as a woman in a male-dominated profession, is writing against much of the rhetoric she evokes in this passage. “I hear that the recipient of the Subaru Literary Award, Matsumoto Yûko, is an intimidating beauty, even more than [woman writer] Takagi Nobuko,” recalls Kawanishi Masakai, the author of the commentary that follows Matsumoto’s postscript, upon first hearing of her literary prowess. He further recalls the comments of the friend to whom he was speaking at the time: “If that’s true, then she’s got to be at the top of the literary world.”⁵⁰ One can assume that Matsumoto would be displeased by these chauvinistic comments. As an author and as a feminist, she has devoted a considerable amount of time to combating the inequalities many women in Japan face, tackling issues as diverse as female sexuality and sex crimes against women in her works. *The Excessive Overeater*, her first novel, sets the stage for much of what would follow, and it remains one of the most salient and explicit examples of the effects of eating disorders on young Japanese women today.

The covers of the hard and paperback versions of the novel are foreboding, and bring the reader into a world in which food is menacing and isolating (the text has not been translated into English). A pastel drawing of ice cream sundaes graces the former, which was published in 1988.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Ariga, 371; see also Matsumoto Yûko, *Kyoshokushô no akenai yoake* [The Excessive Overeater: An Endless Dawn] (Tokyo: Shûeisha, 1991), 172-173.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Ariga, 371; see also Kawanishi Masaki, “Kaisetsu” [Afterword],” in *Kyoshokushô no akenai yoake* [The Excessive Overeater: An Endless Dawn] by Matsumoto Yûko (Tokyo: Shûeisha, 1991), 176.

There are five desserts in total—three in the foreground, two loitering slightly behind—and they seem to be daring us to eat them. Yet there are no spoons. What looks like a strawberry on each dessert, is really a female figure cloaked in red sitting with arms clasped around her knees. The paperback version (1991) features a similarly somber pastel depiction of a white cake, three tiers tall. Each of the two lower layers are bejeweled with what appear to be strawberries, while in the middle of the top tier sits an indistinct female figure again clothed in red so that we mistake her for a strawberry at first. She is a bride with no groom, stuck alone at the top of a mountain of torment. The image is illustrative and foretells Tokiko’s feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Bordo notes that “[f]or women, the emotional comfort of self-feeding is rarely turned to in a state of pleasure and independence, but in despair, emptiness, loneliness, and desperation.”⁵¹ We see this logic at work in *The Excessive Overeater*, too, as the root of Tokiko’s bingeing—her “excessive overeating”—is the failure of two romantic relationships. When the novella opens, Tokiko is on her way to the hospital for a psychiatric evaluation “for the first time ever” so that she can be referred to a behavioral therapist.⁵² As she will eventually explain to Sasaki, the therapist to whom she will be referred, Tokiko’s weight has fluctuated wildly over the past six months: “I went from 47 kilograms to 40, fell in love, got my heart broken, buried myself in food, ...and now here I am at 60 kilograms” (22). True to Bordo’s words above, Tokiko gains weight when she finds herself alone and seemingly unwanted: food is represented as a surrogate or proxy, something to fill the emotional void of being alone, but something that betrays her by pushing her further from the thin ideal. Ashamed of her weight, she stops going out and spends

⁵¹ Bordo (2003), 126.

⁵² Matsumoto, 10. Page citations will hereafter occur in-text. Translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

her days sleeping rather than attending college classes. She wishes that she “had never been born” (10).

Tokiko reasons that if she can get her weight under control and slim down, she will be happy, “beautiful,” and “confident” (65). For her, thinness has a tantalizing aura, for the thin body is:

Cute, graceful, willowy-limbed, beautiful, pure. Intellectual, quick, modern, urban, chic, refined, smart (also in the brainy way). Eccentric, sickly (in the positive sense of a strange kind of beauty), ephemeral, polished, neurotic, androgynous, tragic, skeletal, beautifully dead, Sharon Tate. Vain, unhappy, gloomy, ennui, a beautiful girl, a fairy, Mia Farrow. (67)

Her choice of words is telling, for not only does she equate thinness with attractiveness (and intelligence), but they also remind us of the heroin chic look of the mid 1990s, “skeletal” and “beautifully dead” models toeing the line between life and death. Mia Farrow (around the same time as Twiggy), after all, helped make thin fashionable long before Kate Moss came along.⁵³ And Sharon Tate is dead. Thus Tokiko turns to therapy.

However, as though reaffirming male influence over the construction of the female body, both the doctor and the therapist are men, and both antagonize her. In our text, Tokiko is reminded of the size of her body and her level of attractiveness when she is at the hospital for her psychiatric referral. The male doctor turns his evaluation into an opportunity to objectify Tokiko sexually. Asked what has brought her in, she replies simply: “I eat too much (*kashoku*). I mean, I just eat and eat...and then I get all depressed and don’t feel like doing anything. But before, I used to not eat at all (*kyoshoku*)” (18). The doctor responds by instructing her: “Well, take your

⁵³ Marilyn Monroe’s death in 1962 helped contribute to the end of the Victorianesque hourglass model. As Graham McCann writes, Monroe’s body may have taken precedence over Monroe herself, such that the epitaph on her gravestone might as well read: “Here lies Marilyn Monroe—38-23-36.” Graham McCann, *Marilyn Monroe* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 171.

top off please” (18). Wondering why she would need to do so, Tokiko’s mind wanders: “I tried to remember what kind of underwear I put on today” (18).

The sexual innuendo of the scene is awkward, and Tokiko’s discomfort is compounded by the fact that she has worn three shirts today. She feels scrutinized as she struggles to wiggle out of them, and sweat begins to drip from her brow. Finally succeeding in stripping off her clothes, she stands exposed physically, even though she is seeking treatment for her psychological compulsion to eat. After looking her over, the doctor scribbles the following evaluation in his notebook, as narrated by Tokiko:

Eating disorders often afflict adolescent females, who...are driven by some psychological impulse to develop abnormal attitudes about eating. But I don’t suspect that she [He glanced at me here] has anything wrong with her, psychologically speaking. It could be a state of melancholia, but she isn’t depressed” (20). (Ellipsis in original.)

While he may be quick to dismiss the severity of Tokiko’s malaise, she tells the doctor that she lacks the motivation to go outside or to attend classes, and stays cooped up inside all day long with scant contact with friends (21). This revelation earns Tokiko a prescription for tranquilizers and sleeping pills, as well as her referral to a therapist named Sasaki.

She is not pleased to learn that the therapist, too, is a man because, as she explains, “Even at 60 kilograms I felt extremely self-conscious” (23, 25). Sasaki turns out to be cold, and methodical. In the text, his words are often represented solely in the hiragana script. Hers, on the other hand, are a more natural mixture of katakana, hiragana, and kanji. Visually, they are at odds with each other. In one scene, Tokiko tells him all she has eaten that day. She begins: “I ate a loaf of bread by gulping down instant coffee at the same time.” He summarizes her words: “A loaf of bread and instant coffee” (26). In the text, Tokiko’s words are as follows: 「食パン一斤を、インスタントコーヒーをがぶ飲みしながら食べて・・・。」. Sasaki’s, however, look like this: 「しょくぱんいっきんと、いんすたんとこおひい。」. The distance in his

language contradicts the extent to which Tokiko feels consumed by him physically. When she first meets him, for instance, she feels as though he is going to start rubbing his body against hers, reproducing the awkward moment she experienced at the hospital.

Despite her discomfort with him, Tokiko eventually begins discussing her bingeing problems, something she had never told anyone in much detail. Here is part of the conversation:

“And what did you eat after that?”

“After that...I devoured three tangerines and a five-pack of *daifuku mochi*.”

“Then did you throw up?”

“No.”

“So, until now you’ve never thrown up after binge eating?”

“No, never.” (26-27).

Sasaki is not sympathetic, and instead begins comparing her to another female patient of his:

“This girl, she, uh, she goes to your university and she’ll eat three packs of ramen noodles, two rice balls, a chocolate bar, and a roll cake. Then she’ll stick her fingers in her mouth to make herself throw up” (27). After their conversation, Tokiko admits: “That day, after I got home, for the first time I tried throwing up after I binged” (30). In other words, she learns from the therapist to become bulimic. The ways in which Sasaki is complicit in Tokiko’s bulimia illuminates the gendered nature of eating disorders. The pressures that many women feel to be thin arise from living under constant surveillance. Whereas women are often in competition with each other, scrutinizing each other’s bodies closely, Matsumoto asks us to think about men’s roles in the cultural obsession with women’s bodies.

Whereas Hasegawa, the author of *Prisoner of Solitude*, offers explicit details of the bingeing aspect of bulimia, as we will see, Matsumoto provides comparatively little. She is more concerned with what it means to consume/overeate in contemporary Japan in spite of social prescriptions demanding that women do just the opposite, just as she is more interested in exploring the struggles of a woman who is excluded from the economy of desire based solely on

her weight. We will see that Mayuko in *Prisoner of Solitude* cannot escape this economy; Tokiko cannot return to it. In Chapter Two, I offered that Ami and Lui were “girls gone wild” in the sense of lack of sexual inhibitions. Tokiko has gone wild in a different, though no less troubling, sense: she eats and eats, and stands out in an environment that encourages slimming down to the point of erasure.

Her appetite is troubling given what we know about the dangers of the devouring female. In Chapter Two we saw how the sexually ravenous woman has been construed as dangerous and insatiable. Here, too, the woman who eats feverishly is seen as abnormal and pathological, not only by herself but also by her male therapist, whose job is to “cure” her. Although the emphasis is on Tokiko’s bottomless stomach, she sees her appetite as an extension of her sexual appetite, likening her “never-satisfied stomach” to her “never-satisfied vagina” (32). Even so, there are no sex scenes in the novel. In an inversion of the texts analyzed in Chapter Two, in which there is a lot of sex but little to no eating, here there is a lot of eating but no sex. The two activities are often substitutes for each other.

Matsumoto, like the other authors I explore in this dissertation, devotes her attention to exposing the contradictory nature of woman’s place in modern Japanese society, and Tokiko’s appetite becomes a metaphor not only for sex, but also for the nature of consumption itself. For instance, toward the end of the narrative, she asks, “What is this thing called *eating*? [...]What’s it like when the body cries out in hunger, determined, courageous? I wish I knew” (91). As an overeater, Tokiko is driven by the constant need to consume even though,

I know nothing of starvation, and to me food is an ornament, a toy, and of course a commodity, but it is also entertainment, fashion, a hobby or study, a favorite theme in television and books; it is necessary but at the same time unnecessary. ... We have had this “gourmet boom” for quite some time. But our interest is not in food safety or food itself but in added values such as sophistication, coordination, and presentation. I studied the theory of proper eating and nutrition at school and memorized the textbook so

thoroughly that I can still remember all of the photographs in it. And yet I do not know how to put that theory into practice.⁵⁴

In short, Tokiko eats for a number of reasons, none of which are primary—to respond to hunger. In her analysis of the story, Saitô Minako illustrates that Tokiko’s tendency to binge is not all that surprising, for it is natural to overindulge when contemporary life promotes overindulgence.⁵⁵ Everywhere one turns, there is an over abundance of things to have.

It is relatively easy to see bulimia as an expression of the “double-bind” of consumer capitalism, as scholars have shown.⁵⁶ Tokiko comes face to face with the capitalist monolith after her initial therapy session with Sasaki, who recommends that Tokiko read something—“it doesn’t matter what” (42)—by Freud. Tokiko, an economics major, is well-read, citing canonical authors Dazai Osamu (1909-1948) and Mishima Yukio (1925-1970) several times in her narrative.⁵⁷ So we are not surprised to learn that she stops at a department store to pick up some reading material on her way home that day: Freud’s *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* and Rachel Baker’s *Sigmund Freud*. She also buys three cups of pudding, two sandwiches, ten cream puffs, and a box of sushi from the supermarket in the department store basement—“tonight’s ‘binge’,” in her words (43). In this scene, as in one earlier, Sasaki undermines Tokiko’s attempts to cure her bingeing; just as he planted the idea that she try vomiting, by

⁵⁴ Quoted in Tomoko Aoyama, *Reading Food in Modern Japanese Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008), 192-193; see also Matsumoto 53-54.

⁵⁵ Saitô Minako, “*Bungakuteki shôhingaku* [Literary Merchandise],” (Tokyo: Kinokuniya Shoten, 2004), 57.

⁵⁶ See Bordo (2003), 201; See also Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory* (New York: Garland, 1997), 25.

⁵⁷ Matsumoto is interested in the life of Dazai Osamu, having recently (2009) written a biographical novel from the perspective of Yamazaki Tomie, the woman with whom he committed double-suicide, entitled *Koi no hotaru: Yamazaki Tomie to Dazai Osamu* (Fireflies in Love: Yamazaki Tomie and Dazai Osamu).

sending her to the store to buy a book Sasaki also puts her face-to-face with enticing food that she cannot resist. Tokiko sees the irony herself, and with a bag full of groceries in one hand and a book that will theoretically help her put it down in the other, she sinks further into despair. Indeed, while she was optimistic on the train ride home, reading (devouring) Freud “page after page,” by the time she gets home she turns her attention to eating:

I arrive home and, without bothering to take off my coat or my scarf, begin unwrapping what I bought at the department store. I rip a sandwich out of its bag and stuff it in my mouth. It’s a ham and lettuce sandwich, though I suck it down so fast it hardly matters. As I do, my hand opens the paper box with the creampuffs inside. Before I’m finished chewing my sandwich I cram a creampuff in my mouth. Custard cream spills from my mouth and sticks to my cheek as powdered sugar falls like snow on my black coat. I don’t care, and jam creampuff after creampuff into my mouth. (59-60)

Tokiko’s obsession with consuming is evident here, as is the level to which her drive to consume as much as possible has consumed her. Speaking of the supermarket in the basement of the department store, she wonders, “What the hell is that [place]?” (45). She compares it to a “carnival,” and then to an “edible art museum” (45). As Tomoko Aoyama nicely summarizes:

“The Western cake section is likened to a jewelry exhibition, while Japanese sweets are compared to woodblock prints. Lunch boxes are miniature gardens, and sushi is colorful *nishikie* prints. European dishes are watercolors, and Chinese dishes are medieval paintings. Fresh vegetables are pop art, and fish are etchings.”⁵⁸

A carnival, following Bakhtin’s understanding of it, requires both spectacle and participation—it is a stageless drama where those watching are also those involved. Furthermore, for Bakhtin a carnival is an anti-authoritarian space where rules are overturned and hierarchies dissolved as bodies of different social strata intermingle. While the department store does invite the coming together of different people, and while consumer capitalism itself speaks to observation and

⁵⁸ Aoyama, 192.

involvement, for Tokiko the department store is an oppressive space that re-establishes the chains she is trying to break, and consumerism an empty yet vital activity that occurs there.

This world doesn't make sense to Tokiko; everything is backward. One eats not because one is hungry, but because it is a pastime, part of a larger culture of consuming. Tokiko speaks of "the meaninglessness" of eating; she speaks of the "meaninglessness" of turning on the television and the "meaninglessness" of staring at it (60). As Aoyama shows, for Tokiko "food and eating are, in this consumer-driven world, very far removed from" the world of "food novels," to borrow Saitô Minako's phrase, in which people are brought together at the dinner table in a communal moment of healing and indulgence.⁵⁹ Yoshimoto Banana's (b. 1964) *Kicchin* (1988; trans. Kitchen, 1993), for instance, touched a nerve with readers not least because of the memorable scene where the young protagonist, Mikage, curls up next to the humming refrigerator to fall asleep each night, cradled in its inviting vibration. Mikage says of the warm space of the kitchen:

When I'm dead worn out, in a reverie, I often think that when it comes time to die, I want to breathe my last in the kitchen. Whether it's cold and I'm all alone, or somebody's there and it's warm, I'll stare death fearlessly in the eye. If it's a kitchen, I'll think, "How good."⁶⁰

This is not the environment Matsumoto or Hasegawa portray. Eating is not fun; it is an imprisoning, meaningless compulsion. For these women, eating is not communal. In *Kitchen*, it is a communal act—and indeed creates community. For Tokiko, eating only underscores how lonely she is. She does not cook; she only consumes.

⁵⁹ Aoyama, 193.

⁶⁰ Banana Yoshimoto, *Kitchen*, trans. Megan Backus (New York: Grove Press, 1993), 4.



For a bulimic, this environment of consumption can be especially tenuous. Tokiko speaks early of the opulent department store supermarkets and later turns her attention to convenience stores—Seven-Eleven, for example, or Family Mart, or Lawson—all of which are “twenty-four hour-a-day midnight supermarkets” (87). In Japan convenience stores are never very far away; “estimates now say that more than 90% of Japanese citizens live just within a five-minute walk from a convenience store.”⁶¹ In fact, Tokiko explains that her nearest convenience store is just over 300 feet (100 meters) from her front door (88). This is a curse, for although she may “try and sneak past. . . . [she] cannot restrain [herself]” (88). Thus for Tokiko, convenience stores present a horrible “inconvenience” (88). She goes on to note that when she first began to binge, she was embarrassed to be seen at the same convenience store everyday, so she would alternate stores, going to Seven-Eleven one day, Lawson the next, and so on. In *Prisoner of Solitude*, to which we turn shortly, protagonist Mayuko is also lured by the convenience store’s siren’s call. And the opening pages of Akasaka Mari’s (b. 1964) Akutagawa Prize nominated *Baiborêtâ* (Vibrator, 1999) follow bulimic protagonist Rei as she wanders the isles of a convenience store, her shopping basket full of junk food and wine.

There is something about the convenience store that speaks to the precarious position of Tokiko and other literary protagonists who struggle with eating disorders. Even non-fiction memoirs of women with similar issues, particularly from the US, are filled with scenes of late-night binges fueled by convenience store food. Back in Japan, they are bastions of consumer capitalism that rose to prominence in the 1970s and 80s, concomitant to the emergence of young

⁶¹ Paul Gaspari, “Big Gulps and Big Business: Seven-Eleven Japan and the New Keiretsu,” in *Case Studies in Japanese Management*, ed. Parissa Haghirian and Philippe Gagnon (Singapore: World Scientific, 2011), 122.

women as Japan's primary domestic consumers and amidst its era of high economic growth.⁶² Even today, convenience stores have thrived in the doldrums of Japan's stagnant and "disaster-stricken domestic economy," and *The Japan Times* reports that they have women (and seniors) to thank for their continued success.⁶³ Convenience stores are symbols of a society and its people on the go; everything is ready-made, homogenous, affording anonymity and rapid consumption and repetition. In fact, as Tokiko waits with her basket of goods one night, she cannot resist scrutinizing the other customers in line: there is the young man with the comics and hamburger and coke; the older man with the rice dish and ham sandwich; the woman with the magazine, rice ball, apple juice, and shampoo; and the slightly chubby man in his thirties with a basket full of food. "I felt sad knowing that each of them is going home to eat alone," she says. But she, like the people in line, goes home to eat alone. They are a kind of un-community for her.

Ariga points out that Kawanishi (the author of the commentary that follows Matsumoto's text) dismisses Tokiko's experience and anguish by conflating it with the postmodern malaise: the protagonist feels alienated, he writes, which can be explained by

...the simple fact that the refrigerator in the kitchen of her apartment has become the one place where she can get relief [from the isolation of contemporary Japan]. In that space, *modern people* have become something like clowns on a stage performing only for themselves. This realization is the core element of the story.⁶⁴

⁶² Mika Takaoka, "Globalization of the Distribution System and the '1985 Shock' in Japan," in *Strategies Towards Globalization: European and Japanese Perspectives*, ed. Sung-Jo Park and Seigo Hirowatari (Berlin: Institute for East Asian Studies, Freie Universitaet Berlin, 2002), 285; Sharon Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," in *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan*, ed. Brian Moeran and Lisa Scov (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), 245.

⁶³ Kazuaki Nagata, "Convenience Store Chains Go with Flow, Growth," *The Japan Times*, May 8, 2012, http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2012/05/08/news/convenience-store-chains-go-with-flow-grow/#.Utxat_bna8U (November 3, 2012)

⁶⁴ Quoted in Ariga, 372; see also Kawanishi, 83

I would be remiss if I did not point out that the refrigerator does *not* offer Tokiko “relief,” unlike Mikage in Yoshimoto Banana’s *Kitchen*. In fact, the refrigerator is just the opposite—a source of misery:

Squatting in front of the refrigerator, with my hand pressed to its door, can you imagine the expression on my face as I gazed into it? I realize it now, but I don’t know what I look like when I binge. I scrutinize myself in the mirror a thousand times a day (I feel insecure if I don’t, you know?), but that face is different: I create it and can rebuild it. But when I’m not looking in the mirror, when I’m scouring the insides of my refrigerator—guided by its orange florescent light bulb—that expression on my face could be my true self. [...] (64-65)

Refrigerators can be interesting windows into people’s lives. Leslie Heywood offers the 1995 Hollywood film *Disclosure*, starring Michael Douglas and Demi Moore, as a telling example. Moore plays a high-powered career woman who keep only “oranges and champagne” in her refrigerator. Douglas plays a successful business man whose wife, meanwhile, keeps hers stocked full and her husband and children well-fed.⁶⁵ In Chapter Four, I discuss Hasegawa’s “The Unfertilized Egg,” whose middle-aged, single protagonist keeps only condiments in her refrigerator—she does not have anybody else to care for, so why not? For people with eating disorders, the refrigerator is a perpetual reminder of their struggles, a continually beckoning chamber of secrets. It betrays a sense of lack. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that Tokiko’s therapist sends her to Freud, who is often associated with lack. In fact, Freudian (and Lacanian) psychoanalysis defines female sexual subjectivity in terms of lack and absence of the phallus. Tokiko eats to fill the void, to make up for lack of a boyfriend (another kind of phallic lack), yet she does not cook. Because cooking teeters close to community and domesticity.

Although Kawanishi’s comments are misdirected, they are useful, especially regarding the role of the convenience store in modern Japan as a kind of symbol for postmodern isolation.

⁶⁵ Leslie Haywood, *Dedication to Hunger: The Anorexic Aesthetic in Modern Culture* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 14.

They were very successful enterprises during the economic bubble, offering salarymen away from home something quick and easy. Since the burst of the bubble, convenience stores remain staples of the untethered. In an age when families are not the tightly wound units they once were, convenience stores—with their availability and constantly stocked shelves—are “oases...for people without a mom around.”⁶⁶ They are symbols of the decline of the family and even of society.



