

**The Art of Artists' Personae:
Yayoi Kusama, Yoko Ono, and Mariko Mori**

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THESIS

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SUMMARY

This dissertation presents artists' personae as a trajectory of contemporary art, while conceptualizing persona as an unstable yet productive site that can reveal the complicated relations among performance, representation, and perception of artists and their artworks. By combining theories of performance, celebrity, dramaturgy and postcolonial theory, I specifically analyze the image of three Japanese artists who have gained exceptional visibility in the mainstream Western art world since the 1950s: Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929), Yoko Ono (b. 1933), and Mariko Mori (b. 1967). I argue that it has been their media images and their identities as Japanese women that have determined the reception of their artworks while the artists have also strategically played with the Western audience's cultural, racial, and gendered stereotypes and fantasies about Japan and East Asian women.

Chapter 1 discusses the critical and practical importance in contemporary culture of artists' media images and personae formations by tracing the modern phenomenon of art stars to Jackson Pollock and Andy Warhol in postwar New York. Chapter 2 examines Yayoi Kusama's effort at persona creation in New York in the 1960s and argues that her kimono-clad public performances were not merely crude mongering acts but a survival tactic and satirical parody of Orientalist stereotypes about kimonoed Japanese women. The kimono fetish had become prominent in American culture during the Cold War. Chapter 3 traces the history of the Dragon Lady stereotype and reveals how Yoko Ono since the 1960s has embraced prejudice as a source of her work and how her assertive performances have contributed to the transformation of the originally negative stereotypical role of Dragon Lady into contemporary model of female power. Chapter 4 explores the relationship between Mariko Mori's *Made in Japan* series and the rise of Japanese soft power in the 1990s by explicating Japanese mass cultural aesthetics of *kawaii*

SUMMARY (continued)

(“cute”) and Japanimation in Mori’s art and persona. It also demonstrates how the genealogy of contemporary Japanese art stars represented—in the order of ascendance—by Yasumasa Morimura (b. 1951), Mori, and Takashi Murakami (b. 1962) parallels the shift of the image of Japan from a techno-power dystopia to cute and then to cool dreamland of commodity culture. Chapter 5 emphasizes the roles of celebrity, branding, and mass media in the current art world system, and considers the cases of Nikki S. Lee, Banksy, and Marina Abramović.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

When we analyze the persona we strip off the mask, and discover that what seemed to be individual is at bottom collective; in other words, that the persona was only a mask for the collective psyche. Fundamentally the persona is nothing real: it is a compromise between individual and society as to what a man should appear to be. He takes a name, earns a title, represents an office, he is this or that. In a certain sense all this is real . . . it is only a secondary reality, a product of compromise.

–Carl Jung¹

[I]dentity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results. . . . [T]o understand identity as a *practice*, and as a signifying practice, is to understand culturally intelligible subjects as the resulting effects of a rule-bound discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive and mundane signifying acts of linguistic life.

–Judith Butler²

[A]rt as we know it—art as construed by the institutions of the art world—is capable of representing in an effective way only one institution, that of the artist’s public self. . . . I mean something thoroughly outward: an institution similar in many ways to the entity known as the corporation, *a non-person that bears a person’s name but for the sake of clarity must never be confused with that person*. We ought to take it as axiomatic that every artist who has come to our attention is, to some degree, an institutional figure. When an artist achieves institutional status his or her self aggrandizes its scale and takes on the impersonality of an emblem. This institutional version of the self still displays characteristic personal traits, but they are now formulized, even conceptualized.

–Carter Ratcliff³

This dissertation explores the critical and practical importance in contemporary culture of artists’ public images and personae formations. I present personae as a trajectory of contemporary art in the art world system entangled with many non-art businesses, and in order to shed light on the role that artists’ personae play in contemporary art practice and discourse, I specifically analyze

¹ Carl Gustav Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), 167. This excerpt comes from the essay titled “The Relations between the Ego and the Unconscious,” originally published in 1945 in Switzerland. The essay was an expanded revision of a paper published in 1916, whose English translation first appeared in 1928.

² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006 [1990]), 34, 198. Butler’s emphasis.

³ Carter Ratcliff, “Longo’s Logos,” *Artforum* 28, no. 5 (January 1990): 106. Emphasis is mine.

the image of three female Asian artists who have become famous in the mainstream Western art world since the 1950s: Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929), Yoko Ono (b. 1933), and Mariko Mori (b. 1967), among others. With these case studies, I argue that it has been their media images and their identities as Japanese women that have determined the reception of their artworks while the artists have also strategically played with the Western audience's cultural, racial, and gendered stereotypes about Japan and East Asian women. In the age of mass media, the artist often happens to become an art—an image, a brand, or an aura—and his/her artworks may become byproducts of his/her larger-than-life public persona. Also with regard to critical appraisal it is often the artist's persona rather than the artist or his/her real self that seems to be rendered as the art's creator. Persona, defined here as a concrete but unstable body-image and a performative interface between a person's (internal) subjectivity and (external) identity, can reveal the complicated relations among performance, representation, and perception of these artists who have become symbolic figures in contemporary culture. The mystical and dynamic workings of stereotypes are taken seriously here as a key to help reveal those relations, as they contribute to the production, promotion, and reception of art and artists from cultures or countries foreign to the Western art world.

With Kusama (Chapter 2), for example, my inquiry begins not from her paintings or sculptures but from her frequent media appearances. I trace her effort at persona cultivation from New York in the early 1960s: out of her marginalization in the city's mainstream art circle, she began to stage spectacular street performances clad in kimonos, thus presenting herself as a "geisha." I particularly explore her exploitation of Oriental stereotypes. With Ono as well (Chapter 3), I am more interested in her "dragon lady" persona and its relation to the production and reception of her work (that is mostly performance) than the work itself. This is an urgent

analysis because, while Ono's infamy has long eclipsed her identity as an artist, for the exactly same reason scholars have carefully downplayed any relevance of her public image to the development of her art and politics about "peace." An art star of the 1990s, Mori (Chapter 4) is another Japanese artist whose persona has determined the reception of her artwork, while her body and beauty are in fact at the center of her work. By exploring Mori's self-stylization in her *Made in Japan* series as a cute and sexy, doll-like cyborg, a familiar image from Japanese pop culture, I explain why she became a star in the Western art world but was poorly received in her native Japan. In the conclusion (Chapter 5), I further theorize the significance of artists' personae in contemporary art and culture by examining recent examples of persona-based work.

A predominant trait in the existing scholarship on each of the three artists under consideration is the use of feminisms. Art historical and theoretical assessments of Kusama's work of the '60s germinated when the artist re-emerged on the international art scene in the '90s after two decades of relative obscurity; she had been living in a psychiatric hospital since the '70s—a fact that has colored perceptions of her work. The writings by influential critics and historians including Félix Guattari (1986), Amelia Jones (1998), Griselda Pollock (2000), and Mignon Nixon (2000) were in general confined within the Western theoretical parameters of feminism and psychoanalysis. While Kusama enjoyed the wave of the burgeoning literature and her growing popularity, she neither supported nor refuted such interpretations. She is notorious for avoiding clear-cut explanations, definitions and categorizations of her work, which further makes her a difficult subject of study in contemporary art history and journalism. But for the same reason, I suggest that her effort at persona cultivation demands close observation.

The scholarship on Ono's work, too, is dominated by feminist interpretations, while feminism is just a part of her much larger politics, as I will discuss in Chapter 3. According to

art historian Kevin Concannon, who has investigated this curious phenomenon, it was only since the '90s that the majority of authors began to write about Ono's work as "proto-feminist."⁴ In the '60s, neither the artist nor the critics discussed it as such. These feminist criticisms typically cite the artist's best-known performance from the '60s, *Cut Piece* (in which the artist, while sitting motionless on stage with a pair of scissors, invited the audience members to come up to cut her clothes into pieces), thus "recasting [it] as one-dimensional," as Concannon pointed out. In fact, he further proposed a possibility that Ono may have gradually added feminist contexts to her work that had not been originally intended, taking advantage of the developing feminist theory.⁵ This proposal has meaningful implications that may be applied to any contemporary artist: an artwork is not necessarily a direct expression of the artist's self, and the artist may be deeply interested, if not actively involved, in the making of his/her public image as well as the public life of his/her work.

Since Mori's debut in the mid-1990s, Western art critics have mostly paid attention to the style of her artwork and fashion designs rather than the content. This is despite Mori's insistence that her masquerade as pretty cyborgs in her *Made in Japan* photographic series was a form of feminist critique to "speak metaphorically of the woman's role in Japan—it's a kind of social comment."⁶ Epitomized by the titles like "Cyber Chic" (Kathleen Magnan 1996), "Across the

⁴ Kevin Concannon, "Yoko Ono's Cut Piece: From Text to Performance and Back Again," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 30, no. 3 (2008): 84. Concannon points to Barbara Haskell and John G. Hanhardt's 1991 exhibition catalog *Yoko Ono: Arias and Objects* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 1991) as the first text to apply a feminist framework. The catalog included *Cut Piece* under the category of "Feminism: Violence and Liberation" (rather than under "Early Performance Work").

⁵ Or, it is also possible that perhaps Ono's own interest in feminism has developed over time, as Professor Maud Lavin has noted in her feedback in October 2013.

⁶ Dike Blair, "We've Got Twenty-Five Years: Interview with Mariko Mori," *Purple Prose*, July 1995, <http://www.thing.net/~lilyvac/writing33.html>.

Morphic Fields” (Paul D. Miller, a.k.a. DJ Spooky 1996), “Cute Futures” (Norman Bryson 1998), and “Mori Pop” (Margery King 1998), journalistic reviews of Mori’s *Made in Japan* series emphasized the lightweight, commercial elements of pop, futurism, and postmodernism on the surface of the photographs. These writings also generally commented on the visual style’s “Japaneseness” but without discussing it in depth or in detail. Mori’s practice has resulted in a single feminist interpretation so far, Jonathan Wallis’s “The Paradox of Mariko Mori’s Women in Post-Bubble Japan” (2008), and that is the only in-depth scholarly article devoted to her work.⁷ This means that Mori’s work, like Ono’s and Kusama’s, is awaiting scholarly explorations from diverse perspectives.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

This dissertation has three goals. First is to analyze the contemporary “international art world” as a Western-dominated establishment and its intricate influence on ascending Asian women artists. Anthropologists George Marcus and Fred Myers (1995) analyze the art world as the “Western-centered tradition of fine arts that began with the birth of modernism and a transformed art market out of the previously dominant Academy system in nineteenth-century France.”⁸ Arguing against the prominent cynical view that “art worlds make art,” they proffer a belief in the individual agency of the artist as a social actor and suggest that art scholars must consider ethnography in their research. The art world is defined by layers of awareness as to the

⁷ Jonathan Wallis, “The Paradox of Mariko Mori’s Women in Post-Bubble Japan: Office Ladies, Schoolgirls, and Video-Vixens,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 29, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 2008): 3–12.

⁸ George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers, “The Traffic in Art and Culture: An Introduction,” in *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology*, ed. George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 3. According to these authors, the concept of “art world” in this sense originated with Arthur Danto, who argued that the meaning and value of works are produced in the art world’s institutional matrix rather than inhering simply in the works themselves.

conditions and systems of its own production. Following that proposal, I am interested in how each Japanese artist under consideration has interacted with the modernistic, euroamerica-centric Western art world—through the use of personae.

This leads to my second objective: I will investigate artists' personae as sites of intercultural exchange and conflict between the artist and her socio-cultural context. The personae are used in this analysis to make visible and elucidate the related landscapes of art (of the art world), culture (of the masses), and everyday life (of the individual participants), which are often separated in modernist visual art discourses or are taken for granted in contemporary art criticism. This conception of personae—particularly those of Asian artists active in the Western art and cultural spheres—can be understood as similar to how the author of *Architecture in Translation* (2012), Esra Akcan, conceptualizes translation as both “a contact zone” and “a contested zone” that “not only makes cultural exchanges possible, but also reveals the tensions and conflicts created by the perceived inequalities between places.”⁹

Third, I hope to empower Asian women artists as agents of globalization and creative production by emphasizing their use of their own bodies, identities, and performative tactics (Here I consciously use the term “tactics” as opposed to “strategies,” following Michel de Certeau’s distinction).¹⁰ As influential feminist cultural critics like bell hooks (1981; 1992) and Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989; 1991) have argued, women of color have often been under-represented and/or caricatured in hegemonic Western cultures and media, but they can also transform the

⁹ Esra Akcan, *Architecture in Translation: Germany, Turkey, and the Modern House* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 4.

¹⁰ According to de Certeau, strategies are institutional actions, which are carefully planned and have power to set norms. But tactics are not so dominant and “must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into ‘opportunities.’” When compared to strategies, tactics are thus improvisational and creative and can be devised and used to work against institutional strategies. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xix.

stereotypes by engaging critically and creatively with the stereotypes in everyday practice of cultural politics. The politics that I refer to in this dissertation thus may often appear subtle, soft, and ambiguous, when compared to the polarizing rhetoric that dominated the identity politics of the 1960s and 1970s.

These three seemingly unrelated issues will be shown as critically interconnected as this dissertation discusses artist personae in relation to artworks and a range of cultural and historical contexts. Previous analyses of the art world (Arthur Danto 1964, Howard Becker 1982, Pamela Lee 2012) have focused primarily on economics, globalization, and art-as-object, thus barely touching upon issues of identity politics and subjectivity within the system of art. A rare case is Olu Oguibe's 2004 book *Culture Game*, in which the author critiqued the contemporary Western art world as a "doubly predictable game space" for the artists whose origins are elsewhere, because, first, the rules are set, and second, the aspirants have a limited chance of success.¹¹ Although his focus was on contemporary African artists, he convincingly suggested that non-Western artists in the Western art world often feel the pressure to work within Western prejudice, stereotype, and expectation.

1.3 Persona in Postwar Art: A Short History from Pollock to Warhol

To analyze the politics of public image is not a novel approach in art history scholarship. Cultural historians of Abstract Expressionism like Michael Leja (1993), Ann Gibson (1997), and Fionna Barber (2004) have explored the troubled existential subjectivity and the rebellious macho masculinity performed and embodied by the painter Jackson Pollock among other leading figures of the New York School. And many art historians such as Max Kozloff (1973), Eva

¹¹ Olu Oguibe, *The Culture Game* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 33.

Cockcroft (1974), David and Cecile Shapiro (1977), and Serge Guilbaut (1985) have investigated the U.S. government's use of Abstract Expressionism during the Cold War to propagate "American" ascendant consumerism, democracy, freedom, and individualism.¹² Rarely, however, has the use of public image or the image-making strategy been explored in relation to the East Asian artists who have thrived in America since the 1950s. My examination of the personae of famed Japanese artists will reveal complexities and gradual inefficacy of the Western discourses of art, culture, and identity that were hegemonic throughout the twentieth century. I consider the powerful systems of Modernism and Orientalism as they are implicated in the cultural politics of the Cold War.

After World War II, the world's capital of art and culture shifted from Paris to New York and there the art world rapidly developed into a capitalistic and multimedia industry. The above-quoted American art critic Carter Ratcliff's keen observation of "art" in 1990 as the art world's signifying practices around a few branded artists ("art as construed by the institutions of the art world . . . is capable of representing in an effective way only one institution, that of the artist's public self") was made in effect of the '80s decade of postmodernism and Reaganomics. But I argue that the origin of this phenomenon can be traced to postwar New York, where the unprecedented expansion of the art scene was met with the unprecedented development of the media. We should remember that the rise of visibility and popularity of Jackson Pollock (1912–

¹² Max Kozloff, "American Painting during the Cold War," *Artforum* 11, no. 9 (May 1973): 43–54. Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," *Artforum* 12, no. 10 (June 1974): 39–41. David and Cecile Shapiro, "Abstract Expressionism: The Politics of Apolitical Painting," in Jack Salzman, ed., *Prospects* 3 (1977), 175–214. These texts are reprinted in Francis Frascina, ed., *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2000). See also Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

1956) in the late 1940s and early 1950s coincided with the explosion of mass media in postwar America.

Then, and even more today, it is impossible to view Pollock's abstract paintings without thinking of the proliferating media photographs of him caught in the "act" of painting by the photographer Hans Namuth (1915–1990) who took hundreds of black-and-white photographs in the painter's Long Island studio during the summer of 1950. Pollock's first experience of fame was through the October 1948 issue of *Life* magazine, which featured a color photograph of *Cathedral* (1947), one of his first "drip paintings" (which he created by pouring and dripping paints, often through sticks and hardened brushes, onto canvases laid down on the floor), along with a roundtable discussion among figures from the cultural sphere. During the discussion, the *Nation*'s art critic, Clement Greenberg, praised it as "one of the best paintings recently produced in this country" (although some others on the panel disagreed; Greenberg, of course, became a most influential theorist of Pollock's art as well as of Abstract Expressionism and of Modernist painting).¹³ This *Life* article was a turning point of his life and career: it "changed my life," Pollock told a friend.¹⁴ Within a year, in August 1949, *Life* spent two and a half pages on Pollock, featuring both color and black-and-white photographs not just of his "drip paintings" but also of him posing for the camera, which brought him instant fame and notoriety. The article's headline "Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?" was iterated, reiterated, and therefore became fact.

Because a painter's media appearance seemed like a mongering act by the standards of the time, many fellow artists such as Mark Rothko criticized Pollock for having a "self contained

¹³ Quoted in Evelyn Toynnton, *Jackson Pollock* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), xii.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 61. Pollock was rephrasing what his fellow painter Franz Kline had told him.

and sustained advertising concern.”¹⁵ But no one could deny that Pollock had become an icon of modern American art and a symbol of its triumph over European art, which dominated the international art scene before WWII. As Evelyn Toynton explains,

It wasn't his paintings alone, however, that *Life* made famous. Pollock, as would be demonstrated over and over in the next few years, was spectacularly photogenic. The *Life* article showed him leaning up in front of one of his paintings in jeans and a denim jacket, ankles crossed, arms crossed, cigarette dangling from his mouth; both the cocky pose he adopts and the expression on his face convey his defiance, his refusal to cozy up to the camera. He does not look like a civilized man; he looks dangerous and sexy, full of latent power: a cowboy, or a motorcycle hoodlum. . . . The very fact that his paintings had been made not with gentlemanly oils but with the sort of industrial paints used by builders and laborers was further proof of his tough-guy status. This was no effete character in a smock and a beret; this was a portrait of the artist as America—and the rest of the world—had never seen him before.¹⁶

What Toynton is articulating here is the becomingness and conflation of Pollock's body image, his art, and his attitude, which altogether evoked the image of young and cool America. Such a troubled, rebellious masculinity of Pollock's persona prefigured (and may have inspired) those of the Hollywood actors like Marlon Brando and James Dean who would rise to stardom by playing macho antiheroes in movies like Brando's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) and Dean's *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955).

When Pollock died an untimely death in a car crash in 1956 (like James Dean the year before), Namuth's photographs gained a new life as biographically and art-historically

¹⁵ Rothko's letter to Annalee and Barnett Newman, August 10, 1946, Newman papers, Archives of American Art; quoted in Timothy J. Clark, "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction," in Serge Guilbaut, *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal 1945-1964* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 176. This edited volume is a collection of papers presented at the symposium titled *Hot Paint for Cold War* at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, in September 1986.

¹⁶ Toynton, *Jackson Pollock*, xiv–xv. Toynton also notes (p. 63) that Pollock was most "American" of the New York School artists: he grew up in Arizona and California in a middle-class family, whereas Rothko was an immigrant from Russia; Willem de Kooning from Holland; Barnett Newman from a Jewish community in New York; Arshile Gorky was Armenian American; and Robert Motherwell had an elite upper-middle-class background.

significant documents of the late tragic genius of modern American art. They were especially inspiring and appealing to many younger artists who were pining for success in the contemporary New York art scene. Then an emerging artist and theorist Allan Kaprow (1927-2006), for example, was more fascinated with Pollock's actions captured in the photographic images than his paintings, which eventually led him to develop the concepts and practices of "Environment," "Happening," and the "blurring of art and life" in the mid-1960s. Two years after Pollock's death, Kaprow published the essay "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock" in *Art News* (October 1958), proposing that Pollock "gave up the making of paintings entirely—I mean the single flat rectangle or oval as we know it."¹⁷ Kaprow also wrote,

It has been seen how Pollock came pretty close to doing so himself. In the process, he came upon some newer values that are exceedingly difficult to discuss yet bear upon our present alternative. . . . Pollock, as I see him, left us at the point where we must become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life, either our bodies, clothes, rooms, or, if need be, the vastness of Forty-second Street.¹⁸

This essay was developed into the book *Assemblage, Environments, and Happenings* (1966), in which Kaprow theorized these three new art genres. This book made clear Pollock's importance to these new genres by reproducing two of Namuth's photographs of Pollock "in action." One of them (the one on page 142) was printed right across from a photograph of Kaprow himself standing "inside" one of his early Environments titled *Yard* (1961) surrounded by automobile

¹⁷ Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 7, https://sites.google.com/site/belgiumishappening/home/publications/1958-00-00_kaprow_legacypollock.

¹⁸ Ibid.

tires.¹⁹ Pollock was indeed a star, hero, and role model to many young artists aspiring for success in the international art world.

Like other creative industries such as film, music, and fashion, the art world produces its own stars and celebrities, which can be manufactured through publicity. As the economist Don Thompson writes in *The \$12 Million Stuffed Shark* (2008), one of the recent, popular publications on the economics of contemporary art,

The idea of artist-as-celebrity may seem strange, but it is just an extension of the superstar concept in music, movies, or sport. Every cultural activity has celebrities who become superstars. Celebrity status can be achieved through marking and resulting in well-knownness as well as through professional skill: think of Paris Hilton or Anna Kournikova.²⁰

Thompson traces the modern phenomenon of the artist-as-celebrity back to early 1960s New York, when Andy Warhol successfully “branded” himself and when artists like Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and Roy Lichtenstein were discovered and promoted by “branded dealers” like Leo Castelli and Betty Parsons. Branding is an important marketing strategy especially in creative industries like art, film, and music, where making and selling images is a major part of the operation. Castelli once described his job as a “myth-making.”²¹ Branding, as Thompson defines it, “adds personality, distinctiveness, and value to a product or service,” thus creating experiences for the consumers and guaranteeing the product’s worth.²² We live in a culture

¹⁹ This is noted also by Amelia Jones in her seminal book on Body Art. See Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 276n102.

²⁰ Don Thompson, *The \$12 Million Stuffed Shark: The Curious Economics of Contemporary Art*, 1st Palgrave Macmillan ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 73–74.

²¹ Castelli, 1966, quoted in Annie Cohen-Solal, *Leo and His Circle: The Life of Leo Castelli*, trans. Mark Polizzotti, 1st American ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 366.

²² Thompson, *The \$12 Million Stuffed Shark*, 12.

where products themselves cannot have enough worth; they need to be branded with personalities and added with values in order to be sold. It is the *new aura* that artworks can wear in the contemporary art marketplace.

Castelli (1907–1999) is often credited for the international success of American Pop art and Minimalism, and particularly for Rauschenberg's receipt of the Grand Prize at the 1964 Venice Biennale—which made him the first American artist to be awarded the prize since the Biennale began in 1895, thus signaling the shift of cultural power from Europe to America during the Cold War era. Opening his gallery in New York in 1957, his clever publicity program prior to the 1964 Biennale included, for example, printing an advertisement of his gallery in the magazine *Art International*, which showed a map of Europe with little flags indicating the various cities where his artists had held shows.²³ The advertisement thus suggested the international demand and excellence of his gallery/artists, also anticipating the victory in Venice that summer.

Warhol (1928–1987), too, was equal parts entrepreneur and artist in the sense that his work encompassed promoting artists, musicians, actors, and socialites such as Nico, Velvet Underground, Edie Sedgwick, Ultra Violet, and Joe Dallesandro. In fact, one of his famous dictums says: “Making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art.”²⁴ Known as “Warhol superstars,” the artsy and good-looking personalities regularly performed in his film and other entertainment productions and also accompanied him in his social life, which centered around his studio called the Factory. Established around 1960-61 (a time when he

²³ This advertisement is noted by Max Kozloff in his famous article “American Painting during the Cold War” (May 1973 issue of *Artforum*), rep. in Frascina, *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, 142.

²⁴ Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again*, 1st ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975).

shifted his work from illustration to painting), the Factory was also notorious for “mass-producing” art as if in an assembly line: there, painting was done mostly by Warhol’s assistants using the mechanical technique of silkscreen printing, which would then be signed by Warhol and exhibited in art galleries and museums. In other words, it was not Warhol himself, but the Factory, a part of the “Andy Warhol” persona, that created the work. The candy-colored silkscreen paintings of images from mass culture such as celebrities, Coca Cola bottles, and Campbell’s soup cans are now traded for millions of dollars—because they bear the name “Andy Warhol.”²⁵ Thus, if Pollock’s gestural paintings were perceived as something comparable to his autographs (as if he had “spilled” himself over the canvases), Warhol removed himself and his hands and yet not his persona from the art-making process.

Warhol also cultivated a persona that matched the aesthetics of his artwork. Around the same time as he founded the Factory, Warhol also underwent a major makeover of his appearance (e.g., getting a nose job and changing dress style) and stylized his attitudes as well:

The new public Andy was the epitome of cool. With shades, striped T-shirts, leather trousers and pointed shoes, he was chilled 24/7—apparently too laid back or bored even to answer questions from the press. The essential ingredient of the new Andy Warhol persona was Andy the machine, Andy the android, Andy the asexual creature.²⁶

It is important to note here that Warhol did not invent an alter ego or a completely new self out of nowhere, but he cultivated a unique, attractive persona out of himself. As art critic Stephen Koch notes, Warhol “started out with an absolutely lucid recognition of his

²⁵ Warhol’s auction record is *Green Car Crash* (1963), from his “disaster” silkscreen series, sold for \$71.7 million at Christie’s New York in 2007, four times higher than estimated. Thompson, *The \$12 Million Stuffed Shark*, 77.

²⁶ Chris Rodley, *Andy Warhol: The Complete Picture*, Documentary (BFS Entertainment & Multimedia Limited, 2002), Available on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EgW4o1qaZqI>.

own limitations,” that he was gay, shy, with pale, unhealthy weird-looking face.²⁷ He understood that he would have to make his image out of those limitations, rather than trying to get rid of them or cover them up. A cultural icon with a specific look, Warhol has been dramatized in numerous movies by actors including Jared Harris, Guy Pearce, and David Bowie, who played the role by wearing the pale face, the spiky silver wig, the lofty shyness, and the evasive manner, among other Warholian characteristics. Warhol presents a different case of persona formation from Pollock’s in that the former strategically cultivated his persona whereas the latter’s persona was formed through the wide circulation of an amalgamation of personal and contextual images in the mass media.

As these examples indicate, the *personae* that this dissertation refers to are not limited to artists’ alter egos or stage personae, usually associated with writers and stage performers.²⁸ It can also mean their public images or public “selves” performed or formed outside the realm of “art” and among the publics and in mass media (for example in what anthropologist Arjun Appadurai described as “mediascape”).²⁹

In this conceptualization, I am indebted to art historian Amelia Jones’s notion of “Pollockian performative,” her phrase for an artist’s subjectivity constructed through his/her

²⁷ Ibid. Also see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Queer Performativity: Warhol’s Shyness/Warhol’s Whiteness,” in *Pop Out: Queer Warhol*, ed. Jennifer Doyle, Jonathan Flatley, and Jose Esteban Munoz (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 134–43.

²⁸ Pop-music performers like David Bowie, Madonna, and Lady Gaga are well known for developing different stage personae for different albums or songs. For David Bowie’s personae inventions, see Shelton Waldrep, *The Aesthetics of Self-Invention: Oscar Wilde to David Bowie* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004). As of this writing in July 2013, London’s Victoria and Albert Museum is having an exhibition devoted to Bowie and his personae (March 23–August 11, 2013). The title of the catalog is *David Bowie is the Subject*.

²⁹ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

photographic images on the part of the viewers. It was a new phenomenon in America in the 1960s owing to the proliferation of the photographic images of Pollock, which presented the painter as a performing body and subject.³⁰ According to Jones, the artist's performing body in a photograph produces a subject that is "potentially dispersed, dislocated, and open to spectatorial engagement."³¹ Jones' work should be noted in art history and particularly in this dissertation, because it has significantly blurred the conventional distinctions among portraits of artists, artists' self-portraits, and documentary photographs of artists' performances by using them indistinguishably as "performative," a concept theorized by Judith Butler (who is quoted in the beginning of this chapter). According to Butler, while identity may be a fiction and a mere construction of performed social norms, by the same token the performative body is also always becoming, productive, and potentially subversive of social norms and conventions.³²

The proliferation of star identities in postwar America was a phenomenon resulting from the explosion of consumer culture and mass media, such as television, magazines, and advertisements. The unprecedented rise of a painter, Jackson Pollock, in the public culture of the '50s as an existential (anti)hero was not a random happening, but part of the larger cultural trend of cowboy macho masculinity, which was also exemplified in the celebration of Marlon Brando, James Dean, and the Marlboro Man (1954). In the next decade, Andy Warhol made himself a

³⁰ Previously, celebrated modern artists in Europe, such as Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, and Salvador Dali, gained the comparably enthusiastic media attention.

³¹ Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject*, 55.

³² In her earlier work, *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler argues that gender is a social category constructed by the hegemonic discourses through performance: one's sense of self is constituted by performing social norms and conventions, including those that signify a particular gender. In *Bodies That Matter* (1993), however, Butler introduces into performativity the concept of repetition and the inevitable slippage involved in it, which she sees as a positive, productive force of opening. For example, here she defines gender as "a sedimented effect of a reiterative or ritual process which operates through the reiteration of norms," a reiteration that both "produces and destabilizes" (p. 10).

cultural icon and a brand by smartly exploiting the new aesthetics and mechanisms of the culture industry such as pop, queer, and cool.