Sasaki, Tokiko’s therapist, tries to make the root of her eating disorder about sex, sexuality, and men (about lack), but Tokiko is convinced it has to do with abandonment issues, having been abandoned by her mother when she was an infant. One session between the two is particularly revealing, so I will quote it at length. Sasaki begins:

“Today I’m going to ask you a series of questions. Feel free to answer them. If you would rather not, you may remain silent. Okay?”

“Yeah...okay.”

“Miss Sawada, did you first begin to diet when you started college? Or had you dieted before?”

“In middle-school.”

[. . .]

“Were you overweight then?”

“No, I was not overweight. I was a kid and I thought diets were cool—that’s about it.”

“What about afterwards?”

“Afterwards...As I explained before, I went on a diet when I started college and lost seven kilograms.”

“Was your period still regular after you lost weight?”

[. . .]

“No, it stopped pretty quickly.”

“And now?”

“It’s irregular.”

“And you don’t find that strange?”

“I don’t.”

⁶⁶ Gavin Hamilton Whitelaw, “Rice Ball Rivalries: Japanese Convenience Stores and the Appetite of Late Capitalism,” in *Fast Food/Slow Food: The Cultural Economy of the Global Food System*, ed. Richard Wilk (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2006), 137.

“I see.” [. . .] “So, why did you want to lose so much weight?”
 “Hmm, it’s not like I really remember, but I don’t think there was much of a reason per se. I had always just wanted to be as skinny as possible.”
 “So, you mentioned that you met someone after you lost weight. When, when was that? And what kind of relationship was it? If you’d rather not talk about this, either, don’t feel like you have to.”
 [. . .]
 “It was last July. But I don’t know what to say about what kind of relationship it was.”
 “Oh, well, well what kind of person was he?”
 “He was the older brother of a girl in high school that I was tutoring.”
 “Okay, then, when did your relationship end and why?”
 [. . .]
 “Well. . . well, we both actually had significant others already. And so we split up during summer vacation.”
 “You mean the both of you did? Haha, well, that’s summer love for you, no?” [. . .]
 “And what about your original guy?”
 “We went the whole summer without seeing each other and ended up breaking up in October.”
 “And you started bingeing in the fall, right. . .? Do you think that this might be why?”
 [. . .] “And was it about this time that you stopped feeling full after eating?”
 (36-40)

The conversation ends here, as awkward silence courses between patient and therapist. Tokiko is left wondering if Sasaki is wrong, however: “It might be that breaking up with those two guys [Ueda and Akira] did encourage my bingeing; there’s no denying that I was sad. But that’s certainly not the cause of my over eating” (41).

Late in the novel, she turns her attention to her mother. Tokiko was one-year-old when her mother left, and wonders why “she didn’t take [her] with her” (134). She reasons that what drove her to her boyfriend Ueda was the displaced love she never received from her mother, comfort she probably found in food as well (135). At this point in the text, she speaks at length of the end of their relationship. She describes meeting him after class and asking if he will let her watch him eat a hardboiled egg. Responding to his request for an explanation, she says: “Um. . . eggs are, I don’t know, beautiful. . . Humans can’t give birth to such beauty.” She goes on to tell him that in grade school she owned a bird that laid five eggs. Tokiko stole one and,

overcome by remorse for doing so, cracked it open and drank the insides—“it was like medicine” (147). The next day she began to menstruate. Ueda is hesitant and “unsupportive” after hearing this, and refuses to eat her egg. Tokiko convinces him to change his mind, however, but the egg falls on the floor and breaks. Tokiko says: “After that, my autumn of eating turned into a winter of bingeing...” (150).

Eggs are rich in symbolism. In certain instances, the breaking of eggs can be interpreted as an affront to maturity or even an apprehension toward motherhood, as we will see in my analysis of “The Unfertilized Egg.” In Kawakami Mieko’s *Chichi to ran* (Breasts and Eggs; 2007), the act of breaking eggs is cathartic for Makiko and her daughter Midoriko. In this novella, Makiko and her daughter have traveled from Osaka to Tokyo, where the forty-year old Makiko hopes to undergo breast augmentation surgery, much to the dismay of her daughter who cannot understand her mother’s concern with the size of her breasts. Midoriko, a sixth grader, meanwhile, is concerned about being the last of her classmates to get her period. Her anxiety has led her to refuse to speak for the past six months, choosing instead to communicate by writing in a notebook. Late in the novella, Makiko returns from a night out with her ex-husband. Midoriko confronts her and the two begin breaking raw eggs over themselves. The ritual “clears the air,” and Midoriko begins talking. The novella ends shortly thereafter, with the narrator, Makiko’s sister, examining her own breasts in the mirror.

In Matsumoto’s text, Tokiko’s apprehension is not about becoming *a* mother, but rather becoming *her own* mother, which catalyzes her weight struggles. She explains: “So I don’t end up like my mother, I’m throwing out my womb and my eggs. I’m going to stop menstruating. I’ll become an androgynous or sexless person” (153). The easiest way is to stop eating. Tokiko discovers the origins of her eating disorder here and goes on to discuss how ambivalent she feels

toward her mother. Seeking reconciliation, however, and reminding us a little of *Innocent World*, she writes her a letter asking to meet. Something odd happens at this point, though. When the final chapter opens, the narrative voice has shifted. Somebody is in Tokiko's bedroom, the omniscient narrator explains, reading page after page of, we learn later, the narrative we have just been reading. Then Tokiko's voice:

“Mom, what are you doing in here?! Cut it out!”

“Uh, no, see, I, I was just cleaning up a little.”

“Whatever. You rooted around in my things and read my novel without asking. That's so unfair.” [...]

“I'm sorry. It's just that I was worried about you; this novel sounds like a diary. And so I was curious and couldn't stop reading.”

“Don't be stupid. Of course it's not a diary. You don't mean that much to me. That's just a mother I cooked up in my imagination. It's all made up—every word. ... I hate you.”

(160-161)

Here we learn that while it is true that Tokiko's mother did in fact walk out when Tokiko was an infant, she came back when Tokiko was five years old. “I came back for you,” she implores (162). Tokiko is hostile toward her mother's remark and the two end up arguing until her mother storms out of the house. Tokiko is saddened, but uses the time to reflect on her novel: “I suppose I can end it here,” she says, continuing, “even though it isn't over, I just can't write anymore...an endless novel. Yes. That's it...It's complete in its incompleteness” (168-169). Tokiko, “probably about 65 kilograms now,” then grabs her wallet and heads out the door, “turning right and going straight—as always” (169). We can presume that she is headed for the convenience store. As far as the narrative is concerned, her mother never comes back. She does not need to come back, for Tokiko has the convenience store. For her, eating *is* a substitute, as Sasaki opines earlier in the novel. But it substitutes the mother, not a lover.

The lack of reconciliation is somewhat irksome. But the conclusion, though inconclusive, speaks to a stubborn isolation coursing through human relationships in contemporary Japan. If

we take her “novel” as representing her reality in some sense, then Tokiko finds neither romantic nor familial satisfaction. And food comes to the rescue—which is the important part. As Ariga demonstrates, throughout his commentary, Kawanishi negates Tokiko’s experiences as *gendered*, and instead presumes that they are problems all “modern people” face.⁶⁷ He says: “...we see in graphic clarity the insecurity, loneliness, and isolation that *modern people* live with in this world of excessively large civilizations, business and industries. ... [I]t is this very world of emptiness that is the living environment of *modern people* which provides the backdrop for *The Excessive Overeater*.”⁶⁸ That is true to a degree. But Matsumoto elucidates the ways in which eating and not eating factor into how women deal with their feelings of isolation on a private and public scale. Given that women’s lives are largely dictated by social and cultural contradictions and double-standards, perhaps Matsumoto is ultimately saying that there can be no happy ending—just like her novel.

In a novella predicated on woman’s lack, it appears that Tokiko has no control over her story. Sasaki, her therapist, attempts to inscribe her overeating with his own meaning. Her mother tries to derail her novella and stunt her creative enterprise. In a way, the novella becomes her offspring—the embryo of her imagination that takes the place of all of her discarded eggs. But just as her mother abandoned her, Tokiko abandons her creative work. The story, then, is not about what happened, but rather about what remains: which is not very much.

A QUIET CRISIS

Above, I argued that contemporary notions of femininity are based on an ethics of denial and an embodied nothingness exemplified in the success and residual influence of heroin chic.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Ariga, 371; see also Kawanishi 180.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* Ariga’s emphasis.

Hasegawa's *Prisoner of Solitude* engages this cultural narrative through the personal narrative of her thirty-five year old protagonist, Mayuko, who, since high school, has been meticulously counting calories and purging after she eats. Hasegawa's text is one of material abjection that ultimately critiques the abjecting climate of femininity today, in which women are often required to relinquish their flesh and even control of their own lives. As a bulimic, Mayuko is constantly purging (abjecting) herself of food. While she contends that doing so is the only way to manage a life that seems beyond her control, a way to "reset,"⁶⁹ it is also a habit that she is unable to break, and one which gets worse in times of emotional and physical crisis. Yet at the same time, Mayuko's inability to find a lasting relationship speaks to the ways in which she is being abjected from desirability.

The diegetic emphasis on purging and abjection is immediately apparent. In the opening pages, Mayuko is stumbling home drunk after a night drinking alone and thinking about "all of the men who have come and gone" (3); she stops to vomit. Memories of her former lover Hotaru (which means firefly) come flooding in. Mayuko waves those memories away, redirecting her attention to a nearby convenience store. In the previous section, the convenience store was analyzed in terms of women with eating disorders who see its anonymity and accessibility as a way to "feed" their disorders. This novel is no different. On her way home, Mayuko stops at the convenience store to buy groceries. "Hey, don't you want to come inside?" it beckons. She tries to resist but nevertheless "hurriedly counts her change" and marches inside (4). At home, Mayuko eats voraciously and then purges:

She goes into the bathroom, leaving the door open. Gently lowering herself to the toilet bowl, she forks her fingers into a peace sign and sticks them down her throat. She

⁶⁹ Hasegawa Junko, *Kodoku no ii nari* [Prisoner of Solitude] (Tokyo: Gentosha, 2006), 28. Textual citations will hereafter occur in-text. Translations are my own.

violently crinkles the space between her eyes as saliva begins to drip from her gaping mouth. After a while, after she has repeatedly jammed her fingers in her mouth, the depths of her stomach respond in undulations. Suddenly the dam breaks—yellow noodles, white noodles, brown noodles, they all come pouring out in the order she had taken them in,⁷⁰ making a *pachan-pachan* noise as the surface of the toilet water churns, taking on the color of seaweed. The popcorn still hasn't come up. She goes to the kitchen for a glass of water and hurries back to the bathroom. . . . With a hand on the bathroom wall, she cocks her head back and opens her mouth widely; her body trembles. She looks like someone who has been raped from behind in a public restroom or some other dank place. (7)

Mayuko feels better after purging (*yatto anshin shita*), but steps out on the ledge of her veranda, ready to “end it all” (8, 9). Only the mysterious figure of a woman dressed in white walking the street below gives her pause. They make eye contact and Mayuko steps back from the ledge, wondering about the woman's identity. Mayuko does not realize it at the time, but the woman is a manifestation of her imagination, an earlier version of herself whose white dress suggests a time in which Mayuko was untouched or “pure.” But now broken hearted, lonely, and twenty-years bulimic, Mayuko is stuck. The woman in white moves, covers ground. Mayuko can only watch.

The woman in white haunts Mayuko throughout, and the purity of her white dress is a continual reminder of Mayuko's own impurity and fallen status as a near-middle-aged woman with no romantic prospects. Not only is vomiting an unclean activity, but Mayuko is duped by a potential lover into working in the sex trade. A former writer, she initially joins a second-rate publishing company that puts out books on “animal sexuality.” On her first day, her supervisor Asai invites her to a hostess club called The HapBar under the pretense of “gathering data” for a new book on the sex industry in Japan. There, she meets a woman named Mako who asks Mayuko to dress up as an anime character and “play” with her (36). “Your boobs are so big,”

⁷⁰ This process, in which foods of a certain color are ingested and then taken account of upon expulsion, is known in common American parlance as “layering.”

Mako cries. “Can I touch them?” (37) Mayuko is hesitant and Mako immediately takes offense, accusing Mayuko of thinking that she is “dirty” (37).

This is the first of several outings orchestrated by Asai. Next he sends her to an SM club in Ikebukuro and then to a place called “The Masturbation Room” in Ôkubo, a seedy establishment geared toward male clientele looking to masturbate in front of attractive women who wear sexy attire and talk dirty from behind Plexiglas. A man named Gunjô manages The Masturbation Room, and he encourages Mayuko to try it out for “research purposes.” Although she initially resists, Mayuko nevertheless agrees and Gunjô gives her a red outfit and begins calling her “Ruby” (102). Mayuko returns the following day and the day after, eventually referring to herself as Ruby and dressing entirely in red even when she is not at the sex club. Mayuko develops romantic feelings for him, but Gunjô does not reciprocate, telling her instead that she is “stupid” to fall in love (158). She stops “working” at his club, and goes instead to a place where “she is not the oldest” woman—a club called Jukujo Deai Heya (MILF Parlor⁷¹) where men go to meet attractive older women. Mayuko abandons this place, too, and settles on street walking: the last scene of the novel is her proposition to a would-be john (203).

The reader is left with the sense that Mayuko has fallen through the cracks—or has been pushed out—of the economy of desire and feminine desirability. In the next chapter, I demonstrate that Japanese society does not have a place for women who are between youth and old age. At thirty-five and unmarried, Mayuko occupies this ambiguous space. The men she meets each have a hand in pushing her into a sexual role void of affect or romantic attachment. This point is underscored by the fact that Mayuko cannot rid herself of her desire to reunite with

⁷¹ MILF is a popular term that denotes a sexually attractive older woman.

Hotaru. They had been together for six years, and he was physically abusive. One day he took it too far:

The morning after all of the abuse, she couldn't move her neck. He had wrapped her bruised and battered body in all his 'affection,' and was more violent than usual. He stared at her mangled body through wet, black eyes. Mayuko, trapped in the depths of those eyes, had pleaded with him to stop. But he continued until he was done with her (19).

Following the pattern of many abusive couples, Hotaru apologized and showered her with affection while Mayuko ended up blaming herself for his actions: "He hit me because I did something wrong," she told herself (19). Nevertheless, afterward she pleaded with him to break up with her, and he finally relented. Although ultimately better off for having gotten away from him, Mayuko finds that she misses Hotaru. The majority of the novel, in fact, is predicated on her attempts to reconcile her residual feelings for him by burying them in other men who make things worse for her. Mayuko's feelings of worthlessness and isolation (*kodoku*) are compounded by the fact that when she finally gets Hotaru to meet her for coffee, she learns that he "has settled down," gotten married, and has a child. This revelation only reinforces the myth that all is her fault: Hotaru was indeed capable of settling down and being kind—just not with her.

At its core, the novel is critical of the systemic violence (emotional, physical, and psychological) to which many women are subjected and to which they subject themselves. In the excerpt above in which Mayuko purges, the narrator associates her experience with being raped. Elsewhere, Mayuko suggests that purging is "like having rough sex" because her body goes limp, she aches to her joints, and she can hardly stand up afterward (76-77). The violent sexual imagery here that overlays the violent process of purging disrupts the popular association of sex and eating as pleasurable experiences and corresponds to theoretical interpretations of bulimia. Saitô explains that in some Japanese "food novels," food is a metaphor for, or sublimation of,

sex.⁷² I have demonstrated elsewhere in this dissertation how her words ring true. Hasegawa, however, reassesses the affinity between the two activities, as bingeing, purging, and especially rape cross the line into violence. But hers is a controlled, meticulous violence Mayuko enacts on herself to offset other manifestations of physical violence that are out of her control.

In contrast to anorexia, which can quickly turn lethal, bulimia “can be [theorized] as an ongoing abuse of the body, a kind of sadistic alternation of gratification and deprivation of the body, in which food is rammed into the body in a frenzy and then violently removed, through a purge.”⁷³ Furthermore, it can be coded as “a [perverse] sexual frenzy, in which the climax is indefinitely postponed.”⁷⁴ Anna Motz interprets this sexual frenzy as a fantasy that is meant to counteract “feelings of worthlessness.”⁷⁵ Yet the continual denial of satisfaction is also a kind of violence that hardly seems like a fantasy at all. According to Motz, the punishment and self-harm endemic to bulimia is part of a larger expression of “female anger.”⁷⁶ Self-harm is not only the public display of inner turmoil; for many women, it is turning one’s public anger inward. Motz further posits that the importance of women’s appearances and “social respectability” has nurtured a climate in which women have been conditioned to stifle negative emotions and direct them toward themselves.⁷⁷

⁷² Saitô, 90.

⁷³ Anna Motz, *The Psychology of Female Violence: Crimes Against the Body* (Philadelphia, PA: Taylor & Francis Inc. 2001), 161.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 124.

In this environment, the physical body can be a great ally. “Women typically locate their sense of identity in their bodies,” Motz argues, “which is itself a reflection of the tremendous cultural emphasis placed on women’s bodies, and through their reproductive capacities. They express anger, contempt and shame by injuring their bodies, using the concrete experience of pain to symbolize psychological anguish.”⁷⁸ Hasegawa’s narrative traces Mayuko’s emotional scars through her physical ones. “You knew things were getting worse for Mayuko,” the narrator notes, “because she spent more nights completely absorbed in her bulimia” (88).

Hasegawa makes an even stronger comment on the violent nature of women’s subjectivities through Mayuko’s alter ego Ai, written with the character for indigo but also a homophone for “love,” who yearns to be abused by the various and anonymous men she has sex with throughout the novel. She first appears in Chapter Two, having propositioned a man for sex and taken him to a love hotel. “Are you going to be rough?” she asks him, to which he responds: “I’ll be gentle.” “Hurt me,” she replies. “I want you to hurt me” (16). The man is confused and reaches for his wallet, presuming she is a prostitute with a fetish. “I don’t want your money,” Ai curtly explains. She then shows him all of the bruises on her body: “Look, hydrangeas have bloomed on my arms” (17). Next she shows him the “blueberry-like” bite marks around her nipples, complements of a homeless man she had sex with last week (17). Ai makes periodic appearances, having sex in all of them—in Chapter 6 she has sex with a man behind a supermarket; in Chapter 18, with a middle school student in the bathroom of a luxury hotel; and so on. Her lack of emotional attachment to these men is matched only by Mayuko’s attachment to her boyfriends. And Ai’s desire to be hurt physically contradicts Mayuko’s attempts to free herself from the pain she lives with while simultaneously reminding us of the pain she inflicts on

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

herself. It also points to a theme that resonates with the other texts discussed in this dissertation: an inability to feel anything. The narrator explains, “No matter how many men abused her body, no matter how much semen it took in—it remained clean. She didn’t feel pain. That body, blue coursing through its veins, felt neither hot nor cold. Counting the blue bruises and scars—put there by men—reminded her that she was alive” (83-84).

Mayuko wakes in the mornings to find bruises on her body and cannot explain why. She sees a doctor for abdominal pain—probably due to years of self-induced vomiting. After he examines her, the doctor comments on the “injuries” her nipples have recently sustained (75). He does not prescribe medication, but rather simply instructs: “Ease up on the sex” (77). Her wounds do not heal and she goes back to see the doctor. This time he offers her antibiotics. But he also comments, “Seems you’re really getting around these days. Compared to your last exam, you’ve gotten worse. Keep it up and you won’t be able to have children” (90). Mayuko is put off by the doctor’s words, which seem to be as judgmental as they are cautionary: “How shameless of him,” she scoffs to herself (90). Nevertheless, she lingers on something he said: “Seems you’re really getting around these days.” She is confused: “Between my job and my dreams there may be some incidental cross-breeding,” she reasons, “but there’s no girl (*onna*) out there cleaner than I am” (91).⁷⁹

In Chapter One of this dissertation, the power dynamics of heterosexual SM were discussed in conjunction with Kanehara’s *Snakes and Earrings* as well as Kôno Taeko’s “Toddler Hunting.” In both texts, the female protagonists find pleasure in the pain administered by their respective lovers—or in the promise of pain, as articulated by Gretchen Jones in her study of masochism in Kôno’s work. Because of the ways in which SM potentially obfuscates

⁷⁹ Hasegawa often uses similar scientific vocabulary in her short story “Museiran” (The Unfertilized Egg), examined in the following chapter.

the relationship between gender and power, consent and coercion, and subject and object, Kanehara's Lui and Kôno's Akiko indirectly pose a threat to male hegemony and superiority. Hasegawa's deployment of sexual violence is trickier to pin down. While it is true that Ai demands to be hurt, Mayuko does not. In fact, she runs from pain, evident in her desire to break up with Hotaru after he became abusive. Moreover, Ai is never with the same man twice, and each leaves his mark on her. Indeed, it is hardly a coincidence that her name, Ai, connotes blue, further hinted at in the hue of her bruises and bite marks. These marks are a source of pride and the cornerstone of her identity—like tattoos (see Chapter Two), only not as permanent.

Mayuko, however, does not really have an identity. When we first meet Mayuko, she is nameless. The narrator calls her “the woman,” or *onna* in Japanese, a common and nondescript way to refer to a woman. She is anonymous, nobody, yet she is also sexualized. *Onna* carries a sexual undercurrent, particularly the term *ii onna*—or “good girl.” In Kawabata Yasunari's (1899-1972) *Yukiguni* (Snow Country, serialized 1935-1947) protagonist Shimamura refers a low-class and aging geisha named Komako as a “good kid” (*ii ko*), but at one point begins calling her a “good girl.”⁸⁰ Concomitant to this linguistic shift is Shimamura's growing interest in a younger and “purer” woman named Yôko. Komako becomes upset by Shimamura's words and begins crying, her awareness of her position as a lower-class geisha and Shimamura's status as her wealthy customer suddenly reaffirmed. She had been falling in love with him, but with this subtle change in address reality surfaces.

⁸⁰ In the English translation, *ii ko* and *ii onna* are translated by Edward Seidensticker as “good girl” and “good woman,” respectively. I find that in English “good woman” is stilted and lacking in sexual innuendo while “girl,” particularly when used in reference to a woman, can be disagreeable and condescending in the same way that *onna* can. See Edward G. Seidensticker, “Introduction,” in Yasunari Kawabata, *Snow Country*, trans. Edward G. Seidensticker (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1956), ix.