1.4 **“Asian” Art Stars: Born in Japan, Made in New York**

I have carefully selected the most accomplished *and* most notorious Asian artists in recent art history—Yayoi Kusama, Yoko Ono, and Mariko Mori—as emblematic personae to explore how East Asia has been perceived by and in the West in the twentieth century. Until the end of the Cold War, Japan represented Asia on the world stage. These three artists share more commonalities than one might have imagined. They are all Japanese women, and each moved to New York City from their native Japan in their twenties to pursue a career or higher education in the arts. Also, they each achieved critical recognition early in their careers. This dissertation, however, emphasizes the struggle or “ego trips” (acts or behaviors undertaken to draw attention to one’s image) as well as the historical and cultural contexts of their rise to international visibility.³³ Another common factor is their vanguard use of self-exposure, mass culture and media in conceptual art production, which I suggest is a major reason contributing to their outstanding celebrity and notoriety. As pioneers of performance art, pop art, and conceptual art, they have presented their bodies and artworks in ways that direct our attention outside the often narrowly defined art context. I will also argue that each of the artists has deployed a performative embodiment of Asian femininity, shaped by transnational and inter-cultural perspectives, to consider a Western audience.

³³ The definition of ego trip is derived from The Free Dictionary by Farlex: “Ego Trip,” *TheFreeDictionary.com*, accessed January 20, 2013, <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/ego+trip>. During the final stages of this dissertation’s completion, on January 27, 2013, I learned that a book on artists’ ego trips has been published in South Korea: Geunjun Yim, *Yesulgacheoreom Ja-ah-reul Hwakjanghaneun Beob* (“Ego Trip: Artistically”) (Seoul: Chaek Ilneun Suyoil, 2011). I haven’t read the book yet, but the publisher’s website shows that some of the artists discussed in the book include Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, Marcel Duchamp, Jackson Pollock, Andy Warhol, Basquiat, and Elizabeth Taylor.

We are all products of our own experiences of the world, and the distinctions between public and private, and between social and personal, are often malleable and blurry. Therefore, I will investigate the changing international relations between the United States and Japan (and Northeast Asia) since the 1950s in order to trace the complexities of globalization and the evolution of dominant discourses on art, culture, and identity. I also pay close attention to the biographies of as well as autobiographical accounts by the artists in order to reveal a unique experience working on the frontier of international cultural exchange between East and West. Not only do the artists exhibit an intricate sensitivity to intercultural difference, but they also mold and direct Western prejudice and the fantasy of Japan and “Asian women” in an art of persona cultivation and negotiation.

Finally, the work of Kusama, Ono, and Mori considered in this dissertation has been produced not in their native Japan but in Western metropolises like New York and London—thus *for and among* Western spectators. I explore the constructed personae as symbolic sites of intercultural tension and complicity, where cultural expectations and stereotypes confront an internal and individual agency, where self-image continuously negotiates with public image. The performativity, aesthetics, and politics of each of these women’s identities will be explored through close analyses of their public performances and appearances. In this way, this dissertation also offers a view of the various ways in which these performing artists from Japan have embodied, resisted, performed, interrogated, challenged, deployed, exploited, and/or reinforced Western stereotypes about Japan, Asia, and Japanese/Asian women—thus exposing the stereotypes and what they do to our everyday culture and relationships.

By tracing the emergence of Japanese women in American creative industries, I also attempt to reveal shifts in geopolitical power relations in the late twentieth century that are often

referred to as the “rise of Asia.” In *Flash Art*’s special issue on “Japan Today” in April 1992, Alexandra Munroe remarked confidently that “The Asian Century is imminent, and Japan is leading it.”³⁴ Never mind two decades of stagnation since then. The expansion of Japanese cultural power and the world’s awareness of it during the 1990s has been famously described as Japan’s “recentering [of] globalization” by the much-cited Japanese cultural critic Koichi Iwabuchi.³⁵ But he was referring—correctly—to Japan’s recentering of globalization *within* East Asia: Japan’s cultural power was limited in the West at least in the ‘90s. The history charted in this dissertation will demonstrate both real and imaginary shifts in power from prewar Europe and postwar America (Chapters 2 and 3) to late-twentieth-century Japan (Chapter 4).

1.5 Contribution and Significance of the Study

This dissertation seeks to contribute to—and draws from—visual culture and performance studies, particularly postcolonial and feminist discourses on performance and the representation of identity (gender, race, nationality, etc.). My research will further contribute to the growing academic field of interdisciplinary, contemporary Asian art and culture. The broad scope of this dissertation distinguishes this analysis from existing scholarship on postmodern feminist performance and spectatorship (Jill Dolan 1988, Lynda Hart 1989, Sue-Ellen Case 1990, Elin Diamond 1993, Rebecca Schneider 1997), representation and performance of Asian Americans (William Wu 1982, Josephine Lee 1997, Shimizu Celine Parreñas 2007), and performativity of identity (Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Amelia Jones 1998). My

³⁴ Alexandra Munroe, “Wandering Position: Conceptual Art in the Post-Hirohito Era,” *Flash Art* 25, no. 163 (April 1992): 74.

³⁵ Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

research introduces feminism and Orientalism as embodied and interpreted by the three Japanese artists. Though early discourse on art-and-identity dismissed stereotypes and stereotyping (Edward Said, Frank Chin), the poststructuralist perspective on identity and language as unstable constructs (Luce Irigaray, Homi Bhabha, Judith Butler) contributes to a new understanding of stereotypes as ambivalent and productive sites for exploration and exploitation.

Preeminent cultural critics concerned with identity politics and colonialism, such as Frantz Fanon (1952), Edward Said (1979; 1993), and Stuart Hall (1989), have all emphasized the role that cultural representations play in the formation of colonial subjects. Said argues that popular cultural forms like novels and movies “participate in, are part of, contribute to an extremely slow, infinitesimal politics that clarifies, reinforces perhaps even occasionally advances perceptions and attitudes.”³⁶ Western cultural products hold hegemonic power to globally disseminate negative stereotypes about “the Other” as culturally and racially “different” by caricaturing them as “savages.” Fanon explains that stereotyping and primitivizing representation leads to an “internalization of inferiority.”³⁷ The hegemony of colonial discourse sustains the power and dominance of the West over the rest of the world.

Especially, feminist critics of racism and colonialism such as Gayatri Spivak (1988), Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989; 1991), and bell hooks (1981; 1992) have also called for a reconsideration of the agency of the previously disempowered subjects—disempowered in both colonial and postcolonial theories and practices. Voices of women of color have been further marginalized and oppressed because of their “secondary” gender position within patriarchal societies. Writings of cultural critics Trinh and hooks suggest we should practice cultural

³⁶ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1993), 75.

³⁷ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 11.

politics in everyday life by engaging critically and creatively with the dominant culture and media where stereotypical representations are usually produced. For example, Trinh in *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (1991) argues for “voicing her difference” and creating a “space of creative (re)invention.”³⁸ And while conventional patriarchal discourses often assumed essentialism, binarism, and political correctness in dividing racial stereotypes into “good” or “bad” representations, bell hooks in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992) points out that

[T]he issue of race and representation is not just a question of critiquing the *status quo*. It is also about transforming the image, creating alternatives, asking ourselves questions about what types of images subvert, pose critical alternatives, and transform our worldviews and move us away from dualistic thinking about good and bad.³⁹

My dissertation responds to the feminist challenge by looking closely at the various ways in which the different Japanese women in the Western art world subvert, deconstruct, and play with Orientalist representations and visions, while I will also demonstrate how the modes of Orientalism have changed over the twentieth century. By exploring the transnational life and professional accomplishments of the three Japanese artists, I also seek to empower these women as subjects of creative production and key players participating in globalization and transculturation.

This dissertation, furthermore, offers a rare critique of Orientalism within scholarship on East Asian visual art and artists. In 1978 Said published *Orientalism*, in which he argued that the historically hegemonic Western powers such as France, England, and the United States have

³⁸ T. Minh-Ha Trinh, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 188.

³⁹ Bell Hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992), 4.

created a discourse of the “Orient” in order to bring it “into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire” (but never vice versa). The pervasiveness of Orientalist representations explains the long-term military and economic hegemony of the West over the East.⁴⁰ While Said’s analysis focused mainly on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century imperial European literary representations of the Middle East, this dissertation particularly draws from, and aligns itself with, those that have explored American Orientalism in combination with problems of race, gender, ethnicity, and nationality, such as Gina Marchetti (1993), Taisei Yamamoto (1999), Naoko Shibusawa (2006), William F. Wu (1982), Sheng-mei Ma (2000), Mari Yoshihara (2003), and Karen J. Leong (2005), who have similarly focused on American literary and/or mass cultural representations of East Asia and East Asians.

In fact, Orientalism as a critical lens has been seldom deployed to critique twentieth-century American art. A rare case, though, is the 2009 exhibition *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia: 1860-1989* at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. Curated by the star curator of Asian art, Alexandra Munroe, the exhibition surveyed how modern American artists have adopted and appropriated Asian (mostly Japanese, Chinese, Indian) art forms and philosophies.⁴¹ I propose a different approach: I examine how East Asian women in the Western-dominated international art world perform already existing cultural images, femininities and Oriental stereotypes. I argue for a plurality and diversity of Asian female subjectivities—a spectrum from critique to self-promotion.

⁴⁰ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Vintage Books Ed. (New York: Vintage, 1979), 202–203.

⁴¹ See Alexandra Munroe, “American Art and the East: An Exhibition Proposal,” in *Asian Art History in the Twentieth-First Century*, ed. Vishakha N. Desai (Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2007), 199–210. See also Alexandra Munroe, ed., *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860-1989* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2009).

On using postcolonial theories in this dissertation, I should note that unlike Hong Kong or the Philippines, neither Japan nor Korea or China was ever an “official” colony of the United States or any other Western empires like France or England (although Korea was under Japanese colonization from 1910 to 1945, and Japan under the WWII Allied Powers’ occupation from 1945 to 1952). But as the scholar of American Orientalism, Mari Yoshihara, has argued, from the late nineteenth century “the United States built and consolidated its ‘informal empire’ in China and Japan through the Open Door policy, unequal treaties, and the expansion of commerce and cultural exports.”⁴² In this study, the Japanese women’s cultural and political experiences in America will be explored in ways to illuminate American imperialism in and around East Asia during and since the Cold War. While the U.S.-East Asia relationship is often under-discussed in American history, it should be remembered that America has played a central role in modern histories of East Asian countries, for example most symbolically in the postwar occupation of Japan (1945–1952) and in the Korean War (also known as the “Forgotten War,” 1950–1953), which were only the beginning of American culture’s long-term dominance in the region.⁴³

I would suggest that the spectacular representations and performances of Kusama, Ono, and Mori can be compared to the practice of female African American artists Renée Cox (b. 1960) and Kara Walker (b. 1969) who emerged in the wake of feminism, postmodernism, and

⁴² Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 7.

⁴³ For these issues, see Michael Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan: The Origins of the Cold War in Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). Wayne C. McWilliams and Harry Pirotrowski, *The World Since 1945: A History of International Relations*, 6th ed. (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005), 50–78, 403–428.

multiculturalism.⁴⁴ Cox and Walker have deployed cultural and social myths about African American women/bodies to question invisible and unspoken stereotypes, which often exist subconsciously, deeply rooted in our everyday identity formation. In a series of nude photographs *Hot En Tott* (1994) and *Yo Mama: Last Supper* (1996), Cox presents herself as the Hottentot Venus (a.k.a. Saartje Baartman, the South African woman who was taken to Europe in 1810 to be put on display, naked, as a public spectacle and medical curiosity) and as a nude black female Christ (standing in a setting that mimics Leonardo da Vinci's iconic *The Last Supper*) respectively, as if attempting to disrupt and restructure visual clichés. Walker constructs fictional and historical narratives of slavery and the American Civil War in her monumental wall installations such as *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven* (1995) composed of black paper cutout figures on white gallery walls, a technique derived from popular nineteenth-century Victorian art of silhouetted profile portraits. Walker's silhouetted figures tell stories of interracial romance, rape, pedophilia sex, homicide, and cannibalism, among other taboo subjects, intended to provoke the viewer to confront stereotypes and fantasies dormant in our own subconscious. These artists have often faced controversy and criticism from within the African American community worried that their work, as images, could reinforce the stereotypes they attempt to satirize and transgress.

In contrast to this predisposition to negate critique, the provocations and risks involved in deploying stereotypes are considered in this dissertation as a potentially liberating aspect of contemporary art. I respect the ironies in the subtle politics that are generated when artists' works and bodies partake in the visual system of representation. Cindy Sherman (b. 1954),

⁴⁴ The organization of the exhibition *The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s* in 1990 by the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, the New Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Studio Museum of Harlem is a significantly symbolic event that mirrors the recent changes in art regarding issues of identity, culture, and representation.

James Luna (b. 1950), and Coco Fusco (b. 1960) should also be remembered as postmodern artists involved with the politics of race and gender identity and representation, although their engagement with media spectacles have been aptly acknowledged and politicized, unlike those of Kusama, Ono, or Mori. These Japanese artists are barely thought of as political artists, but rather as something closer to celebrities because they have enjoyed exposures to popular media. To expose their public appearances' political ramifications as well as aesthetics is an important part of this dissertation's aim.

Throughout the twentieth century, Western representations of East Asian women were characteristically Orientalist and strictly dichotomous. In popular media East Asian women were portrayed as either the domineering Dragon Lady or the submissive Geisha Girl, and the stereotypes affected how Asian women in real life were perceived and treated. Consider, for example, the following statements by Asian American women. Renee E. Tajima, the Japanese American filmmaker of the renowned documentary *Who Killed Vincent Chin* (1987), asserted in the 1989 essay "Lotus Blossoms Don't Bleed" that

There are two basic types [of Asian woman in American cinema]: the Lotus Blossom baby (a.k.a. China Doll, Geisha Girl, shy Polynesian beauty), and the Dragon Lady (Fu Manchu's various female relations, prostitutes, devious madams). There is little in between, although experts may differ as to whether Suzie Wong belongs to the race-blind 'hooker with a heart of gold' category or deserves one all her own.⁴⁵

Similarly, Jessica Hagedorn, an American writer and performance artist from the Philippines, wrote in her 1994 article "Asian Women in Film: No Joy, No Luck,"

Until the recent onslaught of films by both Asian and Asian American filmmakers, Asian Pacific women have generally been perceived by Hollywood with a mixture of fascination, fear, and contempt. Most Hollywood movies either

⁴⁵ Renee E. Tajima, "Lotus Blossoms Don't Bleed: Images of Asian Women," in *Making Waves: An Anthology of Writings By and About Asian American Women*, ed. Asian Women United of California (Boston: Beacon, 1989), 309. Tajima is renowned for having co-directed *Who Killed Vincent Chin* (1987).

trivialize or exoticize us as people of color and as women. Our intelligence is underestimated, our humanity overlooked, and our diverse cultures treated as interchangeable. If we are ‘good,’ we are childlike, submissive, silent, and eager for sex. . . . And if we are not silent, suffering doormats, we are demonized dragon ladies—cunning, deceitful, sexual provocateurs.⁴⁶

Lucy Liu, one of the few contemporary East Asian movie stars in Hollywood today, made a similar observation during an interview in 1999:

I think there’s definitely a kind of the fetish of the Asian woman being kind of like a flower, like a lotus flower, or that she’s just like this powerful bad girl, nasty girl. I think the stereotypes definitely exist.⁴⁷

Seemingly opposite images, both *Dragon Lady* and *Geisha Girl* (or *Lotus Blossom*) are equally racialized and sexualized representations of Asian women, resulting from the West’s imperialistic and Orientalist view of Asia and Asians. It is a binary projection of the Western male gaze toward “exotic” Asia. From the West-centric, hetero-male-normative perspective, “Asia” has thus traditionally been rendered as feminine, often in the bodies of a sexually available woman (like *Dragon Lady* and *Madame Butterfly*) or an asexual/effeminate man (like *Fu Manchu* and *Charlie Chan*).⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Jessica Hagedorn, “Asian Women in Film: No Joy, No Luck,” *Ms* 4 (January/February 1994): 74.

⁴⁷ Lucy Liu in Rob Medich, “Just Who Is Lucy Liu? CBS News Entertainment (December 13, 1999), <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/1999/02/05/entertainment/main31695.shtml>; quoted in Celine Parreñas Shimizu, *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American Women on Screen and Scene* (Durham and London: Durham University Press, 2007), 92.

⁴⁸ The feminization of East Asians was questioned by the editors of *Aiiieeeee!* (1974), the first anthology of “Asian American” literature published in the wake of the ‘60s civil rights movements. The editors (Frank Chin, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong) correctly pointed out the feminization of Asians in the American popular culture, but in attempting to deconstruct the racist stereotype of Asian men, they overlooked their own gender stereotype of the female as being without “originality, daring, physical courage, and creativity.” Such a sexist view is understandable, however, if we consider the relatively early date of the anthology’s publication. See Frank Chin et al., eds., *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (Washington: Howard University Press, 1974), 15. In 1991, the same editors updated the anthology by publishing *The Big Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature* (New York: Meridian Book).

Kusama, Ono, and Mori have been treated and viewed in the West according to the same Orientalist stereotypes that Tajima, Hagedorn, and Liu have spoken about. I will also explore the various ways in which these artists have exploited and transformed those stereotypes, often through controversial and seemingly apolitical and ambiguous performances. Such performances are, however, products of the performers' lived experiences and expose the complex intertwinement of the seemingly disparate discourses of race, gender, sexuality, culture, and power. These women's performances are their everyday politics for freedom, survival, and success.

This dissertation also contributes to the growing academic and public interest in the art world as a transnational market and cultural industry. This interest is exemplified by the recent unprecedented boom of publications on the contemporary art market, such as Don Thompson's *The \$12 Million Stuffed Shark: The Curious Economics of Contemporary Art* (2008), Sarah Thornton's *Seven Days in the Art World* (2008), Noah Horowitz's *Art of the Deal: Contemporary Art in a Global Financial Market* (2011), and Michael Findlay's *The Value of Art: Money, Power, and Beauty* (2012), to name a few.⁴⁹ This boom illustrates the deep and mysterious relation between art and the economy as this relation was raucously pronounced in 2008, the year that marked both the global financial crisis and the contemporary art market's latest major triumph. The day that Lehman Brothers announced its bankruptcy, September 1,

⁴⁹ Other notable books of the kind include: Olav Velthuis, *Talking Prices: Symbolic Meanings of Prices on the Market for Contemporary Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Iain Robertson, ed., *Understanding International Art Markets and Management* (London: Routledge, 2005); Iain Robertson and Derrick Chong, eds., *The Art Business* (London: Routledge, 2008); Charles Nathan Saatchi, *My Name is Charles Saatchi and I am an Artaholic* (London: Phaidon, 2009); James Goodwin, ed., *The International Art Markets: The Essential Guide for Collectors and Investors* (London: Kogan Page, 2010); Clare McAndrew, ed. *Fine Art and High Finance: Expert Advice on the Economics of Ownership* (New York: Bloomberg Press, 2010); Adam Lindemann, *Collecting Contemporary Art* (Köln: Taschen, 2010); Annie Cohen-Solal, *Leo and His Circle: the Life of Leo Castelli* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010); and Iain Robertson, *A New Art from Emerging Markets* (Surrey, UK: Lund Humphries, 2011).

2008, was, ironically enough, the first day of British artist Damien Hirst's two-day auction at Sotheby's London that sold \$201 million of art, scoring "a world record for a living artist," as *The Economist* reports.⁵⁰ Five months earlier that year, Sotheby's, this time in Hong Kong, held another historically reverberating auction, of Chinese contemporary art—an event that signaled the rise of China in the world economy and (hence) in the international art market as well.⁵¹ The direct relationship between art and the economy is becoming more explicit.

The books on the booming art market and investment are mostly written by dealers, economists, and sociologists, and so bring fresh perspectives and new research findings to the study of contemporary art. For example, Thompson's list of "Twenty-Five Major Contemporary Artists," compiled based on his interviews with dealers, auction specialists and other experts in New York and London, provides a shocking "reality check" for many art historians whose trainings and studies tend toward aesthetics and politics of art: the list shows *no women* (not even Georgia O'Keeffe or Cindy Sherman) and predominantly "white" Euroamerican men, except for Takashi Murakami (Japanese, b. 1963) and Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960–1988).⁵² Sadly enough, decades after the mainstream feminist and multicultural art movements of the '70s

⁵⁰ Sarah Thornton, "The Art Market: Hands Up for Hirst," *The Economist*, September 9, 2010, <http://www.economist.com/node/16990811>.

⁵¹ Pointed out by Noah Horowitz, *Art of the Deal: Contemporary Art in a Global Financial Market* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011), xiii–xviii. Horowitz teaches at Sotheby's Institute of Art in New York.

⁵² Thompson, *The \$12 Million Stuffed Shark*, 56. The list comprises mostly of male artists associated with Abstract Expressionism, Pop, and Minimalism, such as Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol, and Gerhard Richter (who, in order, rank the top three). Murakami is ranked #17 after Donald Judd at #15 and Willem de Kooning at #16. Basquiat is #25 after David Hockney at #23 and Richard Diebenkorn at #24. I thank Prof. Esra Akcan for informing me about the recent *Vanity Fair* list of "The Six Greatest Living Artists" in the December 2013 issue; it names Cindy Sherman at #5 after Gerhard Richter, Jasper Johns, Richard Serra, and Bruce Nauman. But again, there is "non-Western" artist on this list. For the *Vanity Fair* essay, see <http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2013/12/greatest-living-artists-poll>

and '80s, such data encourages and necessitates the kind of study that criticizes gender, racial, and national/cultural discriminations existing within the contemporary Western art world.

Considering the mass appeal of such books on art and money, however, I find them potentially problematic and misleading in terms of art-historical appreciation and understanding of contemporary art, because many of them concentrate on the buying, dealing, and marketing of art while ignoring the artists' intentions or the meanings of the artworks. They tend to downplay the artists' roles in the art industry by focusing on the power of dealers, collectors, and investors. In this dissertation, my approach to artists' personae will reveal the artists' struggle to succeed in the increasingly capitalistic and commercialized art world, and will also render the artists as significant players in the production of both monetary and nonmonetary values of art while not ignoring the pragmatics and commercialism of contemporary art.

1.6 Conceptual Clarifications

This dissertation's interdisciplinary approach to artists' personae utilizes the following concepts about contemporary culture in their extended and intersecting definitions: persona, art world, and politics of celebrity. Briefly put, I conceptualize an artist's persona as a performative category and method in visual culture studies that blurs not only the conventional art-historical separations of fine arts, media arts, and performing arts, but also the traditional boundaries between self and persona, between subject and object, between artist and the art, between producer and audience, between presentation and representation, between art and politics, and between art and commerce.

1.6.1 Persona

This dissertation uses the word *persona* in the same sense that Camille Paglia used it in *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (1990), in which she assumes that “Western culture is built on perceptual relations” and analyzes erotic characters, both real and fictional, from art and literary history.⁵³ Personae are embodied and are comprised of—and so can be analyzed through—metaphors, signs, and images. The complexity of personae can be understood through the American cultural critic Richard Dyer’s elaboration that “The complexity of representation lies then in its embeddedness in cultural forms, its unequal but not monolithic relations of production and reception, its tense and unfinished, unfinishable relation to the reality to which it refers and which it affects. It also lies, finally, in its comprehensiveness.”⁵⁴

Sometimes as an artistic persona, an artist’s persona can be seen as a performative extension of the artistic ego and the creative endeavor. However, as the artist’s public identity, the persona is formed out of his/her social relations and may therefore also mirror and reveal the society and culture’s dominant notions of identity. Authoritative theorists of persona such as Carl Jung and Erving Goffman have rendered life as a series of role-playing performances and have also emphasized the collaborative nature of persona formation resulting from the needs of the society. Jung (1945), quoted in the beginning of this chapter, originally theorized persona as “a mask for the collective psyche.”⁵⁵ It is worn to play a role assigned by the community

⁵³ Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 33.

⁵⁴ Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

⁵⁵ Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, 167.

according to the collective need and desire, and the performance helps the society and the relationships within it function smoothly. The “mask” can thus be used to mirror the society’s collective myths or ideologies.

Dramaturgical sociology developed by Goffman’s seminal text of 1959, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), conceptualizes social life as a theater where a person or a “performer” can develop different “characters” or personae. In different relationship situations, s/he can present oneself differently and can also be received and characterized differently by the different “audience” members. Similar to Jung, Goffman also suggests that this “theater” of social life is a “relatively closed system,” limited by the social norms, and that human interaction is “the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another’s actions.”⁵⁶ He says, “When an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him or to bring into play information about him already possessed,” such as his occupation, education and family background, marital status, style of dress, his attitude toward them.

Information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him. . . . If unacquainted with the individual, observers can glean clues from his conduct and appearance which allow them to apply their previous experience with individuals roughly similar to the one before them or, more important, to apply untested stereotypes to him.⁵⁷

Stereotypes, assumptions, and prejudices are thus inevitable in social interactions and identity formations. And this is why personae can be used to trace the society’s dominant desires and discourses of identity. In this dissertation, I use the Japanese women artists’ personae to reveal

⁵⁶ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), 239, 15.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

and demonstrate the intercultural dynamics of the art world since the 1950s, for example, its intercultural evolution through embrace of popular culture and diasporic artists.

1.6.2. Art World

This argument and approach is based on my understanding of the realities of the contemporary art world. The art world has itself been a subject of observation by many thinkers and scholars such as Arthur Danto (1964) and Howard Becker (1982), who have both described it as a network of people who share particular interests, knowledge and language of art and aesthetics.⁵⁸ More recently, because of its growing collaborations with and assimilation into commercial industries such as fashion and entertainment, the art world has been described as a “creative industry” (Richard Caves) or a “creative enterprise” (Martha Buskirk).⁵⁹ In her new book *Forgetting the Art World* (2012), art historian Pamela Lee argued that “the work of art’s world” should be considered as a medium of contemporary art. She noted that the various ways that works of art enable and iterate the globalization of the art world, rather than the capitalization or globalization of the art world itself, should be examined.⁶⁰ My focus is likewise on the world outside of art-objects, and I am particularly interested in how artist personae are produced and what they do in the art world as it has become an increasingly global and multimedia industry.

⁵⁸ Arthur Danto, “The Artworld,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 19 (October 15, 1964): 571–584. Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

⁵⁹ These descriptions discard the negative connotations of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s phrase of “culture industry.” Richard E. Caves, *Creative Industries: Contracts Between Art and Commerce* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000). Martha Buskirk, *Creative Enterprise: Contemporary Art between Museum and Marketplace* (New York: Continuum, 2012). Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, and John Cumming, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1993).

⁶⁰ Pamela M. Lee, *Forgetting the Art World* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012).

I characterize the contemporary art world as *multimedia* because of the way it operates—because since the 1950s art practitioners and institutions have been adopting, developing, and working across various media, including the Internet, print media, social media, film, video, and performance, in addition of course to the more traditional media such as paint and canvas. Accordingly, I characterize an artist’s persona as an extension of his/her artwork *and* person, following Marshall McLuhan’s definition in his highly influential book on media studies, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964), that media should be understood as “extensions of man.”⁶¹

The multimedia contemporary art world generates artist personae—indefinable yet tangible images of the artists resulting from the published images of their works, their face and body, the accompanying texts, and the ensuing talks in the discursive spaces. And this public identity of an artist can have psychological and commercial influences—at least distantly—on the artist’s inner self as well as on the perceptions and receptions of her works. Also, in the multimedia art world, an artist’s image and his/her work’s image are often conflated, as in, for example, Jackson Pollock “Jack the Dripper” (as the media in the 1950s dubbed him) and Joseph Beuys the “shaman artist” (as he identified himself so in both words and visual works). In the similar vein, Yoko Ono gained the nickname of “dragon lady,” Yayoi Kusama is referred to as the “polka-dot Japanese artist” or the “crazy Japanese woman,” and Mariko Mori’s image is inseparable from the cute, Hello Kitty-evoking “cyborg” masquerades that she wore in her *Made in Japan* series.

⁶¹ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 2d ed. (New York: New American Library, 1964).

1.6.3 Celebrity and Performativity

The third concept framing this dissertation is the performativity and politics of a persona, particularly of a celebrity persona. What I do in this dissertation—looking closely at personae of famous East Asian women artists—is similar to what celebrity studies scholars do: Assuming that collective desires are involved with their success and fame or notoriety, I read the artist's persona as a cultural and performative text, and so analyze what P. David Marshall describes as “the textual and extra-textual dimensions of the public persona.”⁶² A celebrity's persona is textual because s/he performs on-screen or on-stage roles that are constructed by the industry and are thus themselves cultural and ideological texts; but it is also extra-textual because s/he can always present oneself differently in off-screen and off-stage performances (for example, in interviews, talk show appearances, and “real-life” photographs by paparazzi) and because what other people (audiences, critics, and commentators) say or write about him/her also contribute to his/her image.

Celebrity studies' methodology is thus extensive by nature, often combining “an integrated model for mining the cultural significance of a star that involved textual and biographical analysis (assessing the ‘on- and off-screen,’ ‘public and private,’ ‘mediated and authentic’ life of the star); questions of pleasure and identification; and ideological and historical specificity.”⁶³ This dissertation likewise takes a synthetic approach of analysis by looking at both art and non-art images of artists and their works and activities. In the age of mass media, art's images are always extensive and multimedia.

⁶² P. David Marshall, ed., *The Celebrity Culture Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 9.

⁶³ Sean Redmond and Su Holmes in assessing Richard Dyer's methodological model. Sean Redmond and Su Holmes, eds., *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2007), 7. Dyer is a pioneer in celebrity studies whose influential texts include *Stars* (1979) and *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (1986).

After all, contemporary art is conceived here as a “creative enterprise,” following Martha Buskirk’s characterization in her recent book *Creative Enterprise: Contemporary Art between Museum and Marketplace* (2012). Unlike the previous writers on the art world, Buskirk has called on us to pay attention to the various structural ways that contemporary art is presented and marketed to us for consumption: contemporary art can no longer be understood separately from its relationships with the institutions like museums, galleries, art fairs, and auction houses and the systems of distribution, advertising, and branding and rebranding. “What all of this adds up to is a complex set of relationships, even a process of negotiation, taking place in the intersection of the figure of the artist, the construction of the work and the activities of the institutions responsible for presenting art to its different audiences,” she says.⁶⁴ This means that a work of art’s value may change drastically according to how, where, and by whom it is presented to the public.

Although Buskirk does not comment on the marketing of the artists’ images or personalities in print or virtual mass media such as magazines and newspapers, these too have the power to affect the reputation and sale of the artworks and so can be considered as a part of the presentation skills essential to the creative enterprise in the age of mass media. Reviewing the year 2012’s art scene, *The New York Times* art critic Roberta Smith wrote, for example, “The machine driving this expansion [of the art world “beyond its traditional boundaries”] — a sparkling sphere of money, shiny art and shiny people — hovers like a giant, top-heavy spaceship above what I consider the serious art world, where real art comes from. You see it when you pick up the equally shiny art magazines.”⁶⁵ It is in those non-art spaces as well as art

⁶⁴ Buskirk, *Creative Enterprise*, 23.