We could argue that to be nameless is to be empowered. “To lack a name is to belong to no one, that is, to belong to oneself,” claims Julia Epstein.⁸¹ The nameless narrator may be a blank slate, in charge of his or her destiny. This is not the case for Mayuko, though, whose very notion of self is contingent on the men in her life. When the narrator reveals her name at the end of Chapter One, we are told, “Her name is Mayuko. She turned thirty-five yesterday. ... [and] she is just an ordinary woman (*goku futsû no onna*)” (12). Here, Mayuko has been negated three times (“just,” “ordinary,” “woman”), reduced almost to nothing through the narrator’s choice of language.

Moreover, Mayuko eventually adopts the nickname, Ruby, that Gunjô gives her when she begins going to his sex club to gather data on the sex industry. Although she had only planned on going once, Gunjô promised her that “things will get interesting soon if you stick around” (121). When she arrives after work, the man at the front desk asks, “What was your name again?” “Uh...Ruby,” she responds. He looks her up and down and hands her a red satin sailor uniform, explaining, “You’re a plain one, aren’t you? Why don’t you wear this?” (121). She changes into the outfit and also changes into Ruby. She goes back to the club the next day as well, where she runs into Gunjô who tells her to “work hard” (124). “See you tomorrow,” he says smugly before sauntering off (124). “See you,” she says to herself, and dutifully shows up the next day (125).

After several days of going to Gunjô’s bar, Mayuko decides that she has enough material to write her article. So she stays home. But propelled by a desire to see him, Mayuko goes to her closet to get her red camisole (144-145). The camisole matches her red nail polish, red mules, and the red tint to her hair. To complete the look, she has a red cellphone and red underwear—“all red everything” (145). Her reasoning is surprisingly simple: “Gunjô said I look good in red”

⁸¹ Julia Epstein, *The Iron Pen: Frances Burney and the Politics of Women’s Writing* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 178.

(145). More than a desire to see Gunjô draws her to his club, however. It is a desire to be wanted by men. He had told her that she would be a “popular” addition to the club, and it turns out that he was not wrong, as men ask for her with increasing frequency (140). She tells herself, “See, they all want you now” (140).

Kanehara is critical of women for the kind of codependence Mayuko demonstrates here. According to Rin, the protagonist of Kanehara’s novel *Autofiction* (2006), this is just how women are: “The desire to be wanted by a man. The desire to get a man. Most females go into hysterics if either of these can’t be fulfilled or the fulfillment of either of these two desires is unbalanced. Their pussies get all irritable, restless. What is hysteria, after all? It’s a disease of the pussy.”⁸² Kanehara’s criticism may be unjustified, for, as Jane M. Ussher explains, women have been conditioned to find their sense of self in male companionship and affirmation:

The circulation of narrow, sexualized representations of ‘woman’—the fantasies of femininity found in the images of ‘woman’ aimed at and consumed by women and girls in fairy stories, romantic fiction, teenage magazines, soap opera and advertising imagery act...constantly to remind women that they [are] worthless without a man.”⁸³

Her observations draw our attention to a precarious position for many women who are compelled toward a prefigured manifestation of their own destinies.

Lauren Berlant similarly argues that this cache of images and representations constitute what she calls “women’s culture.” Berlant states:

⁸² Hitomi Kanehara, *Autofiction*, trans. David James Karashima (New York: Vintage, 2007), 16. In the original text, Kanehara uses the term *mesu*, which Karashima accurately translates as female. I have pointed it out here for the animalistic quality of the term, as though Kanehara is intimating at some kind of feminine biological drive to be wanted. Indeed, in the passage quoted, she juxtaposes *mesu* against the more human (and civilized) *otoko* when discussing men. See Kanehara Hitomi, *Ôtofikushon* (Tokyo: Shûeisha, 2006), 22-23.

⁸³ Jane M. Ussher, *Fantasies of Femininity: Reframing the Boundaries of Sex* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 352.

Women have long come to “women’s culture” to experience versions of personal life that are made up by other people claiming to derive their stories from other women’s lives, and who knows? [. . .] This presumption that there is a structure of relevancy, address, and absorption enables the consumers of “women’s culture” to feel that their emotional lives are already shared and have already been raised to a degree of general significance while remaining true to what is personal.⁸⁴

Identifying a handful of women-authored texts that seek to “skewer an open secret” and “hail . . . the wounded to testify, to judge, to yearn, and to think beyond the norms of sexual difference,” Berlant finds that women are largely repulsed by the promise of “women’s culture.”⁸⁵ Nevertheless, she continues, the whispered promises of “women’s culture” are hard to ignore.

Namely, romantic love is often the greatest promise and gravest let down within women’s culture. “Everyone knows,” Berlant says, that “women live for love, and love is the gift that keeps on taking.”⁸⁶ In her study, Berlant draws attention to the ways in which women have been conditioned to chase love at all costs, while similarly demonstrating that love itself has largely been coded as a female emotion in the popular consciousness. She has written elsewhere of the ways in which love functions as cultural “norm and institution.”⁸⁷ Conventions of romantic love compound the over-association of love itself as a female emotion, and *Prisoner of Solitude* is critical of the narrative. Certainly, Mayuko is perpetually heartbroken, and her attempts to alleviate her pain only amplify it:

⁸⁴ Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), ix.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Lauren Berlant, “Love (A Queer Feeling),” in *Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Tim Dean and Christopher Lane (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 439.

Hotaru, whom she loved before Gunjô; her old boyfriend; the men she was with before her old boyfriend—she recalled their faces. Surely, they were by now taking great care of the women they selected. Why would they recall their time with Mayuko? They wouldn't. Ah, nobody gives a damn about the one that got away, do they? Why couldn't [she] get anyone to love her? It's her own fault (jigyô jitoku). It's the same with vomiting. No matter who she's with, they don't even bite hard enough to get a taste before expelling her from their mouths. ... She seemed to have devoted her life to the love of men. (196)

Here, in the emphasized sentences, the names of these men take on the same ready-made, interchangeable aura of the convenience store food Mayuko buys. They satisfy momentarily but are of no lasting value. We get the sense, then, that when Mayuko steps into/onto the street in the novel's final scene, she has given up on love—a decidedly female-coded fantasy—and has instead devoted her body to propping up the male fantasy of woman as sexual play thing.

Ai's diegetic role portends and foreshadows Mayuko's collapse into this expression of male fantasy. She is on the fringes of Mayuko's consciousness for most of the novel, leaving only clues to her existence on Mayuko's body—the bruises, for instances, and at one point Mayuko wonders why she “smell[s] like cum” the morning after Ai had been out sleeping with men. But at the end of the novel, Mayuko and Ai fuse. Not only does Mayuko uncharacteristically wear purple (a combination of red and blue) when she walks a street in Shibuya that is famous for its love hotels, but the manner in which she propositions the man calls to mind the anonymity and emotional detachment with which Ai seeks men. “Hey, wanna have some fun,” she says first, “I'll blow you” (203).

Her words are brief, to the point, and a far cry from the overly formal language Mayuko uses earlier in the novel (called *keigo*), particularly toward men she does not know. When she first meets Gunjô, she greets him in highly ritualized and polite language, which she continues to use in his presence. “It was I who phoned,” she begins, as a way to break the ice (97). Mayuko continues: “This is the first time that my research has brought me alone to an establishment such

as this” (98). Gunjô asks if she would like some “hands on” experience. She is somewhat incredulous, wondering if he extends this invitation to “just any” reporter, and if any actually take him up on it (100). He mocks her rigid and formulaic language from earlier: “Well, now. There are certainly some that do, wouldn’t you say?” (100). One of the functions of *keigo* is to create and maintain distance between self and other. Laura Miller sees it as a mask or uniform. In her study of Japan’s “elevator girl,” a mainstay of many department stores in Japan, Miller notes that these girls are as well known for their voices as they were for their uniforms. Not only do they speak in shrill, rehearsed registers,⁸⁸ but they also use a cache of honorific greetings and announcements. Such “scripted encounters” are part of the job for these women, something worn with their compulsory hat, gloves, scarves, and blazers. Furthermore, the high, rigid “service voice” “discourages passengers from engaging in conversation by alerting them that the attendant is only available for speech related to her role as a formal spokesperson for the store.”⁸⁹ So when Mayuko/Ai uses more direct language in the passage above, she is linguistically allowing men access to her. But interestingly, the reader does not know how—or even if—the man responds to her proposition. In effect, Mayuko/Ai gets the last word, though it is an ambiguous one given the text’s emphasis on male validation for both Mayuko and Ai. *What if he ignores her? What if he turns her down?* The reader is left to wonder. Chances are slim that Mayuko/Ai’s proposition will go unrequited. She purposefully seeks out an introverted and

⁸⁸ She quotes from Nicholas Kristof, who characterizes the elevator girl voice thus: “The Voice is as fawning as her demeanor, as sweet as syrup, and as high as a dog whistle. Any higher, and it would shatter the crystal on the seventh floor.” Nicholas Kristof, quoted in Laura Miller, “Elevator Girls Moving in and Out of the Box,” in *Modern Girls on the Go: Gender, Mobility, and Labor in Japan*, ed. Alisa Freedman, Laura Miller, and Christine Yano (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 56.

⁸⁹ Laura Miller, “Elevator Girls Moving in and Out of the Box,” in *Modern Girls on the Go: Gender, Mobility, and Labor in Japan*, ed. Alisa Freedman, Laura Miller, and Christine Yano (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 56.

awkward looking man with a hunched back—a man who is “lonely” like she is, one who probably will not turn her down (203).

In this novel, Hasegawa is not offering an optimistic or flattering representation of male/female dynamics. Mayuko is continually spurned by men in terms of romantic attachment and emotional involvement. Ai, however, who just demands sex from men, is always obliged, and her requests to be hurt are never ignored. She has it easier than Mayuko does; while it is hard to find a man who will love her, it is easy to find one who will have sex with her. Indeed, even if the nameless man turns her down, another man will happen by soon enough. Both women hunger for men, but the one who hungers without affect ultimately wins out.

The role of men in the text, then, is a comment, then, on the affect-less shape of the world in which Mayuko lives, and maybe even a preference for such a world. Ai does not feel anything; only her injuries remind her that she is alive. Mayuko, we might say, is *tired of feeling*—she is tired of the hurt, isolation, pain of life and love. Because love has been coded as a feminine affective mode and way of living, Hasegawa seems to be suggesting that her protagonist is better off without it. As Berlant demonstrates, however, while women’s texts may be critical of the narrative of “women’s culture” (and there is no doubt that Hasegawa is displeased with it) they still maintain fidelity to the narrative itself. Such texts “tend to foreground a view of power that blames flawed men and bad ideologies for women’s intimate suffering” but still demand that women participate and inevitably desire those same men and ideologies.⁹⁰ Elsewhere in her *oeuvre*, Hasegawa shows an affinity for female protagonists who are able to negotiate a place for themselves outside of the normative rubric of female affect, such as in her short story “The Unfertilized Egg,” which is analyzed in the next chapter. In *Prisoner of*

⁹⁰ Berlant (2008), 2.

Solitude, she is less hopeful, because even in an affectless world of sex with strangers her protagonist is still, in the end, hungry for the momentary satisfaction of a man.

Mayuko is consumed by her own desire to feed. She does not know why she eats; she does not know why she chases men. For her, and because of the lack of introspection on her part, these activities are meaningless. In *The Excessive Overeater*, Tokiko spoke of the inherent emptiness in eating. One eats simply to eat, she observed. For Mayuko, who eats and then purges, eating is truly an empty, cyclical gesture. And the taking in of men (sexually and even emotionally), as with food, is similarly unfulfilling. Yet she is driven to do these things, and here, I think, is one of Hasegawa's main points: gestures that were once meaningful—such as eating or sexual intercourse—have been stripped down to mechanical processes. Hasegawa is nodding toward a nihilistic view of contemporary Japan, I find, and specifically women's place within it. She is saying that everybody is eating, but nobody is full: “[T]here are people who consider their own lives meaningless,” writes Viktor Frankl, “who can see no meaning in their personal experience and therefore think it valueless.”⁹¹ This “living nihilism” speaks to the breakdown of previously symbolic acts that gave life meaning. David Holbrook finds that Frankl's words apply aptly to the dehumanization of sexuality, citing Marshall McLuhan and George Leonard's caution that “sex as we now think of it may soon be dead...the foldout playmate in *Playboy* magazine...signals the death throes of a departing age.”⁹² They said this in 1967, and since then

⁹¹ Victor Emil Frankl. *From Death-camp to Existentialism* (New York: Beacon Press, 1959), 109.

⁹² Quoted in David Holbrook, *Sex and Dehumanization* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998), 64. See also Marshall McLuhan and George Leonard, “‘The Future of Sex,’ *Look Magazine* (1967),” in *Sexing the Maple: A Canadian Sourcebook*, ed. Richard Cavell and Peter Dickinson (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 2006), 103-112.

the “machinelike” trajectory of sex has only increased.⁹³ Although these scholars were referring to Western attitudes toward sex, in contemporary Japan their words are just as applicable, resonating with notions of free sexuality where, to borrow Susan Buck-Morss’ words, “sex has a machine-like character and attraction a commodity-like one” divorced from “the ‘aura’ of love.”⁹⁴ They are also divorced from their own humanity, reduced to colors: red, blue, white. Indeed, The Masturbation Room where Mayuko works is an assembly line, as men wait to be serviced by women, emblematic, perhaps, of the world in which Mayuko lives: “Sexual desire,” writes Shu-mei Shih, “like a commodity, demands instant purchase.”⁹⁵ And women are the providers. “How much is someone worth,” the narrator rhetorically asks. “300,000 yen [\$3000] for a girl right out of high school” (136).



The commodification of desire in this text—and the anonymity with which desire is enacted—speaks to contemporary Tokyo as the locale in which it is all made possible. Henning Bech’s analysis of the (post)modern cityscape and the people living in it comes to mind. He suggests that the contemporary city today is “*a world of strangers*” comprised of “*a large, dense and permanent cluster of heterogeneous human beings in circulation*”⁹⁶ that reduces people to “surfaces...for the simple reason that this is the only thing a person can notice in the urban space

⁹³ Rollo May, *Love and Will* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1969), 61.

⁹⁴ Quoted in Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 322.

⁹⁵ Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 322.

⁹⁶ Henning Bech, “Citysex: Representing Lust in Public,” in *Love and Eroticism*, ed. Mike Featherstone (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1999), 216. Emphasis in original.

of lots of strangers.”⁹⁷ His words resonate with our text given its problematic emphasis on the skin and the anonymity of contemporary Tokyo, which, as one of the largest cities in the world, might be the ultimate “world of strangers.”

This anonymity and alienation is of course not new. It was largely these aspects of the urban world that fueled mystery fiction and the fascination with the grotesque in the early twentieth century, for example. As Sari Kawana explains, the rise of mystery fiction coincided with changes to the urban landscape. She reads the technique of tailing (*bikô*), in which a detective covertly “tails” his or her mark, against a cultural “desire among interwar Japanese urbanites to obtain information about others without being detected.”⁹⁸ “[T]he urge to know” reflected anxieties people held toward the urban landscape and a growing paranoia toward strangers.⁹⁹ There have always been strangers among us. But urbanity brought strangers closer and interjected them into traditional “close-knit neighborhood[s]” that had already been disrupted by the Great Kantô Earthquake of 1923.¹⁰⁰ The landscape had already begun to change well before the earthquake that claimed almost 150,000 people and leveled half of the capital. A surge in population growth led to governmental and municipal projects to reconfigure city streets, improve transportation, tear down old buildings, and build new ones. These projects were completed, according to Kawana, in 1917. Five years later the earthquake upheaved the

⁹⁷ Quoted in Zygmunt Bauman, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Unsafe World* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2001), 147.

⁹⁸ Sari Kawana, *Murder Most Modern: Detective Fiction & Japanese Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 30.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

population, mixing the eastern half with the western. This reshuffling continued during the post-earthquake rebuilding stage, as people from the country flooded the capital.¹⁰¹

Writers during this period captured the anxiety of the urban landscape. Tailing was a prominent theme in mystery fiction, as noted above. Edogawa Rampô's (1894-1965) fiction often follows detective Akechi Kogoro, whose familiarity with the city streets works to his advantage in hunting criminals. But the urban world posed a new kind of threat, as borders between people were dissolved: criminals and "normal" people lived side-by-side. The city offered anonymity for the criminally-minded, and created spaces where crimes could and would happen. In fact, the success of mystery fiction during this period can be partially explained by people's desires to read this fiction as a kind of tableau and stylized portrait of the real crimes that began to take place within the maze-like alleys of urban Tokyo.

Lyn Lofland, who has extensively analyzed the city and the relationships between people it encourages, writes: "To experience the city is, *among other things*, to experience anonymity."¹⁰² These "other things"—the underside of urban anonymity—include isolation, seclusion, and alienation. Isolation is a key aspect, even the primary affect, of *Prisoner of Solitude*, and the city is key in the development of this affective mode. It is most evident in the ways in which Mayuko negotiates the street: she is in Roppongi (30), she is in Nishi Azabu, an enclave of eastern Tokyo (38); she is in Ôkubo (97); she is in Shibuya, standing in front of Don Quixote, a landmark and gathering place for young people even in real life (111); then she is on Center-gai, a crowded street in Shibuya not far from Don Quixote (115). And so on. She is always moving, always on her feet. But she is not doing so in the manner of Michel de Certeau's

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

¹⁰² Lyn H. Lofland, *A World of Strangers: Order and Action in Urban Public Space* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), ix. Emphasis added.

flâneur in “Walking in the City.” Instead of strolling, she is frantic. Instead of visiting landmarks, she is running to the bathroom or going to convenience stores or leaving lovers’ bedrooms or combing the streets for sex. Here, too, she is just like everyone else, a cog in the pleasure machine. For de Certeau, traversing the city—especially by walking it—allows one to use the city and to “operate” on it, for the walker “condemns certain spaces to inertia or disappearance and composes with others spatial ‘turns of phrase’ that are ‘rare,’ ‘accidental,’ or illegitimate.”¹⁰³ Edogawa Rampô’s detective understands the city and uses it to his advantage. Mayuko knows the city, but she may not understand it. It gets the better of her.

While many in the city are isolated, at the same time the city also pushes people together. Bech’s argument is that “the city is invariably and ubiquitously, inherently and inevitably, fundamentally and thoroughly sexualized; and that modern sexuality is essentially urban.”¹⁰⁴ He implicitly speaks of Western cities, but his logic might well apply to non-Western cities, particularly large, sprawling ones like Tokyo, for his thesis rests on urban sexuality as a product of intense physical closeness, exposure to the gaze of others, and the anonymity and freedom to consume others with one’s own gaze.¹⁰⁵ Bech concedes that certain people will use the city for sex (elsewhere he looks specifically at homosexuality in the modern city), which does not necessarily mean that *all* people will. But his study, as are many studies on the relationship between people and their cities, is based on a consideration of how particular *types* of people use it—the flâneur, for example.

¹⁰³ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Stephen Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 99.

¹⁰⁴ Bech, 215.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 221.

We could further argue that the prostitute, and maybe even all women, is emblematic of the city itself. They are part of the city, and within the patriarchal matrix, the objects of the erotic gaze for the man who walks or roams it. Echoing Sôseki's "Dream of the First Night" in which a woman is likened to a plant, in *The Arcades Project* Benjamin offers the following list of "female fauna" one might see in the city: "prostitutes, grisettes, old-hag shopkeepers, female street vendors, glovers, [and] *demoiselles*."¹⁰⁶ His flâneur is an extension of the orderly, modern city, not the chaotic, messy one in which Mayuko is trapped. But as scholars have shown, the flâneur has been recast and even regendered to stand as an emblem of the "fragmentation and limitation" of city life today.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, though we might argue that because women's bodies are constantly on display," their experiences of city life are ultimately different from men's. In *Prisoner of Solitude*, Mayuko becomes a warped version of a flâneuse. For Mayuko, it is as though she is in a maze, prisoner of the city itself and of her own body, which is an extension of it.¹⁰⁸ If men define her identity, it is as though she is scouring the city in search of her subjectivity, and on the verge of never finding it. Which make bulimia, rather than anorexia, an appropriate affliction for Mayuko. The bulimic is symptomatic of "binge consumerism." But perhaps more importantly, because bulimia is not inscribed on the body to the degree anorexia is,

¹⁰⁶ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, prepared on the basis of the German volume edited by Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999), 494.

¹⁰⁷ Graeme Gilloch, "Walter Benjamin," in *Profiles in Contemporary Social Theory*, ed. Anthony Elliott and Bryan S. Turner. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc., 2001), 79.

¹⁰⁸ Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City* is an evaluation of the American city in terms of "legibility," the ease with which a city can be coherently imagined vis-à-vis distinct landmarks, streets, and districts. In Japan, Kyoto is a "legible" city. It is grid-like, with major streets intersecting in a series of right angles throughout. It is very difficult to get lost in Kyoto. Tokyo, on the other hand, is illegible, even labyrinthine, particularly Shibuya, with its quiet hills to one side and sea of neon lights to the other. See Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1960), 2-3.

many bulimics go unnoticed. In this manner, although anorexic bodies are those that literally disappear, bulimics are largely absent from critical discourse and social concern; they exist, but also do not exist—lived fragmentation.¹⁰⁹ Mayuko, perhaps more so than any other protagonist we encounter in this dissertation, is just a body, and one that has fallen through the cracks. It is fitting, then, that her novel should come to an incomplete conclusion, for it leaves the reader unfulfilled and hints at the uncertainty of the life Mayuko lives: Mayuko is on the street, calling out to a nameless man, offering to pleasure him sexually and calling to mind the opening scene of the novel in which she is stumbling home drunk. Significantly, the novel ends before the man answers—thus, we are left in limbo, unsatisfied, hungry.



Both texts discussed in this chapter are about hunger, framed in terms of an insatiable desire for more, and one that is never fulfilled. The protagonists are left hungry at the end, and so is the reader. In Chapter Two, we saw how *Innocent Word* and *Snakes and Earrings* wrap up almost too nicely, as they offer their protagonists somewhat problematic resolutions to the problems that plague them for most of their respective narratives. Here, however, we cannot help but view *The Excessive Overeater* and *Prisoner of Solitude* with pessimism and even irritation. Nothing really changes and that does not seem to matter. We could argue that nothing changes for Ami or Lui

¹⁰⁹ In her memoir *Wasted*, Hornbacher has this to say about the gap between anorexia and bulimia in public opinion:

In treatment, as in the rest of the world, bulimia is seen as a step down from anorexia, both in terms of medical seriousness and in terms of admirability. ... Bulimia harkens back to the hedonistic Roman days of pleasure and feast, anorexia to the medieval age of bodily mortification and voluntary feminine. In truth, bulimics do not usually bear the hallowed stigmata of a skeletal body. Their self torture is private, far more secret and guilty than is the visible statement of anorexics, whose whittled bodies are the epitome of feminine beauty.