⁶⁵ Roberta Smith, “The Great Gallery Slowdown of 2012,” *The New York Times*, December 13, 2012, sec. Arts / Art & Design, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/16/arts/design/the-great-gallery-slowdown-of-2012.html>.

spaces where artists become stars, brands, larger-than-life public personae. And the market's role in producing meanings of art is growing. For these reasons, we should now look at the cultural phenomenon of personae.

2. YAYOI KUSAMA'S SELF-ORIENTALIZATION

There was a general impression of her being very exotic. She was not only Japanese but a Japanese woman. [...] She had an exotic presence there [in New York] and people didn't quite know what to make of it.

–Hans Haacke (1988)⁶⁶

She behaved erotically. [...] She's pretty ambivalent, being a woman, being Japanese, and being all different problems, being aristocrat. She didn't wanna be a Japanese woman in a sense, but she was also proud of it.

–Donald Judd (1988)⁶⁷

In 1957, Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929) left her native Japan to pursue her career in New York City, the world's new art capitol after World War II. There, she began to use her body as a medium of art and publicity, as she came to acknowledge the city's obsession with “empty fame” and “the heartless commercialism” of the art market.⁶⁸ In 1963, she began to appear in art events in America and Europe dressed in eye-catching kimonos and wearing the “Cleopatra” coiffure with straight bang, a style that had been recently popularized by Elizabeth Taylor in the 1963 movie by that name.⁶⁹ Apparently, she had decided to exploit her “exotic” identity. In a press photograph of an opening event in 1965 at Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum, for example, the kimono-clad Kusama stands out from the black and white crowd and draws attention by posing

⁶⁶ Hans Haacke, telephone interviewed by Alexandra Munroe and Reiko Tomii on December 8, 1988. *Center for International Contemporary Arts, New York* [henceforth *CICA*], Audio cassette tapes, 1988, vol. 35, The Historical Music Recordings Collection, the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

⁶⁷ Donald Judd, interviewed by Munroe and Tomii on December 8, 1988. *Ibid.*, vol. 36.

⁶⁸ Yayoi Kusama, *Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama*, trans. Ralph McCarthy, English ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 37. The autobiography was written in Japanese and first published in 2002 in Japan.

⁶⁹ The hairstyle's link to the Elizabeth Taylor movie has been noted by Lynn Zelevansky, “Driving Image: Yayoi Kusama in New York,” in *Love Forever: Yayoi Kusama, 1958-1968* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1998), 20.

in the center of the gathering and staring directly at the camera.⁷⁰ Not only is she one of the very few women but also the only Asian in the group of artists, which includes Hans Haacke (b. 1936), Henk Peeters (b. 1925), Lucio Fontana (1899–1968), Otto Piene (b. 1928), and Günther Uecker (b. 1930).

This chapter explores Kusama's efforts to create and cultivate a persona in the 1960s New York. Kusama's kimonoed performances in the mid-1960s, along with her (better-known) "self-obliteration" body-painting performances with hippies that followed in the late 1960s, have been largely overlooked as an uncritical embrace of "low" popular culture.⁷¹ Midori Yoshimoto's book *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York* (2005) has briefly discussed the artist's self-stylization in kimono in relation to her interest in publicity.⁷² And curator Lynn Zelevansky (1998) has also paid attention to the ways that the artist has posed and presented herself in photographs.⁷³ But I will consider the social and cultural environment in mid-century America in order to help understand that the artist's self-Orientalizing performances were not merely crude publicity-mongering acts (as they have often been dismissed since the '60s) but a survival tactic and satirical parody of Orientalist stereotypes. I demonstrate how Kusama exploited the commercial value of her Oriental body and the Orientalist fantasies of the

⁷⁰ See the Fall 1965 issue of *Art Voices*. A similar photo from the same occasion can be found in Laura Hoptman, "Down to Zero," in Lynn Zelevansky et al., *Love Forever: Yayoi Kusama, 1958-1968*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1998), 44.

⁷¹ The few critical/historical analyses of Kusama's work in performance include Udo Kultermann, "Lucid Logic," *Sculpture (U.S.A.)* 16, no. 1997 (1997): 26–31. Ursula Panhans-Buhler, "Yayoi Kusama: Between Heaven and Earth: This Languid Weight of Life," *Parkett*, no. 59 (2000): 74–91. Kultermann focuses on Kusama's engagement with the matters of the "world" as he examines Kusama's collaborations with hippies as well as her work in the fashion business and art dealership.

⁷² Midori Yoshimoto, *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 62–67.

⁷³ Zelevansky, "Driving Image."

audience to advance her career at a time when escalating Cold War national pride and xenophobia jeopardized her art career in New York. She advanced her parody using the Euroamerican male fantasy of Madame Butterfly and the tantalizing illusion of a kimonoed Oriental woman, long before Orientalism was theorized as a hegemonic colonial discourse (Said 1978/1994) and before the concept of mimicry as a counter-strategy entered the discourses of feminism (Irigaray 1977/1985) and postcolonialism (Bhabha 1984/1994). After accounting for the precocity of Kusama's parodic critique, I argue that the Western art scholars have long perceived her Oriental body as a mere image rather than a performing subject: her work of the 1960s entered the Western art scholarship in the 1990s when she reappeared on the international art scene after two decades of obscurity, and her performance photographs of the '60s were analyzed by the postmodernist and poststructuralist art scholars without a close investigation of the historical backgrounds of the photographs.

2.1 Beginning Notes: Problems in the Reception of Kusama in the West

During her early years in New York in the late '50s and early '60s, Kusama achieved critical acclaim with her abstract monochrome paintings known as the *Infinity Net* series. But in the mid-1960s, she began to stage actions that moved beyond the traditional parameters of studio art. She directed body-painting and flag-burning demonstrations with hippies (which would often turn into real orgies, though she never participated in them).⁷⁴ And in 1968–1970 she also organized and oversaw multiple business ventures, such as Kusama Fashion Company, a weekly newspaper *Kusama Orgy*, and a homosexual social club called KOK. Although she described

⁷⁴ Kusama claims, "I myself avoided the sex, not only because I didn't like sex, but also because at least 80 percent of the people who were involved [in hippie demonstration] had venereal disease." See her interview in Andrew Solomon, "Dot Dot Dot: Yayoi Kusama," *Artforum* (U.S.A.) 35, no. 6 (February 1997): 72.

these activities as “avant-garde performance art for the people,” they were largely ignored and rejected by the critics and artists who had praised her previous work in painting and sculpture.⁷⁵ In retrospect, however, the seemingly “non-artistic” activities can be understood as pioneering examples of the then emerging Performance Art and Pop Art movements. Her contribution can be compared to Andy Warhol who turned his studio into a social hangout and business enterprise known as the Factory. As discussed in the previous chapter, Warhol extended art to encompass pop production: he founded *Interview* magazine (in 1969), he discovered and managed celebrities, known as “Warhol Superstars,” such as Nico and Edie Sedgwick, and he directed films with socialites and wannabe stars. His famous public persona, widely recognized by his silver wig, striped T-shirt, and leather jacket, has been celebrated rather than criticized.

Kusama, on the contrary, was ill reputed for being an exhibitionist and attention seeker—because, most likely, she was a woman and non-white. Even the relatively liberal underground art newspaper *Village Voice* harshly criticized her on November 17, 1968: “Kusama, whose gross lust for publicity never leaves room for taste, managed to put on the year’s most boring freak shows . . . Kusama is definitely suffering from over-exposure of over-exposure.”⁷⁶ It seems that such accusations result in great part from the era’s sexist and racist backlash. As Carolee Schneemann (b. 1939), regarded widely as a feminist pioneer of performance art, noted emphatically:

[Kusama] and I were the few female artists using the body, using nudity, and using the obsessive imagery. She was always friendly to me. Many times I had to fight for her, because her situation was much like mine. “Oh, she’s just nude,” and “that Oriental nude running around.”⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Kusama, *Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama*, 97.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Solomon, “Dot Dot Dot,” 100.

⁷⁷ Schneemann, interviewed by Munroe and Tomii on January 6, 1989. *CICA*, vol. 39.

We must remember that in the 1960s Kusama did not have the luxury of widespread acceptance of feminism, multiculturalism, and performance art.

By the time she returned to Japan in 1973, her reputation in the New York art world had fallen very low. Upon arriving in Tokyo, she entered a psychiatric hospital where she still resides and makes art. For the next two decades she quietly faded into obscurity. In one of the most impressive comebacks in art history, Kusama exploded on the international art scene in the 1990s, exhibiting solo shows at major museums such as the Museum of Modern Art and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and also representing Japan at the 1993 Venice Biennale. She had long stopped producing performance art but returned to focus on making her trademark polka-dotted paintings, installations and soft sculptures. Consequently, her work in performance has received little attention. The late 1960s, which was devoted solely to performance, remains a curiously anomalous phase in her career. When asked why she stopped painting and sculpting in her later years in New York, she replied tersely that it was because “everyone just wrote about my being Japanese and they used the word ‘Zen’ to describe absolutely anything I did.”⁷⁸ She said this in her notoriously evasive manner, giving no further explanation. She is well known for avoiding clear-cut explanations or categorizations of her work, which further makes her a difficult subject of study in contemporary art history and journalism.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Yayoi Kusama, interviewed by Andrew Solomon in Solomon, “Dot Dot Dot,” 100. Curiously, I cannot find written reviews describing her work as “Zen,” although there are several reviews that associate her painting with “Eastern” or “Oriental” aesthetics, as I will discuss later.

⁷⁹ When pressed to reveal the meaning behind her work, Kusama always replies in short and enigmatic sentences, feeding the aura of mystery surrounding her work. For example, in a 1963 interview for WABC radio, Gordon Brown asked her if “the stuffed sacs” covering her sculptures were “phallic symbols.” And her answer was simply, “Everybody says so.” See the interview extract in Laura Hoptman, Akira Tatehata, and Udo Kultermann, *Yayoi Kusama* (London: Phaidon, 2000), 100.

Cloaked in a veil of mystery, Kusama abandons her reserve only when speaking of her mental struggle, which she uses to explain her originality as an artist.⁸⁰ Kusama claims that the obsessively reoccurring motifs and themes like dots, nets, flowers and pumpkins derive from her continuous hallucinations developed during her childhood.⁸¹ This “mental illness” complicates the reception of Kusama’s art, to an extent that it is speculated by many as a part of her lifelong publicity strategy. Most tellingly, a *New York Times Style Magazine* article in 2008 was headlined, “Is She Mad or Merely Cunning? While the Art World Debates, Yayoi Kusama Climbs Back on Top.”⁸²

That a mentally “insane” artist can exhibit sophisticated self-publicity and achieve commercial success has long confused the art world. Kusama’s success contradicts the Western myth of genius as tragic hero, which in modern art history is usually associated with male artists, such as Vincent van Gogh or Jackson Pollock, who died young. Also, the fact that she has been living in a psychiatric hospital has long hindered her work from receiving diverse interpretation. The scholarship and criticism that proliferated in the 1990s examined her practice predominantly through a feminist or psychoanalytic (Western) theoretical lens, disproportionately focusing on her phallic sculptures and installations of the early ‘60s.⁸³

⁸⁰ The sentences in this paragraph are derived from my book review of of Kusama’s autobiography. SooJin Lee, “Seriously Dotty,” *Art in America*, January 2012, 45.

⁸¹ For Kusama’s account of her childhood experience of hallucinations and her early translation of those into art productions, see Kusama, *Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama*, 61–95.

⁸² Alexi Worth, “Is She Mad or Merely Cunning? While the Art World Debates, Yayoi Kusama Climbs Back on Top,” *The New York Times Style Magazine*, February 24, 2008, www.nytimes.com.

⁸³ For example see: Dana Friis-Hansen, “Yayoi Kusama’s Feminism” (September 1994): 48–55. Mignon Nixon, “Posing the Phallus” (Spring 2000): 99–127. Griselda Pollock, “Yayoi Kusama: Three Thoughts on Femininity, Creativity and Elapsed Time” (2000): 107–23. Michael Cohen, “Yayoi Kusama: Love Forever” (April 1994): 74–78. Midori Matsui, “Beyond Oedipus: Desiring Production of Yayoi Kusama” (2000): 92–96. Cohen uses Lacan’s theory of mirror stage and Matsui discusses Kusama’s “schizophrenia” as an aesthetic.

I propose that postcolonial theory can be used to locate Kusama within a Western tradition because she uses stereotypes cleverly. Postwar American biases, logically enough, likewise determine both the reception and interpretation of the artist's work. The preeminent scholar of Orientalism, Edward Said (1978/1994), argues that it was the traditionally hegemonic Western representations of and about "the Orient" that have created knowledge of the East in the West and beyond, and *not vice versa*. The Orientalist discourse was charged with military and commercial ambitions, first in Europe and later in America, to define (and continue to define) the East as "the Other," in order to rule over it. Therefore, according to Said, orientalist stereotypes exist first and foremost in the historically hegemonic Western cultures, even more prevalently and effectively than in the East (though I should also note that the traditional Western pictures of the "Orient" would change dramatically along with the global rise of Asia in the 1990s, as will be discussed in Chapter 4). While Said's focus was primarily on European discourse about the Middle East, Kusama's work and life in postwar New York exemplifies what Mari Yoshihara has called *American Orientalism*, "U.S. discourse about China and Japan during the period of U.S. empire-building in Asia-Pacific."⁸⁴

2.2 Kusama's Early Years in New York, 1958–1962

Kusama was among the first Japanese artists to arrive on the contemporary art scene in New York City after WWII. She recalls that her airplane cabin to Seattle (en route to New York) in 1957 was "empty except for two American GIs, a war bride, and me."⁸⁵ It was very rare in the

⁸⁴ Yoshihara, *Embracing the East*, 7.

⁸⁵ Kusama, *Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama*, 11. Kusama stayed in Seattle for six months before moving to New York in the summer of 1958. While in Seattle, she had a solo show of watercolors at Zoe Dusanne's gallery. Artist Kenneth Callahan had recommended Kusama's work to Dusanne upon seeing her three watercolors exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum in May 1955 (at the International Watercolor Exhibition: Eighth Biennale).

1950s for a Japanese woman to not only travel abroad alone, but also to pursue a career outside domestic spheres. Unlike other Japanese artists who came to New York in the '50s and '60s such as Yoko Ono (b. 1933), Takako Saito (b. 1929), Shigeko Kubota (b. 1937) and Yasunao Tone (b. 1935), who were associated with the Fluxus international group of artists, Kusama refrained from associating with a specific group or a genre of art. This is another sign of her independent spirit. While other Japanese artists settled down in the United States or Europe, Kusama would return to Japan, in 1973.

Soon after arriving in New York, Kusama began to experiment with a new style of painting. In Japan she had earned recognition for her surrealistic watercolor and ink paintings, but in New York she began to create abstract monochrome oil paintings, known as *Infinity Net* series.⁸⁶ The monumental canvases (as large as 33 feet long) covered with tiny arcs, nets and circles seemed to capture the artist's relentless ambition, intensity and obsession. Recalling the origins of this new series, Kusama said,

Pouring virtually every penny I had into materials and canvas, I painted and painted. I set up a canvas so big that I needed a stepladder to work on it, and over a jet-black surface I inscribed to my heart's content a toneless net of tiny white arcs tens of thousands of them. I got up each day before dawn and worked until late at night, stopping only for meals. Before long the studio was filled with canvases, each of which was covered with nothing but nets.⁸⁷

Here Kusama further mythologizes the originality of her art. She has often claimed that the recurring motifs of dots and nets result from her hallucinations that started during her childhood.

But it is also true that the introduction of large canvases and the all-over composition in the *Infinity Net* series would have hardly occurred if not in New York City, where the popularity

⁸⁶ For a discussion of Kusama's surrealistic paintings of the 1950s, see Akira Tatehata's article "Kusama as Autonomous Surrealist" in Zelevansky et al., *Love Forever*.

⁸⁷ Kusama, *Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama*, 18–20.

of all-over composition and gestural painting was at its peak. Kusama's keen sensitivity to the zeitgeist was observed by her close friend and fellow artist Donald Judd (1928–1994): "She had a thorough knowledge of how to deal with relative situations and what had to be done. To some extent she was a model for me. . . . She was sophisticated about what had to be done as an artist for that time."⁸⁸ In the following statement, Kusama critically ponders the trends of the late '50s New York art scene:

As for the art scene in the city at that time, the Action Painting of the New York School still held sway, even though Jackson Pollock had been dead for ten years. . . . But transcendence of the times was to remain out of reach even for the reigning American kind—the glorified and no longer young De Kooning—to say nothing of the followers of Pollock. It was clear to all that the New York School, which had prospered alongside the commercialization of art, now needed to break new ground. But it was not easy for the young international talent gathering in New York to extricate itself from the spell of Action Painting.⁸⁹

She saw the art world in clear economic terms, and her *Infinity Net* paintings may have in fact targeted the New York art scene that continued to bask in the international success of Abstract Expressionism—America's first breakthrough moment in modern art history. Kusama's all-over abstract compositions evoke Jackson Pollock's drip paintings, but she "Kusama-fied" her canvases by filling them with her own vision and subjectivity represented by the monochrome nets and dots, which she painted painstakingly.

With the *Infinity Net* paintings, Kusama was indeed able to achieve her first solo show in New York, as early as October 1959, at the Brata Gallery (89 East Tenth Street). The show attracted much attention from the New York art scene and the success led her to exhibit in other

⁸⁸ Donald Judd, interview by Munroe and Tomii on December 8, 1988, *CICA*, vol. 36. Kusama, Judd, and sculptor Eva Hesse lived in the same building on 53 East 19th Street between 1961 and 1964, before moving in August 1964 to 211 Mott Street. Judd spent considerable time assisting Kusama in 1961 while he was still mainly engaged in art criticism, and has long acknowledged Kusama's influence during his pivotal shift to a leading Minimalist artist (although he denied the term Minimalism).

⁸⁹ Kusama, *Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama*, 34.

cities including Boston (Nova Gallery), Washington D.C. (Gres Gallery), and West Germany (Städtisches Museum in Leverkusen), culminating in an exclusive contract with the Stephen Radich Gallery in New York in May 1960. These shows all received favorable reviews, and Kusama proudly reprinted excerpts from each of them when she published her autobiography in 2002 in Japan.⁹⁰

It should be noted that these early reviews, as well, reveal the critical role Kusama's Japanese origins played in the New York audience's perception and evaluation of her work. The art critics tended to view her *Infinity Net* paintings as restrained Eastern versions of Abstract Expressionism. *Arts Magazine*'s Sidney Tillim compared Kusama's monochrome abstract paintings to Jackson Pollock's 1946 *Shimmering Substance*,

It is a single plane of continuity—thus the purposeful dignity that masks the drive of her expression. ... What results is a profound symbol of detachment. Conditioned by a tradition of not only black and white but of self-effacement, perhaps only a Japanese artist could create an art of withdrawal without the polemical emotions of Western Abstract Expressionism.⁹¹

Kusama's earliest proponent was Donald Judd, then an *Art News* critic, who praised the artist as an original painter whose canvases are strong, advanced in concept and realized: "The expression transcends the question of whether it is Oriental or American. Although it is something of both, certainly of such Americans as [Mark] Rothko, [Clyfford] Still, and [Barnett] Newman."⁹²

These are no doubt favorable reviews, but the charged vocabulary of opposition—"Oriental" versus "American," "Japanese self-effacement" versus "polemical emotions of Western Abstract Expression"—hints at the East-West dichotomy in the era's public discourses and the Western

⁹⁰ Ibid., 24–34.

⁹¹ Sidney Tillim, "In the Galleries," *Arts Magazine* 34, no. 1 (October 1959): 56.

⁹² Donald Judd, "Reviews and Previews: New Names This Month," *Art News* 58, no. 6 (October 1959): 17.

audience's preconceived expectations of Japanese art. The art criticism also indicates the aesthetic dominance of Abstract Expressionism in the New York art world.

Kusama herself was not completely innocent from such prejudiced readings of her paintings. Almost obsessively she had so many photographs taken of her posing in front of or next to the paintings, to an extent that it is difficult to divorce the art from the artist's body. Reproductions of those photographs proliferate in the artist's monographs and exhibition catalogs, and it is rare to find photographs of *Infinity Net* paintings without Kusama's presence. As curator Lynn Zelevansky declared, "Kusama's art—even her painting—was always fundamentally performatory, with the process overshadowing the product and the artist subsuming the art."⁹³

The performative nature of Kusama's paintings echoes the embodied painting performances by Jackson Pollock for popular magazines such as *Life*, and so it can be compared to the practice of Allan Kaprow (1927–2006), the American artist who contributed to the development of installation and performance art by imaginatively theorizing about Pollock's "legacy." Two years after Pollock's death, Kaprow authored "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock" in *Art News* (October 1958). The essay developed the concepts of Happening and Environment:

[Pollock] created some magnificent paintings. But he also destroyed painting. . . . For instance, the act of painting[.] . . . I am convinced that to grasp a Pollock's impact properly, we must be acrobats, constantly shuttling between an identification with the hands and body that flung the paint and stood "in" the canvas and submission to the objective markings, allowing them to entangle and assault us. . . . Then Scale. Pollock's choice of enormous canvases served many purposes, chief of which for our discussion is that his mural-scale paintings ceased to become paintings and became environments. . . . Pollock, as I see him, left us at the point where we must become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life, either our bodies, clothes, rooms, or, if

⁹³ Lynn Zelevansky, "Driving Image: Yayoi Kusama in New York," in Zelevansky et al, *Love Forever: Yayoi Kusama, 1958-1968* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art), 22.

need be, the vastness of Forty-second Street. . . . We shall utilize the specific substances of sight, sound, movements, people, odors, touch.⁹⁴

By 1958, Kaprow had started creating Environments and Happenings, having taken a class on “chance” compositions taught by John Cage at the New School for Social Research in New York (the influence of Cage on Fluxus and performance art is discussed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation). Further, when Kaprow published the book *Assemblage, Environments & Happenings* in 1966, he reproduced a photograph by Hans Namuth of Pollock, juxtaposing it with an aerial photograph of his 1961 Environment entitled *Yard*—the artist posed in the backyard of the Martha Jackson Gallery, which he filled with used automobile tires. Through this act, Kaprow emphasized the significance of the performative dimension of Pollock’s practice for the next generation of artists.

As art historian Amelia Jones has examined, images of Pollock-in-the-act-of-painting by photographers Hans Namuth and Rudolph Burckhardt were widely disseminated in the 1950s. The photographs of Pollock dripping and dancing in the canvas signaled a dramatic turn in the ways that artists would be represented in the media and the ways that they began to perform for the camera.⁹⁵ Jones describes such a photograph of an artist performing for the camera and accompanying the art as “Pollockian performative,” her concept used to make sense of the development of “Body Art” in art history. Body Art, a new genre that emerged in the 1970s alongside the advent of video and photography, is distinguished from Performance Art because the former referred to the performance of visual artists specifically for the camera, rather than a live audience. It is not surprising that Jones was among the first scholars in the ‘90s to pay

⁹⁴ Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, 2, 5–7.

⁹⁵ Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject*, 53.

attention to Kusama's self-display photographs of the '60s; Jones framed Kusama's narcissistic staging of her body as a significant contribution to the embodied, as opposed to the disinterested modernist, viewing of art.⁹⁶ It should be remembered, though, that such favorable analyses of Kusama's narcissism are mostly retrospective appraisals, as will be further discussed later. Back in the 1960s, Kusama was most often criticized for paying too much attention to her public image.

However, it should be noted that Kusama's use of her body did not start as an extension of painting, but grew out of her struggle for recognition and ambition for success: she used her "exotic" body and identity as a tool to advance her career. Despite critical acclaim of the *Infinity Net* paintings and her subsequent solo exhibitions, Kusama continued to fight for recognition. In her autobiography, after she proudly lists New York critics' favorable reviews of her paintings, she describes the struggle for survival and the real agony that saturated the New York art world:

I wasn't surprised that New York was awash with '-isms,' but more daunting was the fact that the struggle for survival was such a powerful component of everything. The city was saturated with the possibility of great good fortune but also harboured a bottomless quagmire of shame and blame. And the heartless commercialism of many art dealers was too terrible even to joke about; it was a cause of real agony for many creative artists.⁹⁷

She recounts her personal struggles and ambitions to create art that she hopes would be ahead of, and also last beyond, its time:

Sometimes, when I was tired of working, I would go to the Museum of Modern Art. Standing before the great pageant of art history, I would gaze on the works that have survived beyond their times, analyzing and evaluating them as if trying to solve mathematical puzzles, attempting to assess them in the context of the

⁹⁶ In Introduction to *Body Art/Performing the Subject*, Jones proposed Kusama as an early example of the "postmodernist subject," Jones's term for a performative body-in-photograph that spills out of the image seeking the spectators' intersubjective experience and identification.

⁹⁷ Kusama, *Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama*, 37.

societies and times that had engendered them; but then I would return to myself and, in trying to consider the next starting point for my work, always find myself faced with the difficulty of reading my own future. From the point of view of one who creates, everything is a gamble, a leap into the unknown.⁹⁸

As driven as she was, Kusama constantly challenged herself to reinvent and reimagine her work. She embarked on creating sculptures, installations, environments and happenings as early as 1961–63, thus making herself an early practitioner of innovative art forms and techniques.

2.3 1963: Year of Self-Reinvention

In a letter written on September 9, 1963 to her Dutch artist friend Henk Peeters,⁹⁹ Kusama complained about the monopoly of American Pop in the increasingly institutionalized and industrialized New York art market: “By this American Pop [Americans] become exclusive of others.”¹⁰⁰ Kusama compared Pop art to a nationalist American style. She was not exaggerating. Fellow artists, with whom she used to exhibit in group shows in New York, such as Claes Oldenburg (b. 1929) and Andy Warhol (1928–1987) who all happened to be both American and male, found representation with powerful art dealers such as Leo Castelli, Betty Parsons, or Charles Egan; but Kusama searched in vain for an advocate in the commercial art scene. In fact, beginning in the early 1960s, Kusama’s records show an increasingly number of exhibitions in Europe.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ *CICA*, vol. 49. Peeters was interviewed by Bhupendra Karia in Amsterdam on March 1, 1989. Kusama and Peeters began corresponding in the early 1960s after he saw her monochrome paintings in *Art News*.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Laura Hoptman, “Down to Zero: Yayoi Kusama and the European Tendency,” in Zelevansky et al., *Love Forever*, 50.

¹⁰¹ It appears that after the exhibition *Recent Painting: Yayoi Kusama* at the Stephen Radich Gallery in May 1961, she did not have a solo show in New York until April 1963, when *Driving Image* opened at the Castellane Gallery.

Since the 1960s, Kusama has claimed that she deserves recognition for soft sculpture credited as the creation of Oldenburg, the multiplied and repeating images branded by Warhol, and the mirrored rooms of Lucas Samaras.¹⁰² She believes that the American artists stole her ideas to cement a legacy in the art history canon. In one of her oft-told anecdotes, Kusama insists that her first three-dimensional sculptures, a series of phalluses she began to sew in the winter of 1961, were the original “soft sculpture” that inspired Oldenburg. In the fall of 1962, Oldenburg’s solo show opened at the Green Gallery and he exhibited his first soft sculptures. At the opening, according to Kusama, his wife at the time, Patty Mucha, pulled her aside and apologized, “Yayoi, I am sorry we took your idea.”¹⁰³ Neither Oldenburg nor Mucha will validate her accusations, and my purpose here is not to find the origin of inspiration, but to elucidate the artist’s obsession with originality and recognition. Recent research by Midori Yamamura (2009) has revealed that Kusama attempted suicide at least twice in the early 1960s, resulting in heavy psychotropic medication.¹⁰⁴ One of the suicide attempts is likely related to the Oldenburg incident: Just eleven days after Oldenburg’s successful opening of his first “soft

¹⁰² See *CICA*, vol. 6. And Kusama, *Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama*, 39–42.

¹⁰³ Grady Turner, “Yayoi Kusama,” *Bomb (U.S.A.)*, no. 66 (Winter 1999): 67. For Oldenburg’s discussion of the difference between his sculptures and Kusama’s, see Alexandra Munroe, “Obsession, Fantasy and Outrage: The Art of Yayoi Kusama,” in *Yayoi Kusama: A Retrospective*, ed. Bhupendra Karia (New York: Center for International Contemporary Art, 1989), 24.

¹⁰⁴ Midori Yamamura, “Re-Viewing Kusama, 1950-1975: Biography of Things,” in *Yayoi Kusama Mirrored Years* (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2009), 63–109. According to Yamamura’s research into Kusama’s hospital papers, even after being discharged, the artist remained heavily medicated through the end of 1963. Prescribed Miltown during the day and Doriden at night, Kusama was sedated all day long and unable to concentrate on any elaborate work. A sheet that bears the instruction for her medication and two diagrams has been found inserted in Kusama’s notebook. Yamamura suggests that the artist may have actually developed (if not fabricated) the self-professed “mental illness” in the early 1960s. For more discussions of Kusama’s history of mental illness, see Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 50–51. Alexandra Munroe, “Between Heaven and Earth: The Literary Art of Yayoi Kusama,” in Zelevansky et al., *Love Forever*, 79.

sculpture” exhibition, on November 24, 1962, Kusama attempted suicide and was hospitalized in a psychiatric ward for the first time in her life.¹⁰⁵

Warhol was another New York artist whom Kusama considered a rival. She felt that he, like Oldenburg, was gaining greater fame while stealing her ideas. To this date, Warhol’s use of repetitive images is recorded as a canonical event in the history of art. He began the *Campbell’s Soup Can* series in December 1961—silkscreen paintings of repetitive images of commonplace objects. But earlier that year, Kusama had started using repeating images in her collages of postage stamps and airmail stickers, which she exhibited in a group show at Stephen Radich Gallery in the fall of 1961.¹⁰⁶ Thus, when Warhol premiered his silkscreen *192 One-Dollar Bill* in the Green Gallery group show in June 1962 (in which both Kusama and Oldenburg participated), some artists uncomfortably recognized an imitation of a concept introduced previously by Kusama. George Segal, who also exhibited in the show, remembers that upon seeing Warhol’s first silkscreen repetitions of dollar bills [and stamps], “We were amused . . . [b]ecause this Japanese girl Yayoi Kusama was already at the Green Gallery with her repetitions of penises.”¹⁰⁷ Donald Judd, her upstairs neighbor on 53 East 19th Street, “thought she should

¹⁰⁵ Kusama has also accused Lucas Samaras (b. 1936) of copying her ideas. Seven months after Kusama premiered her mirrored room (*Kusama’s Peep Show: Endless Love Show*) at the Richard Castellane Gallery, Samaras exhibited his *Mirrored Room* at the internationally renowned Pace Gallery in October 1966. The latter show, unlike the former, resulted in a six-page interview in the leading art magazine *Artforum* and a seven-page special feature in another major magazine *Art News*. After this, Kusama fell ill again, as she explained to the critic Lucy Lippard in a letter dated November 3, 1966. “Lucy Lippard” file, the Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.; quoted in Yamamura, “Re-Viewing Kusama,” 103.