Hornbacher, 153.

either. Both women are more or less back where they started, after all. But the affect is different—Ami and Lui are okay with where they are, even hopeful and optimistic; they have taken a journey of sorts, while Tokiko and Mayuko run in place. In the texts discussed in this chapter, we are asked to think about and acknowledge the fact that some women may not find the better lives they seek. They are consumed by their desire for more. And it eats them alive. And that’s just the way things are.

Sianne Ngai’s analysis of “ugly feelings” resonates, here. She describes anxiety, irritation, envy, disgust, and several other “minor emotions” as those which arise from a state of “suspended agency.”¹¹⁰ They remind us that we are stuck—sometimes temporarily, sometimes permanently—in a world we cannot change. Yet at the same time, the ugly feelings that emerge from such “situations of passivity” can be read “allegori[cally]” for their potential to help us understand those situations in the first place.¹¹¹ For Ngai, ugly feelings can be reestablished and recoded as “*critical*” feelings, and maybe even disabused of their ugliness.¹¹² This is especially the case for “women’s feelings,” Ngai continues, which are “imagined as always easily prone to turning ugly.”¹¹³ She notes that envy is an especially fraught emotion that can be reevaluated for its “political value for feminism” and to complicate “sympathetic identification [“women’s feelings”] as our culture’s dominant way of understanding the making of female homosociality and the formation of political groups.”¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Emotions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 1.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹² *Ibid.* Emphasis in original.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

There is not much explicit envy in the texts discussed in this chapter. There is, however, an abundance of anxiety—and even insecurity. Given the emphasis in these texts on the ways in which bodily borders are transgressed—often through vomiting or bingeing, but also through sexual contact—anxiety is an appropriate affective idiom, or “feeling state” to use Sara Ahmed’s phrase.¹¹⁵ As Ngai demonstrates, Freud defined anxiety as an “externalizing trajectory” that obfuscates the distinction between self and other: it can of course be something one feels toward oneself, but it is also something one tries to deny in oneself by projecting it on to others.¹¹⁶ (Castration anxiety seems contingent on the palpable difference between self and other. Though as Ngai points out, Freud does not discuss the projecting nature of anxiety in relation to castration anxiety.¹¹⁷) If there is one affective mode that binds the texts analyzed in this dissertation together, it is anxiety—toward looks, motherhood, age, and finally the body. These anxieties stem from characters’ engagements with others, with how they are received and viewed *as women*. For the characters profiled in this chapter, their anxieties toward their bodies lead them to engage in potentially harmful behaviors as a way to alleviate it, as a way to neutralize how they feel others feel about them, which influences how they feel about themselves.

Anxiety can be induced by racial, religious, class, and sexual politics. But in the fiction discussed here, it is a bodily anxiety, one that seeps into the cultural construction of women’s bodies as already anxiety inducing. Today, many women’s lives are governed by a “pedagogy of defect,” a language that chastises physical imperfections—even normalcy—and demands that

¹¹⁵ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 40.

¹¹⁶ Ngai, 210-211.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 213.

they be corrected.¹¹⁸ In a sense, these lives are embedded in a cultural and even global beauty ideology that is both explicit within Japan's "beauty culture" and implicit within hegemonic notions of femininity—a social conditioning. This chapter has posited a dynamics of erasure and abjection embedded in contemporary notions of femininity and female subjecthood that contradicts the extent to which women are seen as objects within a highly visual-sexual economy. Bodily anxiety emerges from this persistent "objecthood." Feminists inspired by Foucault have long been fighting for a way out of the visual system, or at least a way to navigate subjectivity within it. Susan Bordo and Sandra Bartky, among others, have demonstrated that the public surveillance of women's bodies is reflected and even exaggerated through women's private surveillance of their own (and each other's) bodies, contributing to what Susan Gubar calls "feminist misogyny," the internalization and replication of misogynistic rhetoric by women. Julia Bullock invokes this term in her discussion of several texts by Japanese women in which female protagonists see themselves as inferior to their male counterparts. "In each case the hierarchical nature of such relationships, whereby the male occupies a dominant position vis-à-vis the female, encourages the protagonist to compensate for her relative lack of power through her compliance with and/or manipulation of the standards used to judge her as inferior."¹¹⁹

Bullock demonstrates that in Kôno's "Hone no niku" (Bone Meat, 1969), in which a woman begins to starve herself after her lover leaves her, the protagonist internalizes the power imbalance of their relationship. Initially turned on by the sadomasochistic games they would play at the dinner table, particularly the act of being fed or starved at her lover's behest, his absence

¹¹⁸ Bordo (1997), 37.

¹¹⁹ Julia Bullock, *The Other Women's Lib: Gender and Body in Japanese Women's Fiction* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), 77.

seems to bring the subtext of the game to the surface; for without him there to allow her to eat, she literally starves. And by the end, she sees herself as no better than the garbage he has left behind at her house.¹²⁰ In this text, the male figure literally and symbolically provides nourishment to Kôno's protagonist. It echoes the refrain of the texts discussed in this chapter, with their collective emphases on hunger. While Mayuko wastes away alongside her expulsion from the romance narrative and the realm of male sexual desire, Tokiko consumes, as though to prevent her own vanishing. Paradoxically, the more she eats the more her body becomes undesirable, its own form of invisibility.

The erasure and abjection traced in this chapter overlaps with and complements the idea that the protagonists in these texts are consumed by their desires for a “good life.” But they are also consumed by their own agonistic feelings toward bodies that seem to impede its actualization. Ahmed points out that desire breeds anxiety—“the orientation toward the good becomes a form of pressure in a world in which the good cannot exhaust the realm of possibility.”¹²¹ In these texts, as in all of the main texts analyzed in this dissertation, the physical body is the conduit to Ahmed's “good.” Yet because the characters face so much pressure publically and privately, the body becomes a source of great anxiety for its potential to fail to deliver. At the beginning of this chapter, I highlighted some of the promises of the thin body, including desirability, glamour, and social mobility, that are seemingly written onto the bodies of runway models and celebrities, whose lives—as far as we know—are perfect. I further demonstrated that in the popular imaginary, to cultivate the thin body is to own, at least in part, a

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹²¹ Ahmed, 31.

piece of all it stands for. In writing size zero, then, Matsumoto and Hasegawa offer case histories of failure, as the anxiety that their protagonists feel gets the better of them.



In the following chapter, we turn to issues of getting older, returning to authors we have discussed before—Kanehara and Hasegawa. In Kanehara’s *Haidora* (Hydra, 2007), the protagonist yearns to be “doll-like” (the antithesis of Lui, who fights to get away from her Barbie-girl femininity).¹²² She stops eating. Therefore, we will revisit certain themes explored in this chapter. But she is also afraid of getting older, which is where our interest lies. The protagonist is only twenty-four, but as a fashion model, she is already fearful of being “past her prime.” In Hasegawa’s “Museiran” (*The Unfertilized Egg*, 2004), protagonist Moriko is under intense family pressure to meet a man and have a child—specifically a girl whose blood type is B and who is born in the Year of the Horse. Moriko, however, is thirty-five, and time is literally and symbolically running out.

¹²² Rio Otomo, “A Girl with Her Writing Machine,” in *Girl Reading Girl in Japan*, ed. Tomoko Aoyama and Barbara Hartley (New York: Routledge, 2010), 131.

CHAPTER FOUR: The Dark Trauma

Wrinkles and bones, white hair and diamonds: I can't wait.

--Holly Golightly, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*

He had not seen her dance in two years. Her dancing had so degenerated that he had to look away. All that was left of the savage strength was a common coquettishness. Form had gone to pieces with the decay of her body.

--Kawabata Yasunari, "Of Birds and Beasts"

Portraits of models and film stars...suggest physical perfection: surfaces are black, white, matte and smooth; lighting effects accentuate contrasts, light and shadow; blemishes or irregularities are inconceivable. The self-conscious arrangements of bodies and the construction of the completeness make even the glamorous men in the portraits appear feminine, as if the art itself was by definition feminine.

--Gail Reekie, *Temptations: Sex, Selling and the Department Store*

THE CULT(URE) OF YOUTH

Mae West is an enigmatic, powerful, and frustrating figure in Western popular culture and gender discourse. On the stage as a young actor, she adorned herself in feminine clothing, moved in highly sexual ways, and lampooned male desire through self-aware and camp femininity. With her hyperfeminine persona and dynamic attractiveness, evident in *Sex* and *The Wicked Age* (1927), she demonstrated that men are often unable to resist the femininity they demand from women. West manipulated her male counterparts in countless performances and offered femininity and sexuality as a vehicle for women's agency, often playing women who take multiple lovers or women looking for financial security from rich men. She demanded the spotlight emphasize her body, and enjoyed being the object of the gaze.

However, as she aged, she lost her grip on the sexual pulse of the age and slipped from icon-status. West has agitated feminist scholars who see desperation rather than transgression in her attempts to remain a sex symbol well into her eighties; fans, critics, and scholars reacted harshly to her role in *Sextette* (1978), in which, at eighty-four, West played an "elderly woman"

who is meant to symbolize—but unable to recreate—the youthful, sassy, sexy West.¹ She was too old to demand to be looked at, they reasoned. “Why couldn’t West age gracefully,” asks Kristen Pullen, “or better yet, not at all?”² In her study of women’s sexuality on stage, Pullen demonstrates that some biographers have refused to acknowledge the later stages of West’s career, effectively erasing her from her own existence.³ “West’s centrality as female icon was challenged by her ‘real’ self,” Pullen elaborates. “The early Mae West is a camp icon; the later Mae West is a (not camp) joke, rendered unimportant and invisible in narratives of her life, career, and impact.”⁴

West seems to be the victim of an externally imposed identity crisis, as critics severed her aging body from everything her younger body symbolized: namely power and importance through self-aware sexuality. Because women’s lives are often defined in terms of their “to-be-looked-at-ness,” to use Laura Mulvey’s famous phrase, West’s ruptured identity is symptomatic of the ways in which the female body is especially vulnerable to “the sheer external changes in the human body—even for those women who successfully negotiated prevailing female cultural mandates when young.”⁵ E. Ann Kaplan holds that for many women aging is a traumatic experience: conditioned from an early age to be part of the visual economy, these women do not

¹ Marybeth Hamilton, *The Queen of Camp: Mae West, Sex, and Popular Culture* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 225.

² Kristen Pullen, *Actresses and Whores: On Stage and in Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 20.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵ E. Ann Kaplan, “Trauma and Aging: Marlene Dietrich, Melanie Klein, and Marguerite Duras,” in *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations*, ed. Kathleen Woodward (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 174.

know how to cope when they are forced out of it. In other words, an important facet of female identity is constituted by the gaze; when one is not gazed at, one ceases to exist.⁶

Pullen argues that female actors and prostitutes share a number of similarities, the most important of which is the extent to which their livelihoods depend on performance and spectacle. Historically, “the trope of the actress/whore pervades histories of prostitution,” beginning with female flute players in early Greece (*auletrides*) who provided musical as well as sexual services to their male patrons.⁷ In Japan, too, histories of women performers are overlaid with histories of sex for sale.⁸ But as these performers age, their “self-conscious...portrayal[s]” of male fantasy become “mere grotesquery.”⁹ Indeed, Kazue, a central character of Kirino Natsuo’s novel *Gurotesuku* (2003; trans., *Grotesque*, 2006) laments the passage of time with biting honesty: “...I thought it would be better to die than become an old hag. That’s right. I’d rather die. Life has no meaning for an old hag.”¹⁰

⁶ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁷ Pullen, 2-3.

⁸ Kabuki is said to have originated with a performance by Okuni, an itinerate performer, perhaps an aruki bikuni—these women took the guise of a nun or perhaps an attendant. Okuni was part of a troupe of female actors who often dressed as men on stage because they took both male and female roles, and in one of her most famous roles she plays a man buying a prostitute. According to Donald Keene, following this performance, Okuni’s shows “degenerated into mere come-ons” for prostitution. The Japanese government prohibited women from appearing on stage in 1629, but the association between kabuki and prostitution persisted into the nineteenth century. Donald Keene, *World Within Walls: Japanese Literature of the Pre-Modern Era, 1600-1867* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 233. See also Haruo Shirane, ed. *Early Modern Japanese Literature: An Anthology, 1600-1900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 235-236; Gunji Masakatsu, *Kabuki Nyûmon* [Kabuki: An Introduction] (Tokyo: Bokuyosha, 1990), 50-52.

⁹ Pullen, 21.

¹⁰ Natsuo Kirino, *Grotesque*, trans. Rebecca Copeland (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 373.

In Kirino's novel, the "Marlboro Hag" looms as a menacing figure. At least sixty years old, and probably older, the Marlboro Hag is a prostitute who can be found every night standing in front of a statue of Jizô, a protector of dead children and other liminal crossings in the Buddhist tradition. She is unable to attract regular customers, but she is not deterred. Kazue initially looks at the Marlboro Hag with pity. But as she soon decides to venture into prostitution herself, she finds that the Marlboro Hag is "a woman to be respected, a woman among women after all."¹¹ She is, in fact, a woman who sells her "hagness" to men who are turned on by it. One night, Kazue approaches the Marlboro Hag, intending to take over her turf, and is confident that the Marlboro Hag's failing body is no match for her "youth and...slim physique." "[T]he skin on her neck wrinkles like crepe fabric," Kazue describes. "As dark as it was, her wrinkles were still visible....Her body was short and stocky and so decrepit it was pathetic." After a brief altercation, the Marlboro Hag relents. Kazue courts a homeless man, a regular of the Marlboro Hag, who offers her 8,000 yen—more than the Marlboro Hag's rate—because she is young. They have sex in an empty lot, and as Kazue watches the homeless man walk away she feels "free...[and]...happy." She explains: "I could satisfy any demand a man might make of me. I was a good woman."¹² Kazue enjoys her success as a prostitute and as a woman until she is murdered by a john.

The association of youth with beauty pervades cultural narratives of gender. Hardly limited to prostitution or the theater, many women find that their lives literally depend on remaining desirable feminine objects. Zhang Zhen deploys the term "rice bowl of youth" (*qingchunfan*) to describe the ways in which Chinese women have been landing coveted jobs by

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 388.

¹² *Ibid.*, 398.

cultivating their own beauty regimes since the 1990s. Zhen writes: “The robust image of vivacious, young female eaters of the rice bowl of youth symbolizes a fresh labor force, a model of social mobility, and the rise of a consumer culture endorsed by official ideology.”¹³ In contrast to the “iron rice bowl” (*tie fanwa*), the symbol of state socialism, recalcitrance, and “monochro[matic]...desexualiz[ation],” the “rice bowl of youth” offers a new temporality in China—a shift from a socialist to a market economy, from production to consumption, and the emergence of “an urban mass culture and a new sexual politics.”¹⁴ Zhen notes that changes in fashion and other areas of popular culture from the 1970s to the 1980s reconfigured women’s “self-perception and gender awareness.” And with the emergence of female beauty as a packable commodity in the 1990s and the media’s evocation of a new breed of woman for the new era—fashionable, sexy, socially mobile, and global—young women “discovered the powerful sexual appeal of their own bodies and faces[.]”¹⁵

Haunting the utopia of youth, however, was an unavoidable truth: neither youth nor beauty last forever.¹⁶ In a visual, sexual, and market economy, women are the producers of their own youthfulness. Older men with disposable income are generally the consumers (see Chapter One). But women must also consume youth in order to remain proximal to it. “By strict cultural standards,” Laura Spielvogel explains in her study of fitness in Japan, “the flawless skin and firm muscle tone that define attractiveness are thought to begin fading by age 28 or 29. By age 30,

¹³ Zhang Zhen, “Mediating Time: The ‘Rice Bowl of Youth’ in Fin de Siècle Urban China,” *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (Winter, 2000): 94.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 94-98.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 111-112.

most women and some men have begun to actively defend against the onslaught of age.”¹⁷ She continues: “In Japan, where sexiness is defined as young, firm, and thin, middle-age and the accompanying scars of childbirth, gravity, and hard work are not considered sexy.”¹⁸ The aging body, then, becomes a testament to rejection and loss within the highly visual landscape of the contemporary moment; it is a continual source of anxiety, symbolic of a battle that cannot be won. Sandra Bartky reminds us that women have long been concerned with youth and beauty. But today’s visual-oriented culture has put new stresses on women to maintain their physiques at the risk of being dismissed from the gaze.¹⁹



The two works of fiction analyzed in this chapter offer narratives about gendered experiences of growing older within today’s fetishized visual milieu. They do so from similar, yet distinct, angles. In Hasegawa Junko’s “Museiran” (The Unfertilized Egg), protagonist Moriko feels the anxiety of age. She is under intense family pressure to meet a man and have a child—specifically a girl whose blood type is B and who is born in the Year of the Horse, in accordance with family tradition. But at thirty-six years of age, her prospects are not good: “If I don’t have a baby now, at thirty-six, my next chance is forty-eight, but by then my uterus won’t be in any sort of working

¹⁷ Laura Spielvogel, *Working Out in Japan: Shaping the Female Body in Tokyo Fitness Clubs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 151.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Sandra Lee Bartky, “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power,” in *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*, ed. Diana Tietjens Meyers (New York: Routledge, 1997), 107.

order, and my mom might not even be alive,” she reasons.²⁰ The majority of the narrative concerns Moriko’s efforts to become pregnant, and in this sense serves as a commentary on the economy and politics of childbirth in Japan, particularly for single women. Moriko’s situation is underscored by the fact that she is surrounded by younger, more attractive women. As such, the narrative also offers a glimpse into the lives of women living with what Kaplan calls the “dark knowledge of aging,” the reality that they are being forced out of the economy of desire.²¹

This “dark knowledge” informs Kanehara Hitomi’s novella *Haidora* (Hydra, 2007) as well, but is even more pronounced. Saki, the protagonist, is twenty-four. Working as a model, she has already been edged out by younger women, as some agencies demonstrate a preference for models under twenty.²² She is only able to keep the interest of her photographer by slimming down to skeletal proportions. Indeed, his interest in her as his “muse” (*senzoku*) stems not from inspiration, but rather a morbid fascination with her decaying body (6). In this novella, Kanehara draws attention to pathological thinness as a prerequisite for beauty, and therefore overlaps with issues discussed in the previous chapter. But through Saki’s increasingly corpse-like and decrepit body, the author also criticizes the degree to which youth prefigures subjectivity, and the lengths some women will go to stay young.

Narratives informed by the prospects of aging are not uncommon in modern Japanese women’s fiction. In some instances, women refusing to hold on to their youth while also refusing to age gracefully is a motif of rebellion. In Tomioka Taeko’s (b. 1935) “*Sûku*” (Straw Dogs,

²⁰ Junko Hasegawa, “The Unfertilized Egg,” trans. Philip Price, in *Inside and other Short Fiction: Japanese Women by Japanese Women* comp. Cathy Layne (New York: Kodansha International, 2006), 180. Page citations will hereafter occur in-text.

²¹ Kaplan, 175.

²² Kanehara Hitomi, *Haidora* [Hydra] (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 2007), 9. Page citations will hereafter occur in-text. Translations are my own.

1980), the middle-aged protagonist enjoys seducing younger men. And in what seems to be some sort of revenge, she makes a point to remind them of her age by making a show of using reading glasses and comparing herself to their mothers. And author Kôno Taeko, mentioned in Chapters Two and Three, frequently deploys middle-aged protagonists who turn their backs on the cult of youth by eschewing pregnancy, marriage, and procreative sex. Not all of her works are as provocative as “Toddler Hunting” (see Chapter Two), though they do consistently ask us to think about the temporality of female subjectivity through the vehicle of middle-aged women. Her 1966 story “Saigo no toki” (Final Moments) is a woman’s internal conversation about death. Early on, she insists: “I’m not an old lady—not terminally ill: I’m middle aged.”²³

Pregnancy is a contentious issue in Japan. Although it is not the sole focus of this chapter, the topic should be discussed briefly, as motherhood cannot be neatly separated from discussions of aging. Research shows that women in Japan are increasingly choosing to marry and have children later in life, if at all. At the same time, however, the declining birthrate in Japan has led to a revamping of the institution of marriage and childbearing.²⁴ “Amid falling birthrates and talk of Japan as a ‘childless society’ (*shôshika*),” Amanda Seaman writes, “there has been a marked increase in the marketing of goods and services to pregnant women.”²⁵ Such goods include cute

²³ Kôno Taeko, “Final Moments,” trans. Lucy North, in *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Japanese Literature: From 1945 to the Present*, ed. J. Thomas Rimer and Van C. Gessel (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 190.

²⁴ The birth rate in Japan has been declining steadily since 1975. In 1989, the birth rate was 1.57, the lowest in history until that point, which ushered in a new catch phrase to describe the situation: “1.57 shock.” Figures continue to drop today—1.4 as of 2011. Miho Ogino, “Japanese Women and the Decline of the Birth Rate,” *Reproductive Health Matters* 1, no. 1 (May, 1993): 78.

²⁵ Amanda Seaman, “Making and Marketing Mothers: Guides to Pregnancy in Modern Japan,” in *Manners and Mischief: Gender, Power, and Etiquette in Japan*, ed. Jan Bardsley and Laura Miller (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 156.

outfits, magazines, and manuals, the aims of which, at least on the surface, are to make pregnancy more attractive to prospective women. But below the surface, Seaman argues, they “have been used by society to create, discipline, and define women, their bodies, and their choices.”²⁶

Women writers have long fought for their bodies and against institutions of maternity. “In the twentieth century pregnancy is not a matter of fertility but rather it is a symbol of sterility and destruction[,]” explains Frank, a character in Ôba Minako’s “Sanbiki no kani” (Three Crabs, 1968).²⁷ In this text, Yuri lives with her husband and their daughter in the Pacific Northwest. During a bridge party with family friends and colleagues, Yuri becomes increasingly disillusioned about her domestic existence. She makes up an excuse to leave the party and ends up having sex with a man she meets at an amusement park. This narrative echoes those mentioned above, in that pregnancy and motherhood are conflated with age. At a critical moment before the bridge party, Yuri is in the bathroom putting on make-up. Her daughter Rie walks in and the following exchange takes place:

“Oh mama. You want to make yourself look young.”

“That’s right. Every woman wants to look young.”

“But mama, everyone knows I’m your daughter so they’re not going to believe that you’re less than thirty.”

“Some women have children when they’re sixteen years old.”

“But nice girls don’t do that.”²⁸

As Sharalyn Orbaugh observes, in this exchange, “Rie positions herself...as both identified with patriarchal authority and as a competitor with her mother for male, patriarchal, attention and

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 158.

²⁷ Ôba Minako, “Three Crabs,” trans. Stephen Kohl and Ryôko Toyama, *Japan Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (July 1, 1978): 329.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 326.

favor.”²⁹ Rie scolds her mother for trying to appear young, taking on the role of the objectifier. The daughter’s position along the male axis, is further elucidated by the narrator later: “Rie hated her mother when she was like this, and immediately sympathized with her father.”³⁰

Other writers of a similar era have used the pen to punish rather than mock the female reproductive body within a patriarchal system that sees them only as mothers, such as in Kôno’s aforementioned “Toddler Hunting” as well as “Hone no niku” (Bone Meat, 1969) in which the protagonists want to be physically hurt and tormented by their younger male lovers. More recently, though, women writers have taken less vitriolic routes in exploring the negotiation between selfhood and pregnancy. Matsuo Yumi’s “Barûn taun no satsujin” (Murder in Balloon Town, 1994) is one such example. The story takes place in the “Seventh Ward” (nicknamed Balloon Town by the locals) of a futuristic Tokyo, a special section of the city designated for pregnant women to live until they give birth. In this futuristic Tokyo, women no longer carry their fetus to term, but rather use “artificial uteruses” in a process known as AU.³¹ AU affords a “safe birth” because artificial uteruses shield the fetus from “toxins, electromagnetic waves, and noise.” Moreover, it also allows a woman to keep her job and perhaps even more importantly, her figure.³² For those who choose “the old fashioned way,” Balloon Town is “a paradise for

²⁹ Sharalyn Orbaugh, “Ôba Minako and the Paternity of Paternalism,” in *The Father Daughter Plot: Japanese Literary Women and the Law of the Father*, ed. Rebecca L. Copeland and Esperanza Ramirez-Christensen (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), 279.

³⁰ Ôba, 325.

³¹ Matsuo Yumi, “Murder in Balloon Town,” trans. Amanda Seaman (1998), 1. (Unpublished, cited with permission.)

³² *Ibid.*, 2.

women who want...a quiet environment in which to gestate.”³³ Detective Eda Marina is asked to go undercover as a pregnant woman in Balloon Town to solve a murder. In addition to solving the crime and furthering her career, the experience allows her to reflect on what it would mean to truly be pregnant. Marina is not enthusiastic about it, though, because she “[doesn’t] feel as if she could subject her body to [raising a child in her womb.] She wouldn’t be able to give up the slender body that she got from the gym and undergo something like pregnancy instead.”³⁴

The two texts analyzed in this chapter contribute to the above-mentioned genealogy of narratives of aging. Hasegawa’s story offers a new configuration of the pregnancy trope by illustrating what can happen when a woman is granted the “freedom” of being single, childless, and, in her case, approaching middle age. Furthermore, sexuality is a recurring theme in the two works discussed here, as both Moriko and Kanehara’s Saki are concerned with remaining viable sexual objects as they age. As a model, Saki’s experience is even more acute, and the extent to which she is rejected from the economy of youth within her profession has broader social implications regarding the political edge of aging; it forces her to remain in a relationship that has detrimental physical and psychological consequences.

EDIBLE COMPLEX-ITIES

“The Unfertilized Egg” begins on the morning of Moriko’s thirty-sixth birthday, as she is stumbling home from an all-nighter with her friend, Rei. The raucous music and uncouth men at “last night’s wild party” has taken its toll on Moriko (173). Her ears are filled with left over music, and the debris of bodies mingling has left a grimy film on her body that feels as though “it

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

can never be washed away” (173). Wearing a short dress and rabbit-fur jacket, she staggers along the street with Rei, who is ten years younger. “At my age, I guess I shouldn’t be staying out all night in the first place,” she reflects (173). Later she confesses that she has been out all night twice this week. While Rei had wanted a “girl’s night,” Moriko had secretly harbored thoughts of meeting a man:

To tell the truth, for most of the night I just wanted to go home, or at least go some place else. The pounding beat of the music made me feel dizzy, tired and way too old. Instead of dancing, I plastered myself to the mirrored wall for hours on end, like a piece of dried gum. I looked wistfully at every guy that barged into me, wishing he would take me somewhere quiet where we could sit down and flirt a little. (173-174)

Moriko is hanging onto the single life at an age when convention suggests that she should be settling down and should already be a mother or wife. She admits to living “like some desperate teenage runaway,” her apartment filled with trash and nothing but condiments in the refrigerator (178).

Although it is fading from the contemporary lexicon in light of societal shifts, there is still a presumption in Japan that women are like Christmas cake—stale after twenty-five and meaningless, for nobody wants a Christmas cake after Christmas. So although she is out partying, Moriko gets the sense that time is running out: “On my birthday, I felt as though a timer had been set in the depths of my belly. . . . Two months left [the first of March], said the timer” (180). In a sense, she occupies a hazy place between adult respectability and teenage effervescence. The young men she works with at a mediocre video import company call her the “Legendary Dancing Queen,” a moniker she does not necessarily mind. But as her younger girlfriends watch aghast as she tries to pick up men at the club, Moriko feels as though she must abdicate her throne: “After all,” she says, “what kind of queen stays out at clubs all night, eyeing cheap-looking guys but getting no response. . . . What kind of queen eats fast food at dawn, gets

screamed at by crows on the way home, and collapses fully clothed into bed like the dead?” (178-179).

Birthdays are typically celebrations of life. But Moriko’s is haunted by phantoms of death. She reminds herself that both Marilyn Monroe and Princess Diana died at that age and that author Suzuki Izumi took her own life at thirty-six. She thus arrives at the conclusion that her days are limited: “Thirty-six is a woman’s unlucky number, a bad omen,” she says (179). But also at stake is the matrilineal family tradition that has given rise to a succession of daughters born in the Year of the Horse with type-B blood. It is now Moriko’s turn, as her mother and grandmother have been reminding her since she was a teenager. “We’ve got to keep the record going!” one exclaimed. “Wouldn’t it be wonderful?” said the other (179). Moriko’s grandmother died “without ever seeing her wish fulfilled,” however, and Moriko is remorseful: “Mom, Grandma, I’m so sorry” (180).

Moriko is fully aware that her body is slipping from the realm of desire, which makes her task to become pregnant all the more difficult. While she had been having an affair with her boss Aono for the past four years, he has gone overseas on business and is ignoring her emails. His last gesture of affection was a box of Godiva chocolates for her birthday. To make matters worse for Moriko, rumors are circulating that Aono got Risa, a younger co-worker of hers, pregnant, and that he really fled overseas to escape controversy and scandal. She misses him, but is not hopeful that he will return or that their relationship will amount to anything: what could he possibly “see in me, the office spinster,” she wonders (182).

Moriko’s younger female colleagues mock her. “Time’s running out for Moriko. She’s already in her thirties. Poor thing,” they snort on one occasion. “She hasn’t had sex for ten years...She’s practically a virgin again. She’ll seal up if she doesn’t get some soon” (177).

Moriko explains that while she did “get some” just last month, “there’s really not much difference between one month and ten years. It’s all too easy for a woman to fall apart when the dark frontier between her legs...is left unexplored even for just one night” (178). Moriko appears to be a prisoner of her body—all “sunken cheeks...[and] slowing metabolism,” as Seaman has accurately described—which cannot compete with those of her younger coworkers.³⁵ And her body is losing patience with her. Sitting in the bath one evening, Moriko reflects, “In this dark wetland, surrounded by ferns, the petals of my rafflesia [a euphemism for her vulva] shimmer with sparkling pollen and laugh coquettishly. *You’d better hurry up and get yourself fertilized! There isn’t much time*, they say. My God, I’m being goaded by my own vulva” (181).

To stave off age, Moriko wears clothes that are typically found on women much younger than herself—specifically her thong underwear. In Western culture thong underwear is slowly losing its sexual connotation. Dee Amy-Chinn, Christen Jantzen, and Per Østergaard demonstrate that while some women consider thongs to be “harlot-like,” this type of underwear is nevertheless pervasive and acceptable for daily use among the adult population—particularly for women under thirty.³⁶ In Japan, underwear discourse is more complicated. Ueno Chizuko has analyzed the relationship between women’s underwear and sexuality in the Japanese context. She argues that the sexual progression of Japanese adolescents coincides with their physical separation from the mother. Within the home, the mother controls the sexual progression of her child by monitoring his or her undergarments, taking care to equate the latter (she offers boys’

³⁵ Amanda C. Seaman, “Two for One: Pregnancy and Identity in Hasegawa Junko’s ‘The Unfertilized Egg,’” *Japanese Language and Literature* 44, no. 1 (April 2010): 6.

³⁶ Dee Amy-Chinn, Christen Jantzen and Per Østergaard, “Doing and Meaning: Towards an Integrated Approach to the Study of Women’s Relationship to Underwear,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 6, no. 379 (Oct. 2006): 386.

briefs as an example) with a motherly touch. As such, the procurement of erotic underwear—especially in the case of college-aged girls—concurrent with the physical dislocation from the mother’s residence, is tantamount to the erotic displacement of the mother.³⁷ Underwear, for women, are potential symbols of sexuality, or in Ueno’s words “wrapping” to hide what lies underneath, to transform the contents, literally, into a gift to be unwrapped.³⁸

In her study, Ueno divides underwear into two categories based on narcissistic and fetishistic desire—those that women wear for their own pleasure, and those they wear for the pleasure of men.³⁹ Moriko attempts to use thong underwear to accentuate her sexuality for male consumption, wearing one when she goes out with Rei. She says, however, that in spite of the “sexy underwear” she is wearing, her “sagging ass” negates any potential erotic appeal (183). Her body, it seems, will not cooperate with her efforts. And sitting alone in the “squalor” of her apartment after her night out, her thong sticks stubbornly and uncomfortably to her body, a reminder of the passage of time (178). “This tiny space I call my own does nothing to assert its existence,” she says of her apartment, “but is simply there, like a gap between buildings that no one ever passes through, lined with moldy, black sewage pipes” (176-177). The description is similar to that of her sex organs above, and the text’s refrain seems to be Moriko’s undesirability, despite or even because of her efforts to reinscribe her body with desire vis-à-vis her underwear or otherwise. Indeed, sexy underwear is interesting because it attracts men only if they see it.

³⁷ Ueno Chizuko, *Sukâto no shita no gekijô: hito wa dôshite pantî ni kodawaru no ka* [The Theater Under the Skirt: Why are People So Concerned About Panties?] (Tokyo: Kawade Shobô Shinsha, 1992), 82, 89.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

³⁹ For a brief history of underwear in modern Japan, see Jonathan E. Abel, “Packaging Desires: The Unmentionables of Japanese Film,” in *Perversion and Modern Japan: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Culture*, ed. Nina Cornyetz and J. Keith Vincent (New York: Routledge, 2010), 273-307.

And in Moriko's case, they don't. In a way, she is wearing the underwear for herself—to remind herself of her availability and her need to be sexy.

In addition to reinvigorating her body through her underwear, Moriko begins to eat a strange diet drink made from tapioca and coconut milk because it is supposed to boost the metabolism. The tapioca balls are egg-like in their shape and are one of the many instances in which eggs appear in the text. Out drinking with colleague and potential mate Mikami, she comments on the “egg-yolk yellow” quality of the whites of his eyes (186-187). Later, she notices that the sun casts an “egg-yolk yellow” hue on everything it touches (190). But most explicit are the dreams Moriko has about eggs, which increase in frequency as the first of March—her “deadline”—approaches.

She dismisses the first dream—in which she sees herself breaking an egg handed to her by a mysterious, muscular male figure, getting yolk all over her shoes—as “a sex dream” (177). In the dreams that follow, Moriko becomes increasingly protective of the eggs. In the second dream, Moriko is “sitting on [her] own vulva” when “[a] white egg appears in the air and falls into [her] open palm” (189). Despite the urge to “take it in [her] mouth or rub it gently over [her] nipples,” Moriko holds it in a protective fashion (190). A disembodied voice instructs her: “This is the egg that you will lay...” (190). In the next dream, Moriko is tied to a pole in the center of “a town square,” the subject of scrutiny by a mob of onlookers (198). A gong sounds and the mob begins pelting Moriko with what she initially thinks are stones but what turn out to be eggs. As in the first dream, these eggs break and cover Moriko with their slimy innards. At a loss, she shouts at the crowd: “Stop! Stop! Don't waste all those eggs! I can't catch them all!” (198). Her final egg dream, occurring on the first day of March, after her ovular deadline has passed, has

Moriko giving birth to herself. Moriko brings her story to a close thus: “As I am expelled, I cry out, ‘Look! You can see the head!’” (202).

The implications of this ending will be considered later. For now, the dreams themselves deserve attention. The sexual implications of her first dream are difficult to ignore: the unknown male figure and the white, sticky consistency of the egg after it breaks speak to the emptiness and transience of Moriko’s sexual history; she comments that “[o]nly women who are loved fully and warmly...are complacent enough to say they can’t be bothered with sex” (178). Moriko takes greater care of the egg in the second dream. She resists the urge to use it for her own sexual pleasure and instead looks after the egg in a more maternal fashion (but also in a pose that is coaxed and instructed by a disembodied voice). In the third dream, Moriko feels as though she is being stoned to death by the unruly mob. Note that prior to the dream, she had sex with a man named Uchiki who seems like he may offer her the chance to get pregnant until he deposits his semen in her mouth. That this dream occurs on the night of her encounter with Uchiki suggests that the stoning is a punishment for not being fertilized by him. Here, too, we see countless eggs breaking, suggestive of so many lost chances to produce a daughter.

The breaking/dropping of the eggs also implies retaliation. Moriko’s mishandling of her eggs reads like a subconscious unwillingness to follow in her mother and grandmother’s footsteps, and a concurrent unwillingness to demonstrate the protective duty of a mother. Not only has she failed to settle down and to get married, but she is similarly demonstrating a figurative unwillingness to become pregnant by destroying her eggs. To become pregnant is to give up one life in favor of another: as Seaman notes, in Japan, “once a pregnant woman has her child...her identity changes completely; rather than a sexually potent being, she is now a mother, charged with advancing the interests of the next generation rather than her own wishes and

desires.”⁴⁰ Seaman goes on to explain that contrary to the United States, where women often return to work after giving birth, new mothers in Japan rarely return to work, though this is slowly changing.⁴¹ For Moriko, then, these dreams offer a way to speak out against social expectation, even if it is within the confines of dreamscape. They offer a way to stave off her maternal duties and stay young forever.

In addition to staying out all night and mishandling her eggs, Moriko fails to take decent care of even herself the way an adult might. The filthiness of her apartment has already been noted. As the narrative progresses, it becomes progressively more rank. Toward the end, Moriko describes her apartment thus:

My apartment is becoming filthier by the day. I can't remember the last time I bothered to open my windows. Musty air coils around my bedroom, mingling with the stench of my sweat-stained T-shirt. A bowl of ancient, abandoned chili beans sits on the kitchen counter. The spices give off a smell like the body odor of a middle-aged man. It reminds me of Aono. (201)

Moriko explains elsewhere that she can't be bothered “to clean, or wash [her] clothes, or shop for food” either (200). In a word, she is lazy, unable or unwilling to perform the stereotypical duties of a “good” mother in Japan—cooking, cleaning, washing; and unable or unwilling to care for her own body. That is, she doesn't eat because she doesn't have food because she hasn't gone shopping because she doesn't have the motivation to do so. She has failed at taking care of—“mothering”—herself. Indeed, the above passage reads more like a description of a teenager's bedroom than that of an adult.

In other ways, Moriko refuses to age by living with one foot in the past. She relives moments with Aono, such as the time they went to a bar, or the time they went shopping at the

⁴⁰ Seaman (2010), 14.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 7, 14.

Gap, goofing off and behaving “like kids” (182). But she also expresses a fondness for “first time movies” that were “all the rage” in the early 1980s (183). As Moriko explains, these movies—such as *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982) or *Little Darlings* (1980) or *The Blue Lagoon* (1980)—all follow the same pattern of teenagers falling in love and then having sex for the first time. She says that adults feel slightly awkward watching these films of sexual coming of age, but she “love[s]” them anyway and at times feels “like [she is] back in high school (183, 185).

She remembers becoming especially fond of the film *Pretty in Pink* (1986), which featured the teenage actress Molly Ringwald. When she saw Ringwald in a later film she, “had turned into a frumpy middle-aged actress playing some desperate femme fatale” (184). While critics typically deride such performances—evident in Mae West’s case—Moriko feels a special affinity with the aging Ringwald: “Molly! How’ve you been? Look what we’ve come to, huh?” (184). Her co-workers are characteristically unsympathetic, accusing her of being “out of touch, old fashioned, [and] trying to restore [her] virginity” (184). Ignoring their vitriol, she reminds herself with a hint of satisfaction that she is “the boss’s girlfriend” (185).

Aono had compared Moriko to Diane Lane once, but not the carefree, youthful Lane of *A Little Romance* (1979)—much to Moriko’s dismay. “Diane Lane?” she scolds him. “If Diane Lane was Japanese, she’d be in a trashy Tuesday night suspense drama on TV. What are you trying to say?” (191). In that particular movie, which Moriko saw as a teenager, Lane kisses a boy under the Bridge of Sighs, a bridge in Venice that is said to hold the key to eternal love for those who kiss under it at sunset. Moriko admits:

Decades have passed, but even now, whenever I pass under a bridge with a man, I always think that I’d better kiss him, just to be sure. ... I can’t remember how many men I’ve kissed under bridges, swearing undying love (not out loud of course, and not because I meant it, but because the occasion seemed to demand it). Sometimes the kiss even turned into a groping session, soiling the memory of *A Little Romance*. But neither the kisses nor the groping sessions ever brought about the miracle of undying love. (191)

As Seaman suggests, “the song of youth for Moriko is one in which the dominant key is romance[.]”⁴² But it is also about growing up. In *A Little Romance*, the bridge seems emblematic of a journey, as the moment of teenage love beneath it ushers in a new phase of romance. Try as she might, however, Moriko is never able to experience that same feeling—not least because it is the wrong bridge. In the passage here, Moriko acknowledges, at least a little, that her (love) life is not on par with the fantasy created by Hollywood. It is, as Seaman says, “a hideous parody,” fantasy gone awry.⁴³

Indeed, back in the present Aono remains “incommunicado” and Moriko learns that she is going to be laid off at the end of the month (179). She had been convinced that “[t]rue love is back in style,” as she explained to her co-workers. Now, however, she is not so sure. Visions of a child with Aono have been replaced by an urgency to be fertilized (195). Hasegawa’s use of the term fertilize—*jusei* in Japanese—conveys a clinical detachedness with which Moriko seeks out a sperm donor so that she can contribute to the matrilineal line of her family. The aforementioned Uchiki is a potential candidate, until he ejaculates in her mouth. Which is just as well—“[f]or me, it just felt all wrong from beginning to end,” Moriko concedes after the fact (198). Elsewhere, Moriko is courted by a man from work named Mikami, who promises to deliver the child she wants. Over drinks, she learns that Mikami’s wife has just given birth. The two flirt and she demands his “dandelion seeds,” but Mikami sneaks off when she is not looking, leaving her to foot the bill (188). “What a tease!” she exclaims (188).

⁴² *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 8.



It is important to note that although Moriko is looking for potential mates, she is not looking for a husband. She invites a comparison to Ainsley, a central character in Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* (1969) who also has designs for a child but not a husband. As Ainsley explains to her roommate and the novel's protagonist Marian, she has no interest in getting married; in her mind, husbands ruin families.⁴⁴ She just wants a child. When Marian asks for an explanation, Ainsley replies: "Every woman should have at least one baby. It's even more important than sex. It fulfills your deepest femininity."⁴⁵ Echoing concerns that remain intact today, especially in Japan, where one is not fully a woman until she is a mother,⁴⁶ Marian wonders if Ainsley's illegitimate child will suffer socially. Ainsley is eventually impregnated by a man named Lin who admits to harboring a fear of eggs (a euphemism for a fear of impregnating women, maybe) ever since his mother forced him to eat one when he was a child. He had been convinced an unborn chicken was inside. "There, there. It's not going to be a little chicken anyway," Ainsley comforts, "it's going to be a lovely nice baby."⁴⁷

Atwood often hints at cannibalism in her novels, which is a particularly resonant in *The Edible Woman*. Protagonist Marian begins anthropomorphizing the food she encounters to the extent that she cannot eat it. After her boyfriend Peter proposes to her, she finds herself empathizing with the food he eats, fixating one evening on his steak dinner. She feels that she is

⁴⁴ Margaret Atwood, *The Edible Woman* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 38.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁶ Sociologist and feminist scholar Ueno Chizuko writes, "In [Japan], being a woman is virtually synonymous with being a mother. And there is a tendency to regard women who are not mothers as not women either." Ueno Chizuko, quoted in Rebecca Copeland, "Motherhood as Institution," *Japan Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (January-March, 1992): 101.

⁴⁷ Atwood, 173.

slowly becoming his prey, not unlike the cow that has become his dinner. As the novel progresses, Marian becomes more and more alienated from the food around her. After hearing about Lin's childhood egg trauma, Marian is unable to eat eggs, too. Atwood is interested in exposing and critiquing the degree to which consumption dominates subjective experience, and food is a potent medium; in this novel, the characters are primarily interested in having things and, ultimately, each other. Marian is afraid to eat and be eaten. But from another angle, the work shows us that women are part of an edible economy—they are dishes to be “eaten” by men.

Women's historical connection to food and to the kitchen has been well-documented, as has the role of food in the reproduction and solidification of feminine virtue. Bordo, for instance, has shown that mothers demonstrate their commitment to selflessness and love for others by feeding others before themselves. Although her work is focused on mothers in the US, Japanese women mirror such behavior, as it is imperative that they “go out of their way to serve others first, saving the most prized pieces for favored guests, friends, husband, and children.”⁴⁸ Furthermore, Alan Beardsworth and Teresa Keil point out that the shopping for, cooking of, and cleaning up after meals constitutes a critical dimension of “the mundane, unglamorous labour of housework, the traditional domain of women...[that] hold[s] little intellectual appeal to the male researchers and theorists” who might think critically about such activities.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Spielvogel, 201.