¹⁰⁶ Yamamura, “Re-Viewing Kusama,” 79. This is according to Yamamura’s archive research and interviews with Donald Judd.

¹⁰⁷ George Segal, quoted in Jean Stein, *Edie: An American Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982, 189; and in Zelevansky, “Driving Image: Yayoi Kusama in New York,” in Zelevansky et al., *Love Forever*, 34n25.

have gotten credit for this [the use of repetitive imagery].”¹⁰⁸ Her neighbor Ed Clark also remembers that Kusama “suddenly got obsessed with the thought that her ideas might be appropriated, which compelled her to close all the curtains facing Park Avenue and 19th Street.”¹⁰⁹

In fact, in the early 1960s, Oldenburg and Warhol were leading artists in the emerging Neo-Dada and Pop art movements, whose practices were characterized by creative appropriation. These financially endowed art movements were promoted by the influential art dealer Leo Castelli (1907–1999). While the U.S. government expanded its political and economic power across the globe during the Cold War, Castelli built his own American art empire in New York, contracting male, American artists such as Warhol, Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), Jasper Johns (b. 1930), Frank Stella (b. 1926), and Donald Judd (1928–1994). The culminating achievement of Castelli entrepreneurial promotion occurred at the Venice Biennale. The 1964 grand prize was awarded to Rauschenberg, making him the first American artist to receive the prestigious award in 69 years of Venice Biennale history. This seminal event thus signified a shift of power from Europe to the United States. Artist Hans Haacke, a German-émigré working in New York since the 1960s, remembers that the ‘50s and ‘60s as “a time when American artists developed national pride.”¹¹⁰ From Johns’ images of American flags to Warhol’s Campbell’s soup cans and Coca Cola bottles, New York City celebrated vibrant

¹⁰⁸ Donald Judd, interviewed by Munroe and Tomii, on December 8, 1988. *CICA*, vol. 36.

¹⁰⁹ Ed Clark, interviewed by Yamamura, on October 9, 2006, and paraphrased in Yamamura, “Re-Viewing Kusama,” 88. Clark tells of the similar recollections when he is interviewed in the 2008 documentary video produced by B.B.B. Inc: Takako Matsumoto, *Yayoi Kusama: I Love Me*, DVD, New People Artist Series (San Francisco: Viz Pictures, 2008).

¹¹⁰ *CICA*, vol. 35.

American affluence and democracy. Apparently, this American pride could not be shared with foreigners like Kusama.

Kusama has become notorious for her unashamed need for fame and success. Artists like Hans Haacke (b. 1936) and Carolee Schneemann (b. 1939) have similarly commented on how Kusama in the 1960s was “very determined to make herself known” and “extremely desperate and increasingly ferocious trying to position her work.”¹¹¹ Arthur Lubow, who met Kusama in 2012 for a *W Magazine* interview, remarked with surprise how the 83-year-old artist, who was currently having a successful retrospective at Tate Modern, would periodically interrupt him to tell him how famous she was and to ask if he thought she was more famous than other artists of her generation.¹¹²

I would argue that Kusama’s obsession with recognition and acceptance should be considered in relation to her social position and identity in the 1960s, rather than her personal vices of narcissism, neurosis, or pathology, which have colored perceptions of the artist and interpretations of her work.¹¹³ Her incessant emphasis on her own originality results from her marginalization in the New York art community during the ‘60s. In the 2008 documentary film sarcastically titled *Yayoi Kusama: I Love Me*, Kusama speaks directly to the camera: “I’m an excellent creator. I’ve always been a pioneer in my work. I’m filled with originality. I’ve never

¹¹¹ Hans Haacke, interviewed on December 8, 1988, and Carolee Schneemann, interviewed on January 6, 1989, both by Alexandra Munroe and Reiko Tomii, in preparation of Kusama’s 1989 retrospective at the Center for International Contemporary Arts, New York. Ibid., vols. 35 and 39.

¹¹² Arthur Lubow, “Fame Becomes Her,” *W Magazine*, June 2012, <http://www.wmagazine.com/artdesign/2012/06/yayoi-kusama-japanese-artist>.

¹¹³ For more on psychoanalysis and postcolonial theory, see Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995). I thank Prof. Esra Akcan for these references.

imitated other creators.”¹¹⁴ However, the seemingly arrogant proclamation is followed by a statement that hints subtly at the reason behind her egocentrism and narcissism: “Artists think their own pieces are the best, so we don’t see things that way. We can’t live if we don’t believe ours are the best. You can’t be an artist if you don’t make up your mind that ‘I’m the one who creates the best work.’” This confession suggests that her often criticized narcissism and obsession with fame reflect a naked vulnerability and gnawing fear of being marginalized and rejected.

Struggling with declining health and a flailing career, Kusama opened *Aggregation: One Thousand Boats Show* at the Gertrude Stein Gallery in December 1963. It was an ambitious installation of a white rowboat bristling with a thousand sculpted fabric phalluses. Kusama covered the gallery walls with 999 black-and-white photographic reproductions of the phallus-covered rowboat that she displayed in the corner of the room. This form of environmental installation, developed based on a single, serialized image, is likely to have inspired Andy Warhol’s *Cow Wallpaper* exhibition at Leo Castelli’s gallery in New York in 1966. The *Aggregation: One Thousand Boats Show* was the first environmental installation of her career, achieved at a time when installation was still a relatively new practice in New York.

Kusama also used the sterilized phallic installation as the setting for what is known to be her very first nude photograph. The most important element resulting from the show, the black-and-white photograph was not a snapshot of some performance art piece, but Kusama meticulously planned the photo-shoot as if she was producing an artwork and also carefully staged her body and gaze for the camera. She hired Rudolph Burckhardt, a photographer well

¹¹⁴ Yayoi Kusama, interviewed in Matsumoto, *Yayoi Kusama: I Love Me*.

associated with the New York School, and directed him as to how best to compose the picture.¹¹⁵ It can be said that Kusama thus consciously turned herself into an art object to be looked at. By carefully staging a photograph and performing for the camera, Kusama evoked the tradition of Abstract Expressionism, in particular Pollock's act of painting for the camera. Rather than wait for magazine editors to send photographers to her, Kusama hired one of the best-known magazine photographers, thus directly embracing the commercial system of publicity photography/performance under her own artistic practice. Starting with this nude photograph, she increasingly focused on staging herself in various environments, including her own installations, urban streets, tabloid magazines and newspapers. Alongside the aforementioned performance art pioneers Schneemann and Kaprow, Kusama began using her body as a medium of art and publicity, years before the mainstream art world acknowledged the body as a raw material of art and identity politics.

In 1963, moreover, Kusama underwent a remarkable makeover.¹¹⁶ In a recent publication "Yayoi Kusama: A Picture Biography," a collection of snapshots trace the chronological evolution of the artist's style.¹¹⁷ And it clearly shows that at the beginning of her career, Kusama would attend show openings wearing Western-style two-pieced suits; she pulled her hair back in a tidy bun, looking like a delicate, self-possessed professional woman. In 1963,

¹¹⁵ Rudolph Burckhardt, interviewed on December 11, 1995. Zelevansky, "Driving Image: Yayoi Kusama in New York," in Zelevansky et al., *Love Forever*, 20.

¹¹⁶ The aforementioned art historian of Japanese artists in New York, Midori Yoshimoto, also notes the year 1963 as a turning point for Kusama's work: "While Kusama's self-fashioning became prominent in the photographs around 1963, she seems to have been always conscious of how to present herself. . . . Compared to her earlier photographs, those taken after 1963 seem to increase the degree of constructedness." Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 62.

¹¹⁷ Diedrich Diederichsen, Midori Yamamura, and Lily van der Stokker, *Yayoi Kusama: Mirrored Years*, exh. cat. (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen / Dijon: Le Consortium, 2009).

however, she re-invented her style and began to dress in sumptuous kimonos. She also changed her hairstyle to the “Cleopatra” coiffure, which had been recently popularized by the 1963 Oriental-themed movie starring Elizabeth Taylor. It was as if she had decided to exploit the commercial value of her Oriental body in order to advance her career. Her Dutch artist friend Henk Peeters explains that Kusama enjoyed performing for an audience: “She used situations that she created. ... She appeared wearing a beautiful kimono, and she liked it.”¹¹⁸ The effort to adorn herself for public exhibition appeared simultaneously impressive and excessive. A German reviewer of her *Driving Image Show*, which opened in Essen in the spring of 1966, made note of how the artist attended the opening “in an intense pink kimono” with “a great deal of make-up, a Grecian hairdo, and much perfume.”¹¹⁹

1963 was also the year that Kusama’s earliest account of hallucination appeared. During her interview with the art critic Gordon Brown for WABC radio, she said, “My nets grew beyond myself and beyond the canvases I was covering with them. They began to cover the walls, the ceiling, and finally the whole universe.”¹²⁰ This incident suggests that Kusama was at the time trying to publicly connect her artwork to her inner self—thus using her mental problem to draw attention to not only her work but also her image.

¹¹⁸ Henk Peeters, interviewed by Bhupendra Karia on March 15, 1989. *CICA*, vol. 49.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Udo Kultermann, “Driving Image in Essen,” in Hoptman, Tatehata, and Kultermann, *Yayoi Kusama*, 88.

¹²⁰ Yamamura, “Re-Viewing Kusama,” 96–113. Gordon Brown, then the executive editor of *Art Voices*, was an early proponent of Kusama in New York. His interview with the artist from which this statement comes from was conducted in 1963 for WABC radio and was first published in 1965, in *De nieuwe stijl: Werk van de internationale avant-garde*. An extract of this interview text is rep. in Hoptman, Tatehata, and Kultermann, *Yayoi Kusama*, 100–105. Ten years later, Kusama officially published an essay on her hallucinations *Waga Tamashii No Henreki To Tataki* (“Odyssey of My Struggling Soul”), published in the Japanese art magazine *Geijutsu Seikatsu* in November 1975. Extracts of this essay is rep. in *Ibid.*, 118–122. Also see Yamamura, “Re-Viewing Kusama,” 64n8. Yamamura notes that the commonly accepted narrative of Kusama’s mental illness has routinely featured the particular statement that Kusama prepared in 1966 in New York with the assistance of two art critics, Jay Jacobs and Gordon Brown, who helped her translate, copyedit, and title it.

Kusama was well aware of the Orientalist fantasy about kimonoed women as she was experiencing it directly in America and Europe. The longest romantic relationship she has had was with the American artist Joseph Cornell (1903–1972), whom she dated for about ten years before his death in 1972. Kusama writes in her autobiography that what sparked the ten-year romance was her exoticism and Cornell’s “Lolita complex,” which she associates particularly with notions of “Orientalism” and “Japanism” of the ‘50s and ‘60s.¹²¹ More commonly known as “lolicon” in Japan, Lolita Complex refers to an attraction to underage girls or male adults with such tendencies—a well-known syndrome in Japan in relation to the popularity of *manga*, *anime*, and the *otaku* subculture (These Japanese subcultures will be discussed in Chapter 4 of this dissertation). Kusama first met Cornell, 26 years her senior, in 1962 through an art dealer who hoped to win over the otherwise reclusive and obstinate man by enticing him with an attractive woman: “The only way to soften him up was to bring a beautiful young woman along. That, she told me, was why she needed me to go. She had already advised him that she was bringing an attractive Oriental girl.”¹²² So Kusama wore “my finest kimono, with a silver obi” to visit Cornell at his home in Queens.¹²³ For Cornell it was love at first sight; he began writing love letters full of obsessive tenderness.¹²⁴

As historian Naoko Shibusawa carefully examines in her book *America’s Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (2006), during the Cold War the image of kimonoed Japanese

¹²¹ Kusama, interviewed on December 16–18, 1988, recorded in *CICA*, vol. 5.

¹²² Kusama, *Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama*, 163.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 166–169.

women was greatly popularized in American culture, which she interprets as the Americans' attempt to transform the image of the former war "aggressor" into a friendly "ally."¹²⁵ After World War II, the Pacific Rim emerged as a major source of profit for American corporations, and the United States realized that Japan could stand as a model of capitalism in Asia, especially as a foil to a possible revolutionary China.¹²⁶ Intent on bolstering Japan's economy, the United States forgave Japanese reparations, allowing the country to cease payments to its Asian victims. American influence also effected the exoneration of Hirohito (Emperor Showa), who many believed would be tried and convicted as a war criminal. During World War II, the "Japs" were imagined as short, dark-skinned barbaric men, but after 1945 the new "ally" Japan had to be remade in the image of a harmless young kimonoed girl.

For example, *Life* magazine printed an exciting cover photograph of a young Japanese woman dressed in a decorative kimono and throwing a ball down a bowling lane for a special issue on Japan published in September 1964. Bowling was immensely popular in America at the time. With the kimonoed woman signifying Japan and the bowling sport symbolizing America, this cover photograph advertised a newly allied relationship between the two countries during the Cold War.¹²⁷ The kimonoed geisha became the public American image of Japan, while in reality

¹²⁵ Naoko Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006), 3–4. I would like to thank Prof. Shibusawa for referring this book to me when we met at Brown University's 5th Annual Graduate Students Conference in April 2010.

¹²⁶ Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999). Rep. in Min Zhou and J. V. Gatewood, eds., *Contemporary Asian America: A Multidisciplinary Reader*, 2nd Ed. (New York and London: New York University Press, 2007), 478. Lee cites Noel J. Kent, *Hawaii: Islands under the Influence* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 97. Kent reports that between 1951 and 1976, the book value of American investments in the Pacific Rim grew from \$16 billion to \$80.3 billion.

¹²⁷ Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally*, 291.

the geisha is “a very marginal cultural institution in Japanese society.”¹²⁸ The geisha (a combination of the words *gei* meaning “art” and *sha* meaning “doer”) in Japan refers to a female performer and entertainer professionally trained in traditional Japanese arts, who is considered an artist or artisan.¹²⁹

Kusama arrived in the United States in 1957, the same year that Hollywood released two blockbuster movies depicting a romance between an American man and a Japanese woman: *Sayonara* starring Marlon Brando and *The Barbarian and the Geisha* starring John Wayne. The former was a Warner Brothers adaptation of James Michener’s 1954 bestselling novel of the same title, loosely based on his romance with his Japanese wife, and the latter was a 20th Century-Fox dramatization of the real story of Townsend Harris, the first U.S. Consul General sent to the Empire of Japan in the 1850s who was rumored to have a geisha lover. These were, however, just two of what Shibusawa describes as Cold War Orientalist films: data shows that between 1949 and 1967, Hollywood produced over a dozen movies set in Japan, in addition to nearly two dozen war movies set in Asia.¹³⁰ They ranged from high-budget films like *Sayonara* and *The Teahouse of the August Moon* (1956) to forgotten B-movies like *Japanese War Bride* (1952), *Three Stripes in the Sun* (1955), *Tokyo After Dark* (1959), and *Cry for Happy* (1961).¹³¹

¹²⁸ Ibid., 12.