⁴⁹ Alan Beardsworth and Teresa Keil, *Sociology on the Menu: An Invitation to the Study of Food and Society* (London: Routledge, 1997), 2; see also Tomoko Aoyama, *Reading Food in Modern Japanese Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 213, f. 24.

The sublimation of women's bodies into dishes to be devoured might be the extrapolation of women as nurturers, offering themselves to others.⁵⁰ In this regard, in *The Female Eunuch* Germaine Greer writes, “[Woman] was for consumption; [she was spoken] of in terms of cherries and cream, lips as sweet as honey and skin white as milk, breasts like cream uncrudged, hard as apples.”⁵¹ Greer, borrowing from “Epithalamion” (1595) by Edmund Spenser, wrote this in 1970, but her words remain strong today, as does the imagery of which she speaks; now, however, the apple is the providence of the behind—evidenced by the popularity of women's clothing brands Apple Bottom Jeans and Juicy Couture, the insignia for which (Juicy) is often splayed across the behind.

In *The Edible Woman*, Marian becomes increasingly dissatisfied with the implied trappings of domestic life and her future as Peter's wife. She decides to bake him a cake in the shape of a woman to prove her point. Here is the episode in question:

She went into the kitchen and returned, bearing the platter in front of her, carefully and with reverence, as though she was carrying something sacred in a procession, an icon or the crown on a cushion in a play. She knelt, setting the platter on the coffee table in front of Peter.

“You've been trying to destroy me, haven't you,” she said. “You've been trying to assimilate me. But I've made you a substitute, something you'll like much better. This is

⁵⁰ The phrase *nyotaimori*, written with the Chinese characters for “woman's body” and “to serve (food),” connotes the practice of eating sushi or other delicacies off of a woman's nude body. Although *nyotaimori* is hardly common in Japan today (it seems to be more common in cities such as Los Angeles or New York), it is nevertheless a potent example of woman as/and nourishment.

⁵¹ Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (New York: Harper Collins, 1970), 65. Some scholars have argued that our lexicon of endearment reflects a similar approach to women as food—honey, sugar, sweetie pie, etc. I think, however, that these terms are not as unilateral as scholars assume (or at least not anymore), and are often used by women to refer to men or each other with equal frequency. They are also regional. See, for example, Jane Sunderland, *Language and Gender: An Advanced Resource Book* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 10.

what you really wanted all along, isn't it? I'll get you a fork," she added somewhat prosaically.⁵²

Peter does not eat it but hurriedly makes his exit, leaving Marian alone with her creation: "As a symbol [the cake] had failed. It looked up at her with its silvery eyes, enigmatic, mocking, succulent. Suddenly she was hungry. ... 'I'll start with the feet,' she decided."⁵³

Ainsley comes home just as Marian is polishing off the legs of her cake. Marian offers her some, but Ainsley refuses, admonishing: "You're rejecting your femininity!" Marian responds, "Nonsense. ... It's only cake," and then with her next forkful neatly cuts the head from the body.⁵⁴ Marian's illicit lover Duncan enters shortly and then decides that he will have a slice of Marian's cake. Marian watches him dutifully, with a "peculiar sense of satisfaction," as he finishes off the cake. The novel ends with his telling words: "It was delicious."⁵⁵ Marian's smile and gentle behavior betrays a happy ending for Marian, who enjoys a sweet feast with Duncan behind Peter's back.

In "The Unfertilized Egg," there is very little emphasis on consuming, by contrast. The only things Moriko ever consumes are her diet drink and a hardboiled egg. With all of the diegetic emphasis on eggs, Moriko's eating of one is overtly cannibalistic. She describes the experience in thoughtful detail:

I imagine [the hardboiled egg] when it was raw, rolling around like an innocent child. But now, boiled, it sits there sullenly, pretending to be asleep. ... I peel away the shell carefully to reveal the succulent, white flesh. I sprinkle some salt and take a bite. The warm yolk sticks obstinately to my teeth. As I scrape away the thick, sticky substance with my tongue and wash it down with a mouthful of coffee, it occurs to me that this

⁵² Atwood, 271.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 272.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 272, 273.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 281.

stubborn boiled egg is a noble food, a whole complex life contained within its shell. It was the soul of the egg that clung so determinedly to my teeth. (192-193)

Here, Moriko feasts on the “flesh” of the “innocent child,” of her own unborn child or her own unborn self perhaps. We might interpret this scene in a self-referential, autocannibalistic way as well. Moriko *is* eggs—her ovaries are full of them—and she is eating herself, eating her own eggs because they are going to waste.

The notion of rot and waste carries over into other aspects of the text. Most explicitly, Moriko’s body is aging: rotting, wasting. Thus Hasegawa’s use of the term *rafflesia* to describe Moriko’s vulva is certainly deliberate. A *rafflesia* is a parasitic plant that has no stems, leaves, or roots. Living off of the life-force of other plants, it is pollinated by carrion flies, flies that usually feed on the corpses of animals.⁵⁶ When it blooms, which it does for only one week, it produces “the world’s largest flower,” as well as a horrible smell “more repulsive than any buffalo carcass in an advanced state of decomposition.”⁵⁷ Given its parasitic nature and its stench, these flowers have earned the nickname “corpse plant[s].”⁵⁸ To refer to her vulva as this particular flower is for Moriko to associate it with something parasitic and putrid that can only attract flies that feed off of dead animals.

Moriko’s “flower talk” is an interesting take on—maybe even a parody of—Victorian flower discourse.⁵⁹ Dorri Beam notes,

⁵⁶ Grant Allen, “Our Debt to Insects,” *Popular Science Monthly* 25, no. 19 (July, 1884): 341-342.

⁵⁷ Rebecca Stafoff, *The Flowering Plant Division* (Tarrytown, NY: 2006), 51.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Beverly Seaton has demonstrated that flower language began in France and made its way to England by the early 19th century before slowly crossing the Atlantic where it was adopted by American writers and dictionary editors. Beverly Seaton, *The Language of Flowers: A History* (Charlottesville, VA: The University Press of Virginia, 1995), 80.

It was not uncommon for nineteenth-century women to assign a fragrance to their feelings...and in fact this was the business of flower language, popular throughout the nineteenth century. ... From Victorian flower dictionaries to George Bataille, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida, flowers have facilitated queries about the nature of language, its capacity for expression, and its relation to materiality.⁶⁰

Beam explains further that “flower language” was often used as a “popular ‘code’” for Victorian writers to talk delicately about sex, desire, and the body.⁶¹ Leigh Hunt’s “Love Letters Made of Flowers” (1837) is an illustrative example. The opening stanza reads:

An exquisite invention this,
Worthy of love’s most honeyed kiss,
This art of writing *billet doux*
In buds and odors, and bright hues;
In saying all one feels and thinks
In clever daffodils and pinks,
Uttering (as well as silence may)
The sweetest words the sweetest way:
How fit, too, for the lady’s bosom,
The place where *billet doux* repose ‘em.⁶²

Here, Leigh offers his flowers as an epistolary (*billet doux*) and romantic device befitting the woman who will read it. While his poem is explicit in coding flower discourse in a highly gendered manner over which men have authorial control, Beam suggests that by mid-century flowers were recoded as an exotic and extinct women’s language, often to be deciphered by men: a variety of texts, including Thomas Miller’s 1847 *The Poetical Language of Flowers*, “suggest that flower language posits oblique access to a mystical, sensuous, remote, and even repressed femininity.”⁶³ Although Moriko disguises her sex organs in a not so subtle botanic metaphor,

⁶⁰ Dorri Beam, *Style, Gender, and Fantasy in Nineteenth-Century American Women’s Writing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 37.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Quoted in Seaton, 80.

⁶³ Beam, 43.

there is nothing oblique or repressed in her semantic discourse. She does not evoke a poetics of anything, really, other than rot: her flowers are strewn over a field of trash, her bedroom a dump.

As she eats the hardboiled egg in the episode above, she is drawn to a childhood memory in which she kept budgerigars, a kind of parakeet. Moriko tells us that she had a male and female but one day the male flew away, after which the female began laying eggs one after another. All of her eggs rotted, and although the smell was awful, Moriko says, the bird remained in her nest and “would fly into a rage and peck [her] finger” whenever she tried to clean it (193). Moriko, scared and in pain, gave up on her bird after that. The image of the female bird amidst its rotten eggs parallels Moriko’s dreams in which her eggs break, covering her with their white and yellow mixture. Moriko wonders if her female bird began laying all of those eggs out of “spite” or because she missed her male companion (193). Here, too, we get a glimpse of self-reference as Moriko pines for Aono, even though she is disheartened to hear rumors that he has impregnated another (younger) woman from the office.

Perhaps most urgently, Moriko is being “consumed” by social stigma against women “like her”—neither caregivers nor child bearers, and too old to be considered “marriage material.” Seaman has shown that older women with jobs are routinely replaced by younger ones (recall that Moriko is fired from her job), a phenomenon that suggests that, while women have made gains into the workforce, Japanese society continues to privilege young, pretty women, who, as they become older, will be replaced by younger and prettier women. The “rice bowl of youth” comes to mind here. The unstated presumption is that many of these women will marry, decide to start a family, and leave their job on their own accord, after which they will be replaced again.

In Kirino's *Out* (1997), Kuniko, one of the main characters who works in a *bentô* factory, attempts to find other work by responding to an ad at a hostess club. She has a brief interview with the manager, who decides even before the interview begins that he does not want to hire her. He asks her age. She lies: twenty-nine. "The fact is," he begins, "the minute the ad came out we had six girls, all about nineteen, show up. We like them fresh like that; seems to be what the customers want."⁶⁴ Kuniko is dejected, but also convinced that her age would not matter if she were stylish. "But just for the record" the manager presses, "—you're really over thirty, aren't you?" She maintains her innocence. On her way home after the interview, Kuniko stops for a bite to eat and studies her reflection. "There, staring back at her, was the blank look on her own homely face, perched on her own thick neck. She turned quickly away, recognizing that the mirror probably reflected her true age, thirty-three. She had lied about her age to her friends at the factory, too."⁶⁵

Moriko is emblematic of the paradox of female subjectivity in Japan. To remain viable sex objects, women must cultivate youth and beauty. But at a certain point, a woman's life transitions from sex object to maternal subject, catalyzed by marriage and then pregnancy. Social discourse in Japan often portrays women as *either* sexual commodities *or* fetal incubators, to paraphrase Bordo. But Moriko is neither. In this liminal space, Moriko's existence takes on a distinct lack of meaning; she has fallen through the cracks of a systemic feminine discourse and landscape that places women in secondary positions to both their husbands and children. In her study of fetal subjectivity, Bordo rhetorically wonders if mothers—often construed as fetal incubators in juridical and social contexts—are people. Are they not "mere bodies," she asks,

⁶⁴ Natsuo Kirino, *Out*, trans. Stephen Snyder (New York: Kodansha America, Inc., 2003), 17.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

robbed of a right to embodied subjectivity and personhood.⁶⁶ In Japan, too, the proverb *hara wa karimono*—“the womb is a borrowed thing”—strips women of all but their reproductive potential. Although it dates from the Edo period (1600-1868), the proverb’s influence remains strong. In 2007, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) health minister Yanagisawa Haku caused controversy after referring to women as baby-making machines. Moriko, it seems, is even further removed, for her sex organs and womb—her body—remain unused, neglected, and relegated, at the end, to the squalor of her apartment.

The clock continues to wind down as the story approaches its end. Moriko is unable to find a new job and she still has not heard from Aono. The night before the first of March she has the dream that constitutes the story’s climax. She is giving birth to a huge egg, which turns out to be Moriko herself. It is an ambiguous ending, to be sure. Seaman interprets the ending as a figurative rebirth for Moriko, who might now be free of “the biological imperatives of the womb.” We might also consider the fact that the “self-birth” with which Hasegawa brings the narrative to a close highlights the plight of women in contemporary Japan who have been liberated from the traditional marriage clock but who have few options with which to fill the void. In the end, Moriko is without a place in Japanese society, her biological clock having eroded her place at the “rice bowl of youth.” I suggested earlier that Moriko’s existence is predicated on lack—lack of male companionship, lack of a child, lack of a job, and lack of the youthful beauty of her co-workers. Hasegawa’s ending suggests that this may not be such a bad situation. Here, dreamscape affords Moriko the opportunity to explore the improbable. Hasegawa leaves us with an image of Moriko struggling to start a new life without Aono, without her job, and presumably without a child, and perhaps *with* the dreamy optimism that she will be just fine

⁶⁶ Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, 10th ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 72.

beyond the economy of desire and the happily ever after movies of her youth. As she sighs after being derided yet again by her co-workers, “God, nobody dreams anymore” (185).

BEING (AND) NOTHINGNESS

Kanehara’s protagonist Saki experiences her own crisis of subjectivity vis-à-vis male desirability. The novella is not as explicit in its concern with the gendered politics of aging in Japan; Saki is only twenty-four. But her realization that she is already past her prime in the highly visual profession of modeling dictates what seems to be the narrative’s central concern: dieting/eating disorders. In this way, *Hydra* overlaps with texts discussed in the previous chapter, and it just as well could have been included there. However, my aim is to demonstrate how Saki’s fear of getting older catalyzes her descent into anorexic-like behavior, purging after eating, and an odd pattern of chewing her food and spitting it out to keep her weight at about 77 pounds (35 kg in the text). “This is how I maintain my body,” she explains, fully cognizant of the fact that without her physique, she is nothing (38).

It is somewhat ironic that to be *something*, she must cultivate a physique that borders on *nothingness*. Models must be thin, of course, but Saki goes to such extremes because her live-in boyfriend and photographer Niizaki demands it. Moreover, having been dismissed from a modeling agency that prefers women “twenty and under,” Saki seems convinced that without Niizaki’s support, she will sink into obscurity (9, 111). Earlier in her career, Saki was featured in fashion magazine *SS* and then later had a spread in a magazine called *Delilah* that was shot by Niizaki, which remains her claim to fame. But even that spread is attributed to Niizaki’s genius behind the camera rather than to Saki’s professional talent in front of it (7). He is a famous photographer, and Saki understands that she needs him to survive—other than modeling, she does not have the “skills” to do much else short of prostitution or escorting (9). So she lives

according to his whims, ignoring his philandering with his younger, prettier clients; hardly talking and sleeping in separate rooms “like roommates;” and, as noted above, cultivating a skeletal thinness at his behest (23). Furthermore, “Unless we’re having sex, he never touches me” (23).

This novella—like many others in Kanehara’s oeuvre—is ultimately about survival. Like *Snakes and Earrings* in particular, the narrative pivots on the choices Saki makes regarding the men she is involved with. Saki meets a singer named Matsugi and becomes romantically involved with him behind Niizaki’s back. Although she just wants a fling at first, she and Matsugi quickly make plans to move in together. “He probably doesn’t care how much I weigh,” Saki tells herself (108). And the frequency with which they have sex is a far cry from the nearly “sexless” relationship she has with Niizaki, who, when they do have sex, treats her like a “cum dumpster” (*senyô benki*) (21, 90). “I don’t need that job,” she tells herself, referring to her modeling career. “All I need is Matsugi. And it doesn’t matter if I gain weight” (111). She gains a kilogram, and seems content. But underneath the veneer of happiness, Saki is worried:

I’m happy when I’m with Matsugi. And I feel like I don’t need anything or anyone else. Even so, if that means I’m no longer Niizaki’s girlfriend, no longer the subject of his photographs, no longer his client; if that means everyone will forget about me—what will happen to me? I mean, what if Matsugi were to dump me? Then I’d really be nothing. (115)

Weighing her options, and antagonized by rumors that Niizaki has been taking photographs of a model named Ojima Rin, Saki quickly loses the kilogram she gained and decides to go back to Niizaki. “I have to win. I can’t let [her] beat me. Anorexia is my weapon. ... I have to be skinny, I have to be skinny” (142). At the end of the narrative, she has gone back to Niizaki. He grabs his camera, and while Saki holds her pose she thinks back to the brief if pleasant relationship she

had with Matsugi. A smile drifts to her lips. “Don’t smile,” Niizaki barks, as the shutter snaps (148).

It is not uncommon to see fashion models with frowns or frozen sneers, both in pictures and on the runway. Niizaki demands that Saki, his girlfriend of three years, plays into the trope of the model in this respect. But there is a more sinister undercurrent. He seems determined to rob Saki of her personhood, which is an integral part of his demand that Saki remain so thin. Staring at herself in the mirror one evening, she says: “I had the eyes of a dead fish. Just the way he likes me. It made me sick to my stomach” (47). By the end of the narrative, Niizaki’s manipulation and control of Saki’s subjective experience of her body is transferred to her subjective experience of herself. When she goes back to him after spending the night with Matsugi, telling him all the while that she was with her girlfriend Mizuki, Niizaki is suspicious and upset; he gives her a choice:

“You can stay, or you can leave. It’s up to you.”

“I’ll stay.”

“That was quick. Well, if you do decide to leave, do it when I’m not here.”(147)

She cannot help but think that Niizaki knew she would be back, that everything had gone according to his own plan (149). In other words, he knows that she needs him.

Kanehara often writes about women pushing the boundaries of marriage or motherhood or feminine normativity, but she nearly always turns to dealing with how women survive after life bottoms out, and this text is no exception. She repeatedly writes of hurt—domestic violence, adultery, divorce, child abuse, and the unfortunate consequences of choosing the wrong guy—and how women deal with it. Some, like the young mothers in her recent novel *Mazâzu* (Mothers, 2011), run from their pain, because as literary critic Saitô Minako explains in her analysis of the

work, they have no other option.⁶⁷ Others retreat into their minds to construct and live out elaborate fantasies of murdering the men who wronged them.

Not all of her works are discourses on terrible men, but as Kanehara's career expands, she seems to be interested in a complex engagement with what Lauren Berlant calls the "female complaint," the notion that, it is worth repeating (see Chapter Two), "women live for love, and love is the gift that keeps on taking."⁶⁸ Men hurt Kanehara's protagonists, physically, emotionally, but her protagonists want them anyway, until they don't want them, after which they do again. Kanehara complicates this notion slightly in *Hydra*, showing readers that there is a certain degree of practicality in staying with the man who will ensure a woman's survival/worth and even dictate her life (so that she does not have to do it herself), even if it means that she will be unhappy and constantly watching her weight. To be sure, Niizaki does not "want" Saki; they rarely have sex and live "like roommates." Rather, he seems to take satisfaction in knowing that she depends on him.

Her friend Mizuki is aware of the limitations of her relationship with Niizaki. In fact, she is the only person who even knows about it. To prevent scandal and gossip, Saki has been telling people that her boyfriend is in the public sector. Mizuki initially tries to set her up with a twenty-year old named Ritsu, a former model who now runs a nightclub. The two first meet at a house party in the trendy Aoyama district of Tokyo where they bond over the tribulations of modeling. "My photographer never lets me smile," Saki complains to him; "That's a little excessive," he

⁶⁷ Saitô Minako, "Jakusha no shishô" [Thoughts of the Vulnerable], *Asahi Shinbun*, August 31, 2011.

⁶⁸ Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 1.

rejoins (16). The next day, Saki tells Mizuki about her encounter with Ritsu, and Mizuki immediately suggests that she go out with him. Their conversation goes, in part:

“He’s cute. But he’s too young for me.”

“The hell he is! You’re already twenty-four, Saki. *Sink your teeth* into a younger guy—just this once.”

“I have no intention of breaking up with Niizaki.”

“I’m not saying you should date him. Just sleep with him.”

“If you feel so strongly about it, why don’t you *have a taste?*”

“That won’t do. I’m on an older guy kick these days.” (25) (Emphasis added.)

Although Saki and Ritsu never get together, he is an important if ephemeral figure in the text. She meets Matsugi at his nightclub. And late in the text, he warns Saki to be careful with Matsugi—the romantic high she is currently riding will not last forever. His words prove true, for once Matsugi explains to Saki that he will go on a four-month national tour, Saki realizes the futility in staying with him.

In the original text, the italicized words in the above conversation are derivations of the verb “to eat,” or *kû* in Japanese. Kanehara uses the verb in a variety of contexts throughout. At the house party, one guest asks if she makes enough money as a model to eat (7); Mizuki expresses concern that without Niizaki, Saki won’t be able to eat (30); in the heat of passion, Matsugi says that he wants to eat her (71). These phrases stand out given the text’s emphasis on Saki’s relationship with food and its concurrent emphasis on the ways in which Saki is “eaten” away by her relationship with Niizaki. Hollywood films continually reaffirm this relationship, portraying women’s bodies as food-like through the ways in which they are “consumed” by men. In Alfonso Arau’s *Como agua para chocolate* (Like Water for Chocolate, 1992), for instance, eating becomes a substitute for sex. In this film, Pedro gives Tita roses, but they have been forbidden to marry by the latter’s mother. Tita then makes a sauce from the roses, which the lovers eat together. Here, too, gender roles are codified, as it is Tita who prepares the dish for her

lover Pedro. Women have historically had a “closer” relationship to food than men—as mothers, daughters, wives. In the sex—food—body triad, it makes sense that Tita should offer herself up as dishes to be eaten.

Yet it is also the case that while men partake of the flesh of women, it is women who are characterized as sexually vociferous—and sometimes dangerously so. Think about *Dracula*. Van Helsing describes Dracula’s wives as “voluptuous,” and gives special attention to their lips and mouths, the locus of their sexual hunger. Before killing them at novel’s end, he speaks of their beauty and the wickedness it veils:

She lay in her Vampire sleep, so full of life and voluptuous beauty that I shudder as though I have come to do murder. Ah, I doubt not that in the old time, when such things were, many a man who set forth to do such a task as mine, found at the last his heart fail him, and then his nerve. And he remains on and on, till sunset come, and the Vampire sleep be over. Then the beautiful eyes of the fair woman open and look love, and the voluptuous mouth present to a kiss, and the man is weak. And there remain one more victim in the Vampire fold. One more to swell the grim and grisly ranks of the Undead!⁶⁹

Bram Stoker envisions the sexually dangerous woman as a “voluptuous” one, codifying the association between gluttony and female desire vis-à-vis woman as excess. Furthermore, *Dracula* was published in 1897, and thus Stoker’s voluptuous vampire women are monsters in a true sense, for the nineteenth century was an era during which women’s sexuality was held in check by Victorian-era morals. After all, Van Helsing does not characterize his “human” wife in such saucy terms as those cited above; she is insane, in fact. While the voluptuous woman has been replaced in the popular imagination by a thin one—whose sexual appetite, if contemporary media is the yardstick by which we might measure, is as healthy as ever—the associations between women’s dangerous sexuality and its implicit hunger remains strong.

⁶⁹ Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, 1897 ed. (Salt Lake City: Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, 2006), 587-588, E-book.

Under different circumstances, Saki could be a femme fatale, using her modelesque beauty to get what she wants, devouring hapless male victims with her seductive charm. Nakamoto Takako's "Suzumushi no mesu" (The Female Bell Cricket, 1929) comes to mind here, for in this short story protagonist Tomoko sucks the life force from her meager male admirer Miki. When the text opens, Tomoko has lost her job and her common-law husband Akita. She has no reservations about turning to Miki for her needs. He gives her all he has, no questions asked, including his food. Tomoko is not impressed by his adoration, but rather disdainful:

Realizing that Miki had saved the food for her even though he was hungry himself, she was filled with an even stronger contempt for him. She felt no gratitude for his kindness and gentleness. She knew where his ambitions lay, she could see it more clearly everyday. Men are all kind and gentle until they get what they want from a woman, she thought.⁷⁰

Over the course of the story, Tomoko grows fat while Miki wastes away. He works long hours to provide for her, but he can hardly "keep up with [her] appetite."⁷¹ Miki grows sick, and Tomoko, now with a double-chin and hips "full and solid as the body of a female moth," entertains designs of devouring him—just like the insect of the story's title: "She coldly watched as this male bell-cricket became emaciated with the approach of autumn, ready to be eaten by his female."⁷²

Okamoto Kanoko, too, uses food often in her works as well. In her acclaimed short story "Sushi" (1939), a man frequents a sushi shop hoping to relive memories of his deceased mother. As he explains to the daughter of the owner, when he was a boy, he refused to eat, fearful that to do so would pollute his body. Unable to get him to eat anything else, his mother prepares him

⁷⁰ Nakamoto Takako, "The Female Bell Cricket," trans. Yukiko Tanaka, in *To Live and To Write: Selections by Japanese Women Writers, 1913-1938*, ed. Yukiko Tanaka (Seattle, WA: Seal Press, 1987), 137.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 141.

sushi, taking extra caution to wash in his presence her hands, her knife, and the cutting board. He eats what she prepares and grows up strong and healthy and indebted to his mother. He began going to the sushi restaurant after she died. The owner's daughter is keen to know more, but the man leaves and never returns.⁷³

Ogino Anna posits that in many works of fiction by women, eating is deployed as an expression of “gustatory disgust, or gastronomic unhappiness.”⁷⁴ The consuming or rejecting of food speaks to larger anxieties over being consumed/rejected as women, Ogino continues.

“Gastronomic unhappiness” in women's fiction stands for

the unhappiness, we might say, of alienated people who are using the act of eating as their final avenue of self-expression. In contrast to the active, male subject/consumer who eats up the world, we have the female subject, who has lost her sense of self, being eaten or consumed by the world as she becomes at once both subject and object[.]⁷⁵

In the fiction explored in Chapter Three of this dissertation, “the act of eating” is not as expressive or as powerful a statement as the rejection of food or the conspicuous over-consumption of it. In Hasegawa's *Prisoner of Solitude*, Mayuko's bulimia is coded with a pervasive sense of self-rejection and social abjection. And for Tokiko in Matsumoto's *The Obsessive Overeater*, (over)eating is an act of self-hatred and demonstration of weakness. Both

⁷³ In her analysis of the story, Tomoko Aoyama says that the boy is “anorexic.” She uses this same term regarding Lui's bout of self-starvation in *Snakes and Earrings*. “Anorexia nervosa represents only a small part of [Lui's] obsession with modifying, manipulating, and even transgressing her body and body image,” she writes. In both instances, I feel her use of the term is misguided, if only because anorexia nervosa is part of a medical discourse that is absent from these texts. Anorexia and similar eating disorders emerge from a constellation of factors including consumerism, fashion, changing gender roles, sexuality, identity, and body image (see Chapter Three). Aoyama, 207.

⁷⁴ Mizuta Noriko, et al. “Symposium: Women's Culture: Postmodern Expressions,” *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 4 (1991): 70. See also Aoyama, 188.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

women understand that their value as women rides on their physical attractiveness. Following Ogino, they are “consumed” by their desire—or, equally, their failure—to fit a particular stereotypical model of femininity.



Saki is already stereotypically feminine: beautiful, thin, submissive, vacuous (she is almost a parody of the feminine, in fact). As a model, she is a burgeoning icon of quintessential femininity, and she earns praise for her “beauty” throughout the narrative. Jennifer Craik explains that in the West,

[m]odeling [has] come to epitomize dominant characteristics of...femininity: the importance of appearance; fetishization of the body; manipulation and moulding of the body; the discipline and labor associated with ‘beauty’ and body maintenance; the equation of youth with femininity; and feminine lifestyles.⁷⁶

Craik further notes that the rise of fashion was preceded by the gendering of consumerism. The association of women with the home gradually gave way to gendered notions of “modernity (through consumer goods and household appliances), leisure and pleasure.”⁷⁷ Craik draws from Anne Clark’s studies of how women’s identities became conflated with consumption and consumer culture, which was further reflected and even exploited in marketing campaigns directed primarily at women that continue today. “Man is essentially the earner, woman the shopper,” was the slogan of one Australian department store at the turn of the 20th century that continues to ring true.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Jennifer Craik, *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 69.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 70.

In her study “The Girl: A Rhetoric of Desire,” Clark offers the figure of “The Girl” as an easily identifiable mainstay of the landscape of consumer capitalism. “What is she like?” Clark asks:

Blue skies, blond hair in the wind, jeans running across a field strewn with wild flowers, *The Girl is free*. She is able to do, be and choose anything whatsoever, whatever she is offered: Swiss Formula, Helene Curtis, L’Oréal. She lives anywhere—anywhere, that is, that is a democracy. This allows her democratic choice: any kind of cheeseburger, says the American Dairy Association. So she can *be* anyone. Her home is the context of no context, promising us happiness if only we join her there. Her history is to have no history so that anything is possible. That enables her, being formless, to be infinitely free.⁷⁹

The Girl is a corporate image, emblematic of the interplay between self and commodity, and self *as* commodity, between consumer and consumed. She is a “surrogate” for public and private interests—“the coin in the exchange of desires.”⁸⁰ The Girl “makes desire intelligible by giving it form and she does this by establishing and controlling what is acceptable as pleasure (the feel of a Schick-smooth leg” or as exchange for sexuality (‘Give her diamonds. For all the ways they make a woman feel...’).⁸¹ While Clark claims that The Girl is gender neutral because “any of us may see ourselves through her,” it is still true that women are tied to consumerism more so than men.⁸²

Odaira Maiko argues along similar lines. Beginning her study *Onna ga onna o enjiru: bungaku, yokubô, shôhi* (Women Performing Women: Literature, Desire, Consumption) with the rise of department store culture in the late nineteenth century, Odaira shows how a burgeoning

⁷⁹ Ann K. Clark, “The Girl: A Rhetoric of Desire,” *Cultural Studies* 1, no. 2 (1987): 195.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 200.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 195.

consumer culture worked against women by emphasizing a decorative role and an artificial femininity.⁸³ Echoing Ogino's words above, Odaira describes the ways in which the female body has been rendered both passive (*jûdôteki*) vis-à-vis the whims of fashion designers and marketing campaigns, and increasingly doll-like (*ningyo=josei*)—like a mannequin in a department store window, to be “looked at.”⁸⁴ Her focus is on the Meiji (1868-1912) to Taisho (1912-1926) eras, though her argument is as relevant today as it was then, if not more so, given the prevalence today of a consumer culture and women's role within it.

Craik's study is insightful in tracing the development of fashion alongside aesthetic shifts in society at large. She argues persuasively that film and photography offered actresses and models as role models for mass and rapid consumption: “Films threw up the new role models, images of a consumer society, visually-based fantasies and narratives.”⁸⁵ Those fantasies promised a glamorous and leisurely life to wealthy consumers with the expendable income to acquire them. Furthermore, fashion designers looked to inspiration from art, and the modernist movement of the 1920s and 30s was a conspicuous influence that led to stylized, “angular and geometric,” representations of gender and femininity that remain popular today.⁸⁶ It led, too, to a diminished gap between woman and art, such that woman *became* art, something to be looked at and appreciated, an artifice.⁸⁷ In this milieu, photographers were the preferred documenters of

⁸³ Odaira Maiko, *Onna ga onna o enjiru: bungaku, yokubô, shôhi* [Women Performing Women: Literature, Desire, Consumption](Tokyo: Shinyôsha, 2008), 30.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 36, 38, 40-44.

⁸⁵ Craik, 98.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

fashion, Craik explains. They could isolate and fetishize particular parts of the body. And after the war, technological advances and experimentation in technique breathed life into the fashion industry that was still fixed on wartime “austerity...and...restrictions.”⁸⁸ Indeed, in the postwar period photographers sought to “celebrate...the female form with attention to shapely contours and signs of femininity.”⁸⁹ Photographers were in high demand. In turn, some demanded to work exclusively with the model(s) of their choice.

But what fashion photography does not capture is the labor of femininity, the labor of the look. This is what Kanehara does in *Hydra*. In contrast to the texts discussed in the previous chapter, whose protagonists are chasing the elusive rewards of thinness and beauty, Saki already has those things. She just has to work hard to keep them. The primary means to do so is by staying thin, which she does by either purging or chewing her food and spitting it out. In one scene, Saki is on her way home when she stops by her local convenience store. She packs her basket full of foodstuffs, hoping that the “boy behind the counter” will presume that she is a secretary picking up food for the people back at the office (36). When she gets home, she rings the intercom to make sure Niizaki is not home. At this point, the reader is introduced to Saki’s odd ritual. She says:

While my *bentô* warmed in the microwave, I hid all the candy in my desk drawer. If Niizaki were to suddenly show up, I didn’t want him to find anything. I took the lid off my warmed *bentô* and set it nearby; then I pried apart my wooden chopsticks and took a bite of hamburger and rice. Saliva infused itself with the rice and hamburger as my jaw

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* During this same period, designer Christian Dior introduced a fashion line in which full drapery was prominent. Some women, accustomed to shorter skirts and exposed bodies, were agitated (Mr. Dior / We abhor / Dresses to the Floor!), and missed the subtle implications behind Dior’s liberal use of fabrics on the heels of strict wartime rationing. Fashion magazine *Vogue*, however, was impressed: “Every woman’s a woman again!” Daniel Delis Hill, *As Seen in Vogue: A Century of American Fashion in Advertising* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2004), 76-77.

bobbed up and down, churning my mouth's contents into mush. I grabbed the plastic *bentô* lid and spit it all out. Repeat, repeat, repeat. Like a machine, I chewed and spit. Even when my jaw started hurting, or when I ran out of saliva, or when my mouth got dry, I put food in, I spit food out. (36).

We get the sense that Saki *has* to do this; it is a chore, a mindless mechanical ritual, even. Later on in the text, when she is on her way home after spending the night with Matsugi, Saki “marches mechanically” (*kikaiteki ni ashi ga muita hōkō ni*) toward her usual convenience store to do it all over again (82). When she is finished, her mind wanders to Matsugi, who had earlier promised to cook her fried rice and “make her fat” (86). Not without a tinge of sorrow, she says: “I wonder if there will ever be a time when I can actually *eat* what he makes for me” (86). While her resolve to leave Niizaki strengthens at this moment, in the next she climbs on the scale to check her weight: 35 kg.

Here she explains why she monitors her figure so closely. “I wanted Niizaki to stay interested in me. I wanted him to look at me again, pay attention to me. As a subject for his photos, as his girlfriend—this is what I wanted most of all” (87). Saki is fighting a losing battle in a way; soon after they moved in together, he began spending all of his time with other women. Saki was hurt, but she knew better than to complain—“he might dump me” (88). “So I had no choice,” she elaborates, “than to keep chewing and spitting and thinning like a machine, and turn myself into a grotesque creature with no emotions or feelings or thoughts” (88). Somewhat paradoxically, in stifling all affect, she is able to be a better model for him—Niizaki never wants her to smile when he takes her photos, after all. When they first began working together, she jokingly asked if he likes ball-jointed dolls (*kyūtai kansetsu ningyō*). He replies that he does not, which leads Saki to conclude that “he prefers taking pictures of people who have lost their humanity” (106). At the same time, however, she says that she was happy when he was interested in her. And the more weight she lost, the longer she was able to hold his attention.

Saki admits that she initially resented Niizaki for “making [her]” lose so much weight (106). But she gradually came to accept the fact that she should be thankful for her weight loss:

That’s right, I felt like I could touch some hidden worth deep inside me...The skinner I got, the happier I was. ... The sickly pallor of my face, the way my face clashed with the dullness in my eyes—it all made me happy. But it’s not that he wanted to take pictures of my bones, or that he wanted to take pictures of a doll; I knew that he really wanted to document emotion and affect leaving my body. ... If I lost too much weight and died he’d lose interest in me for sure. But I couldn’t not lose weight, either. ... I had to do what he wanted; that’s the only way I could beat those other girls. (106-107)

While her brief relationship with Matsugi seems to offer her reprieve, once she hears rumors that Niizaki has been going out with Rin, she breaks things off with Matsugi. “Anyone but her,” she moans, referring to Rin. “No matter what else, I didn’t want him taking her pictures” (95). The source of her hatred for Rin stems from two years prior when she was called in for a photo shoot “simply because I look like her” (96). She had even been mistaken for Rin in public. Saki feels threatened, and states that although she may look like Rin, “Rin possesses something [she] lack[s]”—“and wouldn’t she be a better model for Niizaki, besides,” Saki wonders (95). As briefly noted above, at this point in the text, Saki decides to go back to Niizaki, and hurriedly loses the kilogram she gained while she was with Matsugi.

“[T]he desire for positive validation by the men in one’s life is...important in rendering women complicit with social constructions of femininity,” notes Julia Bullock in her study of Japanese women writers of the 1960s and 70s.⁹⁰ In an exchange economy in which women are treated as the items of exchange—as possessions, as conquests, as photographic subjects—this kind of rivalry is not uncommon. Neither is it an uncommon literary trope. One salient example is Ariyoshi Sawako’s *Hanaoka seishû no tsuma* (The Doctor’s Wife, 1966), a historical novel

⁹⁰ Julia Bullock, *The Other Women’s Lib: Gender and Body in Japanese Women’s Fiction* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2010), 77.

based loosely on the life of Hanaoka Seishû (1760-1835), a physician and pioneer in the field of anesthesiology. Hanaoka develops an anesthetic solution and his mother and wife both hope to be used as his first test subject. “I am the mother who gave birth to you,” his mother insists, “so I, more than anyone else, understand what you want to accomplish.”⁹¹ In this novel, the mother-son bond and the wife-husband bond become tangled. And both mother and wife offer their bodies as a way to show the son/husband the extent of their affection and commitment to his success. Here, mother and wife try to out-martyr each other, as though the “better” woman makes the greatest sacrifice.

This is what Saki does in our text as well, pledging to become as thin as possible to please Niizaki. She is not explicitly in competition with Rin (the latter is only referred to by name in the text) or any of the other women Niizaki photographs. Theirs is an implicit competition as both women and photographable subjects. All of Saki’s eggs are in one basket, so to speak. She explains that she first met Niizaki after she lost her job as a magazine model. He agreed to take her on as his client, under the condition that she refuse all potential offers for TV or radio or erotic magazine appearances and devote herself exclusively to him (20). “There was one time, ages ago, when I didn’t do as he asked,” she continues. ““I want to be in TV,’ I told him. He told me to do as I pleased, but the ice in his words froze me with fear. From that time on....whenever I got requests to model [in the mail], I balled them up and threw them in the garbage” (20).

Is Kanehara’s text, then, an instance of what Susan Gubar calls “feminist misogyny,” the internalization and replication of misogynistic rhetoric by women? Bullock invokes this term in her discussion of several texts by Japanese women in which female protagonists see themselves

⁹¹ Sawako Ariyoshi, *The Doctor’s Wife*, trans. Wakako Hironaka and Ann Siller Kostant (New York: Kodansha International, 1981), 105.

as inferior to their male counterparts. “In each case the hierarchical nature of such relationships, whereby the male occupies a dominant position vis-à-vis the female, encourages the protagonist to compensate for her relative lack of power through her compliance with and/or manipulation of the standards used to judge her as inferior.”⁹² Bullock demonstrates that in Kôno’s “Bone Meat,” briefly mentioned above, the protagonist internalizes the power imbalance of her relationship with a man. Initially turned on by the sadomasochistic games they would play at the dinner table, particularly the act of being fed or starved at her lover’s behest, his absence seems to bring the subtext of the game to the surface; for without him there to allow her to eat, she literally starves. And by the end, she sees herself as no better than the garbage he has left behind at her house.⁹³

Saki complicates this picture slightly. Evoking a discourse of individualism, she acknowledges that while Niizaki wanted her thin, it was ultimately her choice to take it to such extremes. The notion of choice is tricky here. Saki does have a choice, of course, but given her dependence on Niizaki it is not much of a choice at all. She is complicit in her own subjugation because it makes the most sense given her other options. So, probably, are the women she is competing with. As models, and as women, they desire to be the object of Niizaki’s (photographic) gaze.

Late in the text, after Saki has made her mind up to go back to Niizaki, she goes to the convenience store again. All she wants to buy are a charger for her cell phone and some underwear but she ends up with a basketful of groceries. She is still staying with Matsugi and is nervous about doing *this* at someone else’s house. When she returns, she locks all three bolts on his door and heads straight to the bathroom to throw up:

⁹² Bullock, 77.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 83.

I stuck my finger down my throat and began heaving so hard that I felt like my stomach was going to come up. I washed the saliva from my hands and went to sit near the bed. I piled all of the food onto the end table. ... No matter what, I couldn't make a mess. I fastidiously wiped my hands and mouth with a tissue while I chewed and chewed. The more I chewed, the more I had to spit out. Three pieces of inari-zushi, three bites of a sandwich, one hamburger *bentô*, one fish and soy sauce *bentô*, one *maku-no-uchi bentô*, two boiled eggs, four croissants, eight slices of raisin bread, one bag of cookies, four roll cakes, ten *senbei*, one box of chocolates. I ate and ate, but I couldn't make a dent in all I brought back from the convenience store. ... So nobody would notice, I hurriedly threw everything in the dumpster and scurried back to his apartment. I took my clothes off and headed for the bathroom. Stepping onto the bathroom scale, I held my breath: 35.2 [kg]. I was satisfied. Everything will be okay, everything will be okay. I can go back to how I was. I'm not going to get fat. (109-110)

Here, again, is evidence of Saki's presumption that losing weight is the key to a secure future. The works discussed in the previous chapter countered the idea that Tokiko's over-eating and Mayuko's bulimia were simply manifestations of a desire to be thin. In both texts, the protagonists' issues with food were extensions of deeper personal crises. This is an important point, because it is easy to presume that eating disorders arise solely from sociocultural pressures to be thin. Even so, the discursive opposition in these texts shields the protagonists from accusations of superficiality and even elides the sociopolitical reality of eating disorders in light of the personalization/individualization of being thin. In *Hydra* Kanehara is able to both personalize and generalize Saki's story. As a model, Saki is an important and appropriate medium to demonstrate thinness as a generic social imperative. Yet as a model who is getting older and quickly losing her ability to find work, hers is also a personal struggle to find the remaining worth in her body. Saki does not entertain fantasies of thinness as an egress to happiness. In *The Excessive Overeater*, Tokiko attaches any number of ideals to thin body, which she is able to do because she *is not* thin. Saki, by comparison, is thin and knows first hand that a particular body size does not elicit happiness; she is quite miserable, in fact.

Rather, to be thin—and, more importantly, to keep Niizaki satisfied—is to stay alive, even if it means starving herself. So she agrees to stay with him. As already noted, at the end of the narrative he has camera in hand, and Saki poses for him. She thinks back to something Matsugi had said: “Everyone deserves to be happy” (147). She smiles. Niizaki tells her not to, and in an instant her smile vanishes. For Saki, then, practicality and survival take precedence over happiness. “I wish that camera would burn his eyes out,” Saki thinks as she glares back at its gaze (147).



What ultimately frames the above texts is a discourse of disgust toward the aging/aged body. Because the “shelf-life” of models is exceptionally short, Kanehara’s text offers a condensed version of the same social narrative Hasegawa addresses. One woman’s social worth is predicated on her reproductive potential to have a certain kind of baby while the other’s is defined by her visual marketability—and both are preceded by youthfulness. Furthermore, if Moriko is unable to produce a child, if Saki is unable to keep Niizaki interested—both women will presumably fail as women. Indeed, Moriko’s reproductive potential is determined by her sex appeal, which is fast fading; and Saki’s photographic appeal seems to be a metaphor for her own sexual appeal—the camera’s gaze as a stand in for the man’s gaze (which is odd given that Niizaki is not very sexually attracted to her). In both texts discussed here, then, we see Moriko and Saki attempt to defy their ages: Moriko by dressing and acting like a teenager, Saki by losing weight.

Together, Hasegawa and Kanehara offer a portrait of life in contemporary Japan in which women are always already aware of their expendability and the lengths to which they must go to keep age at bay. In larger social discourse, their respective texts offer insight into patriarchal

concerns over, in Ussher's words, "disgust towards the menopausal body."⁹⁴ The current craze for plastic surgery in many first world countries sheds light on many women's efforts to curtail the inevitability of aging. Ussher continues: "Sucking away layers of fat, nipping and tucking the sagging skin, removing the lines that crease the face, filling the lips with botox—women can pretend that they are not facing mortality, or at the very least, that they are still within their fecund years."⁹⁵

I wonder, then, if it is a coincidence that the afterword to Kanehara's text is provided by Setouchi Jakuchô (b. 1922). A Buddhist nun, author, and activist, Setouchi is now 91 years old. The afterword is in the form of a letter addressed to Kanehara-sama (Miss Kanehara). She begins:

We've never had the opportunity to meet, and I was surprised to be asked to write the afterword for your text. The editor probably heard somewhere that I'm a fan of yours. I'm very interested in what you and other young authors are writing, and for my age, I guess you could say I read your novels frequently. Even without reading their works, I generally know what authors my age write about. But young writers surprise me with their ingenuity and originality and they even offer a delightful shock sometimes.⁹⁶

After a brief reflection on Kanehara's *Snakes and Earrings*, Setouchi wonders how Kanehara's career will progress as she ages. "Hitomi-san, I was born in 1922; you were born in 1983. There are sixty-one years between us. ... I heard that you've gotten married and have had a child, like a normal girl (*futsû no onna no ko*). Speaking of which, there are children and babies in your

⁹⁴ Jane M. Ussher, *Managing the Monstrous Feminine: Regulating the Reproductive Body* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 127.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Setouchi Jakuchô, "Kaisetsu" [Afterword], in *Haidora* [Hydra] by Kanehara Hitomi (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 2007), 150.

recent novels, no? Mothers, too.”⁹⁷ Regarding *Hydra*, one gets the sense that Setouchi does not really know what to do with it. She comments on the morbid subject matter, its “quick tempo,” and Kanehara’s uncanny ability to capture the thoughts, feelings, and ways of speaking of Japan’s youth.⁹⁸ But she quickly shifts her focus once again to Kanehara’s future: “When you turn forty, when you turn fifty, when you’re close to ninety like I am—I’d like to read what you write.”⁹⁹ From the above excerpts, it is clear that Setouchi is intrigued by the generation gaps that separate her from Kanehara and Kanehara’s generation. In fact, when she was 86, Setouchi wrote a “cell-phone novel” called “Ashita no niji” (Tomorrow’s Rainbow) under the pen name “Purple.” *Keitai shōsetsu* in Japanese, these novels are typically the domain of younger authors.¹⁰⁰

The afterword is troubling in a way because it focuses on a lateral and solely female experience, obfuscating the fact that these women’s experiences with aging occur in an androcentric worldview. The texts discussed in this chapter are not concerned with *old age* as much as they are concerned with *getting older*, or at least with *not* being young. In Japan, the elderly do face numerous challenges as they do in other parts of the world.¹⁰¹ But what is

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 154-155.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁰⁰ Larissa Hjorth, “The Novelty of Being Mobile: A Case Study of Mobile Novels and the Politics of the Personal,” in *Throughout: Art and Culture Emerging with Ubiquitous Computing* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2013), 209. Larissa Hjorth finds that *keitai shōsetsu* were originally written by professional writers, but the accessibility and ubiquity of cell-phones has afforded even the non-professional the opportunity to write. Moreover, many hard cover books begin as *keitai shōsetsu*. Larissa Hjorth, *Mobile Media in the Asia-Pacific: Gender and the Art of Being Mobile*, ed. Ulrik Ekman (New York: Routledge, 2009), 114.

¹⁰¹ See, for example, Diana Bethel, “Alienation and Reconnection in a Home for the Elderly,” in *Re-made in Japan: Everyday Life and Consumer Taste in a Changing Society*, ed. Joseph Jay Tobin (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 126-142.

challenging and even traumatic for the protagonists in the works discussed here is the transition and coercion that accompanies getting older and the unknown threat of what happens to them in a male-dominated society. Kaplan says that aging and trauma are not often linked because the former is presumably “a ‘common’ or ‘quiet’ crisis.”¹⁰² She further observes that aging constitute a crisis of identity; and “[f]or women, identity crises however around bodily changes in a culture obsessed with normative ideas of feminine beauty. The core of feminine subjectivity is threatened.”¹⁰³ I have argued above that feminine subjectivity in the aging body is constituted by lack, by an existence in a void. Kaplan astutely notices that popular culture does not know what to do with these women who do not know what to do with themselves, arguing that “aging women...traditionally been relegated to the fringes of classical narratives or, if central, then imagined as witches or phallic mothers. Popular culture has no category for women between sexy youth or young motherhood, on the one hand, and old-aged women, represented as tired, bitter, evil, or jealous, on the other.”¹⁰⁴ When the issue is broached, she says, it is typically in the form of a generational mother/daughter rift, a theme that is evident in Setouchi’s afterword.

“This in itself displaces troubles about aging onto women (leaving men out of the picture except as loving support figures or impediments of some kind),” she continues. “Aging is shown as trauma for women, but not for men.”¹⁰⁵ It is trauma because there will always be a younger

¹⁰² E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 46.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ E. Ann Kaplan, “Trauma, Aging, and Melodrama,” in *Feminist Locations: Global and Local, Theory and Practice*, ed. Marianne Dekoven (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 309.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 310.

woman. Men have options for younger and younger sex partners. This is less so for women, and in Japan, the focus on the *shôjo*—“the elusive model for cute culture” and heterosexual desirability¹⁰⁶—makes the problem of age even more of a problem: as women age, the *shôjo* remains the same. As women age, they are expected to become contributing members of society—as wives or mothers; yet *shôjo* by their very nature are exempt from this requirement. As Jennifer Robertson shows, *shôjo* “means, literally, a ‘not-quite-female female’” and exists in a perpetual space of deferment and inexperience.¹⁰⁷ She does not have to grow up, which is part of her appeal, particularly to men whose roles are ostensibly predetermined.¹⁰⁸ We could argue, too, that this is part of what is alluring and threatening about her for women—recalling *A Little Romance*, Lane can be thought of as inhabiting a *shôjo* space as she seeks out true and lasting love beneath that bridge in Venice. But it is a space that women must leave behind; even Lane, after *the kiss*, is different, mature, as though she has crossed her own bridge into a more fixed temporality.

But the women I have discussed in this chapter are not able to make the transition. They have no concept or acceptance of their own futurity. Moriko seems to miss the boat entirely, enamored of the fleeting *shôjo* realm of Hollywood “first time” fantasies and promises of happiness. Moriko waits until her (biological) clock runs down before scrambling to meet a man who can help her make the transition. But the men she meets fail to deliver, leaving her to

¹⁰⁶ Sharon Kinsella, “Cuties in Japan,” in *Women, Media, and Consumption in Japan*, ed. Lise Skov and Brian Moeran (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1994), 244.

¹⁰⁷ Jennifer Robertson, *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 65.

¹⁰⁸ Sharalyn Orbaugh, “Busty Battlin’ Babes: The Evolution of the *Shôjo* in 1990s Visual culture,” in *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, ed. Joshua S. Mostow, Norman Bryson, and Maribeth Graybill (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2003), 225.

improvise. Her mother and grandmother ask her to give birth to a child just like herself, and in a sense ask her to give birth to herself—which she does. And Saki has no next step to make. She can only work on getting thinner—literally spitting her insides out until there is nothing left. She is trapped in a photograph, robbed of emotion and subjectivity. Like the ubiquitous scowling runway models, Saki is just supposed to be—empty and vacuous. Because as a model she is a place holder, a clothes hanger. Other women are supposed to look at her and imagine themselves in her place—wearing her clothes, entering the frame of the photo. If she has a personality, it will be impossible for the viewing women to take her place. She has grown so accustomed to being empty that she has no substance, nothing to project, no future beyond the frame.

Setouchi's afterword is an interesting addition to this discussion, and a fitting way to bring the chapter to a close. Setouchi herself demonstrates the temporality of female experience. Although she took Buddhist vows in 1973, and gave up her given name Harumi, she continues to write stories as Setouchi Harumi. Her early career stirred controversy for her use of the word "uterus" in her story "Kashin" (Pistil and Stamen, 1957), which is about a woman who leaves behind the domestic life of a housewife to become a prostitute. Setouchi refuses to cast female sexuality through the lens of subtle euphemism and "flower talk," repeatedly using the anatomical term "uterus." This story earned Setouchi the nickname *shikyû no sakka*, or "writer of the womb."¹⁰⁹ An industry backlash followed, and Setouchi found it difficult to find publishers for her subsequent works. As a result, she turned to writing biographies of similarly ostracized women as well as less polemical fiction. Her "serious" fiction was committed to exploring women's sexuality, and the emotional complexities of loneliness, promiscuity, and adultery.

¹⁰⁹ Gretchen Jones, "The 1960s and 1970s Boom in Women's Writing," in *The Columbia Companion to Modern East Asian Literature*, ed. Joshua Mostow (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 226.

CONCLUSION: Discourses of Disappointment, Heuristics of Happiness

There can be nothing more terrifying than getting what you want, because it is at this moment that you face what you really want.

--Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*

...but nevertheless I was keenly aware of the discrepancy between what I imagined that I was supposed to feel and what I actually did feel, because in the end I just felt like a person who for some reason was having her stomach licked, and not like a woman having a passionate erotic experience, and I didn't know who to blame for this mishap, him or me.

--Zeruya Shalev, *Love Life*

PLAGUES AND FANTASIES OF FEMININITY

This dissertation has been concerned with tracing a strategy of survival in a selection of works by Japanese women writers. These six works are a window through which we can observe and try to understand critical issues in Japanese women's experiences; they are representative of current trends in fiction by women that reflect pressing issues in the social realm. This dissertation has analyzed these works through three lenses—obscenity, abjection, and trauma—that are important theoretical tools to help us understand the ways in which femininity is both constructed publically and dismantled privately. Drawing from literary and social scholarship and commentary, this dissertation demonstrated that women's bodies continue to be limned by social contradictions and phallic fantasies of “proper” femininity that code particular female archetypes with positive affect while simultaneously denigrating women who fall short. The obscene, the abject, and the traumatic are causes, symptoms, and experiences for many women living today whose lives are governed by the reality of stasis in the face of expectations of progress.

We see the static nature of subjective experience in novellas and short stories that go nowhere. Each work examined in this dissertation suffers from a lack of temporality and progression that is reflected in the characters' own lack of futurity. As Sara Ahmed articulates,

narratives demand movement from “here” to “there,” and “the ‘there’ acquires its value by not being ‘here’.”¹ There is something “there” that draws characters away from “here,” something rewarding or promising, something satisfactory and even final. This kind of temporality is largely absent from the texts analyzed in this dissertation. Stories are either circular, such as Kanehara’s two novellas and Sakurai’s, in which Lui, Saki, and Ami end up almost back where they started; or they just end, as in Matsumoto’s and Hasegawa’s novella and short story. This is not to say that as readers we demand happy endings or permanence. We do, however, expect some form of finality or something gained—particularly in popular fiction that is sustained by a satisfied readership. Many works of fiction end unhappily, of course, but there is a sense of closure, or a concurrent sense that even unhappy events and experiences offer the opportunity for psychic growth or a lesson to be learned. The problem with works of obscenity, abjection, and trauma is that they work against this expectation. Nothing is to be learned because there is no framework for learning—there is no path from “here” to “there.” Obscenity and abjection work to destroy boundaries and convention, such that there is no distinction between how life is and how it could be, leading to a fixed state of trauma. Indeed, our texts take place in alleys and corridors, tattoo shops and hotel rooms, dreams and flashbacks—indistinct, borderless spaces where life does not seem to unfold according to a clear plan or trajectory.

We see stasis, too, in the attempts characters make to enact change but who flee from its potential. That is, ideologies of sex and sexuality, beauty, youth, and ultimately the gendered body itself are continually attacked in this fiction by young protagonists bent on overindulgence and headstrong allegiance to those very ideologies. At the same time, however, they are not entirely optimistic in their subversion and retreat from the edge to turn back to the ideologies that

¹ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 32.

caused them so much frustration in the first place. This ambivalence emphasizes the precarious position in which many women find themselves: encouraged to embrace their sexualities, their bodies, and themselves, but ultimately victims of the consequences. Thus this fiction offers case studies of young women managing lives within contradiction and fantasy who may challenge convention but who nevertheless self-preserve within it. In a way, then, these narratives create their own fantasy worlds—teasing the reader with them, inviting them in—and then, at the end, rupturing them because they are yet too far from reality to offer the substance necessary for permanence.

Indeed, more often than not these narratives retreat to the familiarity of the institutional male-female romance, and at the expense of potentially cathartic female-female relationships. Although they may critique it and complain about it, they nevertheless buy into it. Lauren Berlant argues that “complaint” as a discursive mode depends on “a view of power that blames flawed men and bad ideologies for women’s intimate suffering, all the while maintaining some fidelity to the world of distinction and desire that produced such disappointment in the first place.”² To be sure, there is a heteronormative undertow to the fiction discussed in this dissertation, not least because of the glaring lack of sustained female-female relationships within the respective narratives; aside from a peripheral character or two, there are no meaningful secondary female characters in these texts. The protagonist is on her own, adrift in a sea of men, to whom she turns for various reasons—sex, comfort, tattoos, pregnancy, security, romance. But life gets more complicated as a result: the heterosexual matrix informs nearly all of the decisions these characters make, often, though not always, at the expense of bonds between women. This is not very surprising, for heterosexual conduct and ritual is one of the primary affective life

² Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Raleigh: Duke University Press, 2008), 2.

modes in popular consciousness and popular fiction. Only in Matsumoto's *The Excessive Overeater* and Hasegawa's "The Unfertilized Egg" do such bonds—the mother-daughter bond—even matter. But we have seen that they are unstable, toxic, and insupportable—in both cases mother and daughter fail to get along or reconcile their problems.

These texts disappoint because for all their shock and potential trail blazing, they are relatively tame at their core, as they do not unsettle heteronormative values or even try to see beyond them. Only the pregnancy-hunting Moriko in "The Unfertilized Egg" seems optimistic at the conclusion of her story. But, alone, jobless, childless, and almost erased from existence and female subjecthood, one wonders why. Furthermore, the fact that her story concludes while in the realm of a dream suggests that we cannot trust her optimism anyway. The other protagonists do what they must to ensure their survival and non-erasure: Kanehara's protagonists choose the men that are bad for them; Sakurai's Ami and Hasegawa's Mayuko continue turning tricks; and Matsumoto's Tokiko buries herself in junk food, a kind of surrogate lover who will never leave. Berlant states that much of (United States) women's fiction continues to demonstrate a "love affair with conventionality" that peddles a version of femininity dependent on what is heteronormative.³ We have seen how Japanese women's fiction can be guilty of the same, because the point of this fiction seems to be how women can loosen the grip of hegemonic conventionality, how they can live comfortably in a world in which conventionality still governs peoples' lives.

Conventionality is comfortable, predictable—a place of retreat. And much of this fiction depends on women's efforts to find their way back to it. If we are disappointed by this fact, we might argue that the authors are too. Because when they send their protagonists back to where

³ *Ibid.*

they came from, back into the stronghold of feminine ideology, they are sending a message that is hard to ignore. It is a subtle message, whispered rather than shouted, and easy to lose sight of in light of everything else that happens in the texts. According to Berlant, women's texts share an affinity through the ways in which they embed historical narratives of suffering within personal narratives of the same; the success (however defined) of women's fiction is linked to its successful contribution to the tradition of suffering, hurt, and attrition. She reads this discourse of suffering within the grander discourse of conventionality, arguing that women often write suffering in order to critique social and systemic injustices that are easily recognizable within the daily lives of most women.

Our authors are not necessarily determined to upset our expectations for optimism through an overindulgence in pain. They are, however, interested in crafting protagonists whose ways of living may mirror our own; their unhappiness speaks to a subtle replay and stylization of many women's lived realities. As numerous scholars have demonstrated, fantasies of femininity are forestalled by hidden regimes of power and violence—such as the fantasy of the perfect body or the perfect romance or that of the happy housewife. Part of my aim has been to elucidate the ways in which recent fiction by Japanese women ruptures the preconditioning of “the good life” by asking what is so good about it. Encouraged by the possibility of “the good life,” we have witnessed characters harbor expectations for romance, the perfect body, timeless beauty, and motherhood. Even when they attain these things, which is rare, they find that “the good” in the good life remains elusive. It is a fantasy that leads to disappointment. Ahmed calls these fantasies part of a “gendered script” that women follow.⁴ In this dissertation, I have demonstrated how certain gendered scripts work to coerce women into particular life modes: appropriate

⁴ Ahmed, 59.

attitudes toward sexuality, motherhood, thinness, and age all promise women “the good life.” In Ahmed’s words: “There is no doubt that the affective repertoire of happiness gives us images of a certain kind of life, a life that has certain things and does certain things.”⁵ In this way, we see how certain kinds of bodies and lifestyles afford proximity to the good life. Those that renounce their desire to *just be* are those that are rewarded; those that work hard toward a particular feminine ideal “deserve” the good life. The fiction I have analyzed is powerful because it offers a different kind of teleology, a circular logic to a tiresome and familiar pursuit of disappointment for women.

The prominence of disappointment in these texts agitates our understanding of contemporary feminist and sexual politics. This small sample of *fin-de-siècle* woman-authored Japanese narratives shows us women pushing boundaries but never transgressing them. They flout convention, employ the obscene and the abject as representatives of pro-sex and “raunch” feminism. But to what aim? To give it up for a man or procreation or the perfect body? To give it up for social expectation? These texts give us glimpses of women approaching a threshold of gender equality, in which women are doing what they want, when they want, and with whomever they want. But that is the problem, because they cannot see past the safety offered by sexual admiration, thinness, security, motherhood, and heterosexual love. They do not *have to* see past those things, of course. But we should pay attention to why they do. The allure of not behaving according to social expectations is ultimately too good to be true for our protagonists. Feminism has always been confusing, but our protagonists are caught in a confusing moment in which new freedoms of the end of the 20th century clash with the persistence of old expectations.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.



The emphasis on *women's* pain in these narratives invites important questions: Can men identify with these narratives? Can men relate to stories of intense bingeing or purging, or to one lover being murdered by another, or to trying to find a mate before time runs out? Can the notion of “women’s pain” be discussed without effacing individual experiences or pain’s pluralism? Pain—both physical and psychological—is bound to discourses of imaginary identification along lines of race, sexuality, nationality, class, gender, etc., that are prone to simplification: because that is the only way pain can be discussed critically. Those who write it do so from a particular set of circumstances that make them simultaneously accessible and inaccessible, inviting identification and/or maybe even voyeurism. The problem with women writing pain, and with women writing pain that is consumed by a (male) readership that may not *get it*, is that it can risk becoming what Suzanne Gibson calls “warnography,” the eroticization of pain (and violence) and women’s bodies as the platform for that pain.⁶ Dianna Taylor points out that in women’s attempts to author(ize) their pain, they risk becoming complicit in its reproduction and perpetuation: “We profit from the [pain] or we’re undone by it.”⁷ Regardless, we can argue that women in particular write about pain and embed it in their narratives almost like a code. In Japanese women’s fiction, pain is explored not necessarily to find a way to neutralize it, but rather to offer it as a moment of sharing. The specifics of pain may not necessarily be shared; not

⁶ Suzanne Gibson, “On Sex, Horror and Human Rights,” *Women: A Cultural Review* 4, no. 3 (1993): 254. Gibson uses the term primarily in relation to sex crimes against women that take place during war, calling attention to the trappings of sensationalism in attempts to document war rape. In a sense, “warnography” can be read in two ways: war-nography, the sexualization of women’s plight during war, and warn-ography, which calls attention to the dangers of that kind of sexualization.

⁷ Dianna Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s Dirty War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), xi, 24-25.

all women binge eat, after all. However, many women share body image issues, feelings of inadequacy, and engage in destructive methods of coping. The distinct means of decompensation may vary, but the core sense of pain is the same.

The catharsis to pain lies in sharing it, recognizing, living with it—not in fighting it off—and knowing that other women are living with their own pain. Slavoj Žižek has theorized the ways that pain can become pleasurable, which he describes as a moment beyond the pleasurable—pleasure deduced from pain, is, in his words, “enjoyment,” something in excess of and distinct from mere pleasure.⁸ He conceives the difference between pleasure and enjoyment as follows:

[A] simple illicit love affair without risk concerns mere *pleasure*, whereas an affair which is experienced as a “challenge to the gallows”—as an act of transgression—procures *enjoyment*; enjoyment is the “surplus” that comes from our knowledge that our pleasure involves the thrill of entering a forbidden domain—that is to say that our pleasure involves a certain *displeasure*.⁹

Our texts do not try to make pain pleasurable. Sadomasochism aside, the psychological and physical pain these protagonists experience is to be understood as the consequences of living today and nothing more. While Žižek’s words invite a more complete understanding of pain, we could argue that sometimes pain is useful not for masking or affording pleasure, but for being painful. Sometimes what hurts is not pleasurable; sometimes it just hurts.

Bodily and gendered pain affords a dialogue that crosses generations, as we have seen. This dissertation has touched on women’s writings from the early to mid twentieth century to underscore the urgency and regularity with which women record their experiences. Women

⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (New York: Verso, 1997), 47.

⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (New York: Verso, 1991), 239. Emphasis in original.

writing today do so from different sociocultural frameworks and with more freedoms than previous generations. Yet discourses of disappointment remain pressing themes in today's fiction. This dissertation has drawn our attention to the ways in which women's lives remain ensconced in familiar affective narratives of hurt. "Life hurts; certain ideas and experiences hurt," author and essayist Cynthia Ozick notes in an interview, speaking about why writers write. "One wants to clarify, to set out illuminations, to replay the old bad scenes and get the *Treppenworte* said—the words one didn't have the strength or the ripeness to say when those words were necessary for one's dignity or survival."¹⁰ Ozick admits to authoring her own painful experiences, at least in part, out of the desire for revenge. "Any story is worth any amount of vindictiveness," she continues.¹¹ We might also say that in writing "the bad scenes," the pain becomes tangible and communicable, something to be shared and passed on.

While the preceding study has focused almost exclusively on negativity in works of Japanese fiction, it is worth ending on a positive note. Regardless of their affective resonance, emotional truths are powerful diegetic devices. Novelist Kamila Shamsie states that fiction "convey[s] emotional truths...more revelatory about a time and place than any series of facts."¹² These truths shed important insights into personal and public psyches. And while the women's fiction analyzed in this dissertation hints at a large-scale pessimism and hopelessness toward systemic inequalities and fantasies of femininity, all is not lost. Negative affect can catalyze a

¹⁰ Tom Teicholz, "Interviews: Cynthia Ozick, The Art of Fiction No. 95," *The Paris Review* 102 (Spring, 1987), <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2693/the-art-of-fiction-no-95-cynthia-ozick> (January 17, 2014).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Kamila Shamsie, "More Honest Than the Facts: Growing Up Under a Censoring Dictatorship Taught Me How Fiction Can Be a Place of Truth," *The Guardian*, July 2, 2007, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/jul/03/comment.pakistan> (January 17, 2014).

change toward the positive, even if it is simply be a desire to not feel pessimistic and hopeless any longer. The authors profiled here do not offer us optimism. They do, however, offer us records of negativity—obscenity, abjection, trauma—that we can use to envision something better.

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