¹²⁹ The Japanese word “geisha” first appeared in the seventeenth century, and the first people to go by that name were actually men. See Lesley Downer, *Women of the Pleasure Quarters: The Secret History of the Geisha* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001), 96.

¹³⁰ Shibusawa, *America’s Geisha Ally*, 256.

¹³¹ Ibid. Asia was such a popular subject at the time that a significant number of movies featuring Japanese Americans and Asian Americans also appeared, and these included *Go For Broke!* (1951), *Bad Day at Black Rock* (1955), *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* (1955), *The Crimson Kimono* (1959), and *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960).

The American wars in Asia had resuscitated the pre-existing Orientalist visions of Asia and particularly of Japan. In reality as well, romance and marriage between American GIs and Japanese women occurred frequently during and after the U.S. Occupation of Japan (1945-1952), and the so-called Japanese “war brides” gained a new visibility in America. A 1955 *American Mercury* article approximated that about 20,000 American servicemen had married Japanese women.¹³²

The Cold War Orientalist movies commonly portray a sappy, interracial love affair, in which the Japanese/Asian female character is portrayed as submissive and loyal to her American lover, and she is dressed in exotic traditional dresses that mark her different ethnicity. This is evident in the movie posters of *Sayonara* and *The Barbarian and the Geisha*, both of which similarly depict the kimonoed Japanese actresses held hostage by their strong, masculine American lovers. In the *Sayonara* poster, the actress Miiko Taka’s kimono-clad body is twisting erotically in Marlon Brando’s macho-aggressive embrace: with plunging neckline and protruding breasts, her eyes are half-closed and mouth opened. The caption scrawled across the poster reads, “And then she said, ‘I am not allowed to love. But I will love you if that is your desire...’” In other words, through she is a chaste woman, she would be willing to submit to the American man’s command by breaking the taboo of interracial romance.

¹³² Hugh F. O’Reilly, “Our East-West Marriage Is Working,” *American Mercury*, December 1955, 17-19; quoted in *Ibid.*, 49. O’Reilly’s real-life story with his Japanese wife Yuko was made into a movie, *Three Stripes in the Sun* (1955). The rate of Asian women marrying white men has always been higher than that of Asian men intermarrying. In 1999, Robert Suro reported that Asian women were intermarrying at twice the rate of Asian men. Roberto Suro, “Mixed Doubles,” *American Demographics* (November 1999): 58; quoted in Frank H. Wu, *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 275.

The Hollywood superstar Marlon Brando contributed to the movie's promotion also in a remarkably Orientalist manner.¹³³ During the movie's publicity campaign, he married a South Asian woman (actress Anna Kashfi), and in a magazine interview titled "Marlon Brando: Why He Prefers Foreign Girls" (1957), he explained his penchant for foreign women—they knew "exactly when to encourage [their men] and when to shut up," whereas the modern American women did not "often give the man a chance to feel and act like a man."¹³⁴ Not only does this interview demonstrate the century-old white male Orientalist fantasy still current in mid-century America, but it also exemplifies the tangled coexistence of fantasy and reality, and how such perceptions may have influenced Kusama's (and our) everyday life choices and experiences.

2.4 **Kimonoed Performances: Mimicry of Orientalism**

Kusama's kimonoed performances were not merely crude mongering acts, but a close observation of them reveals that they were more than a survival tactic—a parodic critique of the Orientalist gaze. In the mid-1960s, Kusama staged (at least) two street Happenings dressed in kimono. In *Walking Piece*, the artist transformed herself into a "geisha" by donning a blossoming pink floral kimono and carrying a matching umbrella. Then she flamboyantly strolled the streets of Lower Manhattan, inviting passers-by to indulge in latent Oriental fantasies. Thus she became a *flâneur*—a detached observer of the city. The performance was documented by Eikoh Hosoe in saturated color photographs, and they reveal that Kusama was

¹³³ For more on masculinity and the 1950s Hollywood, see Steven Cohan, *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997).

¹³⁴ Quoted in Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally*, 267. Clair Primus, "Marlon Brando: Why He Prefers Foreign Girls," *Movie Mirror* [month missing], 1957, 28–33, 52–3, clipping in Sayonara #14587A, Warner Brothers Archives.

playing a “geisha” as imagined and portrayed in Western fictions, not a traditional type of Japanese geisha. Specifically, it seems that the artist re-enacted emotional moments from *Madame Butterfly*, the famous opera by Giacomo Puccini: she wept, wandered dejectedly and longingly gazed at the horizon of the Hudson River horizon as if waiting for her lover to return from across the Pacific. As she intended also, the “geisha” appeared lost and misplaced in the industrial streets of Manhattan factory buildings, drug stores, and boulevards. Altogether the photographs evoke an image of a Western “geisha,” which has no affinity with Japanese images of strolling women, for example by the famous Edo-period artist Hokusai (1760–1849), in which the figures do not express much emotions are situated in simple interiors or landscapes.

The reference to *Madame Butterfly* is significant because the opera is an epitome of the nineteenth-century *japonisme*. And the longevity and international popularity of the narrative further indicate vestiges of the imperial fantasy in modern Western culture.¹³⁵ On a separate note, it was one of Kusama’s favorite operas: the artist was a fan of operas, and Jerry Rothlein remembers that she knew the lyrics of many operas including *Madame Butterfly*, *La Bohème*, and *Aida*.¹³⁶ Premiered in Italy in 1904, *Madame Butterfly* was created within the center of the literary wave of interracial romances set in Japan—a trend traced to the market success of Pierre Loti’s 1887 novel *Madame Chrysanthème*. Written after Loti’s trip to Japan in the summer of 1885, *Madame Chrysanthème* claims that while in Nagasaki he was offered young Japanese women for purchase by their own families and that he agreed to pay twenty dollars per month for

¹³⁵ *Madame Butterfly* is currently ranked as the most-performed opera in America. See Opera America (The National Service Organization for Opera)’s “The Top 20” list of most-performed operas (accessed February 14, 2011): http://www.museumstuff.com/learn/topics/Opera_America::sub::Cornerstones

¹³⁶ Jerry Rothlein, interviewed by Reiko Tomii and Bhupendra Karia on February 11, 1989. *CICA*, vol. 55.

an eighteen-year-old girl named Chrysanthème.¹³⁷ Loti's book was an instant bestseller and is credited to have popularized the Western fascination with Japanese women.¹³⁸ The American John Luther Long's novella "Madame Butterfly" (1898) was one of the many fictions inspired by Loti's book and the latest fad for Japanese women. This novella was adapted into a play in New York by David Belasco (1900), which then inspired Puccini to write the famous opera after seeing the play in London.¹³⁹ This short "history" of how the opera was created only indicates how popular the theme of Japanese woman was across Europe at the turn of the century.

Madame Butterfly became a sort of "prototype" of interracial romances that usually end with the non-white female protagonist's sacrifice. In the opera, Cio Cio San, nicknamed Butterfly, is a beautiful, innocent fifteen-year-old Japanese girl contracted to marry the American naval officer Pinkerton during his sojourn in Nagasaki. Though Pinkerton vows one day to marry an American wife, the two fall in love and sing of their devotion in a moonlit garden. In Act II, after Pinkerton left Japan for his home country, Butterfly waits loyally for her husband's return, having given birth to their son. After three years, Pinkerton returns with his American

¹³⁷ Loti is the penname of Julien Viaud, a French naval officer well known for thrilling writings on adventures in French colonies and other exotic places around the world such as Istanbul, Senegal and Tahiti. See Pierre Loti, *Madame Chrysanthème*, trans. Robert Arnot (New York: Current Literature Publishing Company, 1910).

¹³⁸ Endymion Wilkinson, *Japan Versus the West: Image and Reality* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 116. Wilkinson notes that *Madame Chrysanthème* went through 25 impressions in French alone in the first five years after its publication. He also names *Poupée Japonaise*, *Petite Mousmé*, and *The Honourable Picnic* as other variations of the Chrysanthème theme.

¹³⁹ John Luther Long's "Madame Butterfly" was first published in *Century Magazine* 5 (January 1898): 274–92. While Loti's story ends as he leaves Japan, with his temporary bride paid and politely sending him off, Long's story emphasizes the agony of the woman left behind in Japan by an American Navy Lieutenant. For more about the creation of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, see Arthur Groos, "Lieutenant F. B. Pinkerton: Problems in the Genesis and Performance of *Madama Butterfly*," in William Weaver and Simonetta Puccini, eds., *The Puccini Companion* (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1994), 169–201. Puccini wrote another Asia-themed opera, *Turandot*, a story set in China, after seeing Friedrich Schiller's play adaptation (1801) of Carlo Gozzi's story written in 1762. The opera premiered in Milan in 1926, two years after Puccini's death.

wife. Devastated, Butterfly sends her little son to the American couple and kills herself for the “good” of the new family.¹⁴⁰ The same narrative is reiterated in numerous film and theater adaptations, including a 1915 silent film starring Mary Pickford as Madame Butterfly, a 1932 Paramount film featuring Cary Grant as Lieutenant Pinkerton, and also in movie interpretations set in other Asian countries such as *The Toll of the Sea* (1922) and *Miss Saigon* (1989).

Film critic Gina Marchetti, who has famously analyzed the recurrence of the “Madame Butterfly” narrative in Hollywood, has argued that the non-Western heroine’s self-sacrifice in the end of the stories is to legitimate the authority of the Western patriarchy embodied by the “white” male leads.¹⁴¹ Considering that Japan emerged as a new military power at the turn of the century, she also suggests that in the original story the figuration of Japan as a powerless and submissive woman can be interpreted as Western need to trivialize, marginalize, mock and emasculate Japan within the Western imagination. Japanese military prowess—the defeat of China in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and the victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) fought over the lands of Korea and Manchuria—threatened the West and marked a tension that would escalate until—and of course during—the breakout of World War II.

Kusama staged another kimonoed spectacle in 1966, at the 33rd Venice Biennale. For a year Kusama lived in Milan with her artist friend Lucio Fontana devising *Narcissus Garden*, an installation of 1,500 factory-made mirror balls, to exhibit at the time-honored and prestigious international art exhibition. Though she was not officially invited, she claimed that she “had spoken directly with the chairman of the committee and received his permission to go ahead with

¹⁴⁰ See Giacomo Puccini, *Madame Butterfly: Opera in Three Acts* (New York: G. Ricordi, 1954).

¹⁴¹ Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the “Yellow Peril”: Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 80.

my installation.”¹⁴² But the chairman probably did not expect that she would sell the mirrored balls at the exhibition. Outside the Italian Pavilion, Kusama put up a sign that read “YOUR NARCISSISM FOR SALE \$2” alongside the 1,500 mirror balls. Wearing an exotic kimono and a pretty smile, she was selling not just the mirror balls, but also “Yayoi Kusama.” She *is* Narcissus. The artist exhibited her beautiful kimono-clad body amidst the shiny mirror balls, thus marketing herself along with her art objects. It can be said that, to exaggerate a bit, the *Narcissus Garden* installation was probably a just an accessory to her self-promotion.

The act of mongering, bartering and selling transgressed the conventional code of conduct at the prominent international art exhibition. The police ordered the artist to stop the wholesale/installation/performance. Undeterred, Kusama instead passed out self-promotional flyers that featured the renowned critic Sir Herbert Read’s poetic descriptions of her work as “images of strange beauty” that “press ... on our organs of perception with terrifying insistence.”¹⁴³

Past and present criticism of this Happening has mostly highlighted the impropriety of the avant-garde act of selling out. In a statement from 1966, Kusama promoted the idea of collaboration between an artist and industry to create and sell an artwork in the price range of food at the supermarket.¹⁴⁴ The first in-depth analysis of this Happening appeared in Laura Hoptman’s 1998 exhibition catalog essay, and the curator applauded Kusama’s wholesaling act as the artist’s “most straightforward critique thus far of the mechanization and commodification

¹⁴² Kusama, *Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama*, 54.

¹⁴³ Sir Herbert Read had written these words in response to Kusama’s *Driving Image Show* at Castellance Gallery in New York in April 1964; quoted in Hoptman, Tatehata, and Kultermann, *Yayoi Kusama*, 63.

¹⁴⁴ Kusama’s personal statement, rep. in Louise Neri and Takaya Goto, eds., *Yayoi Kusama* (New York: Rizzoli, 2012), 176.

of the art market.”¹⁴⁵ As the title of the installation, *Narcissus Garden*, indicates, the artist probably wanted to parody the narcissism of the art world involved in the acts of buying and selling art and producing meanings about “art,” although she has never explained in detail her intentions. In fact, she offered mass-produced mirror balls as “art,” whose shiny surfaces would reflect back at the viewer his/her narcissism. Thus *Narcissus Garden* was not just a beautiful artwork that appealed to the senses (“images of strange beauty”) but it was also conceptual and critical. It was as if she was playing some game with the viewer.

It should be also noted that the kimono was not the only costume Kusama wore for her performance. According to photographs taken at the Venice Biennale, Kusama changed her attire at least three times.¹⁴⁶ A gold kimono accentuated her exoticism; a vivid red bodysuit, which had recently become a New York fad, evoked sexy Western modernity; and a neat, lady-like blouse paired with a demure, knee-length skirt, represented Western, conservative femininity. By assuming different types of femininities ranging from East to West, old to new, the artist played with the objectifying gaze of the audience.

Of the three, it was, of course, the kimono-clad Kusama that garnered the most attention. A photograph of the geisha smiling beautifully in a sea of shiny mirror balls was printed in the Italian magazine *ABC*, with the title “A Very Sexy Biennale.”¹⁴⁷ It was as if she had played a predictable game: Her cultural experiment proved that the audience desired to see her as an exotic woman. Today it is difficult to find photographs from the Venice Biennale performance

¹⁴⁵ Laura Hoptman, “Down to Zero: Yayoi Kusama and the European New Tendency,” in Zelevansky et al., *Love Forever*, 50–51.

¹⁴⁶ This has been noted in Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 69n74. Some photographs from the occasion can be found in the *Love Forever* exhibition catalog (1998).

¹⁴⁷ Milena Milani, “Una biennale tutta sexy” (A Very Sexy Biennale), *ABC* 7, no. 27 (July 3, 1966): 12–14.

with Kusama in the other two outfits; the photographs in her monographs and catalogues only document the artist dressed in kimono.

What has gone unnoticed by a Western audience is the element of satire in Kusama's performances. As stated earlier, the artist's conscious and critical act of dressing in a kimono to exploit and challenge the Oriental fantasy has been largely ignored by art critics and historians. Now I'd like to suggest three possible reasons for this omission in art historical discourse. First, it seems that her excessive and exaggerated parody of a geisha was often perceived as her real identity as a Japanese woman in the West. Ronald Kuchta, former Director of Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, remembers that, in the 1960s Kusama's eccentric actions were interpreted as "another gesture of Japanese."¹⁴⁸ In fact, Kusama parodied the Oriental stereotypes before they were recognized as stereotypes. During the time of the Civil Rights Movement, the stereotypes about East Asian women were never effectively questioned or subverted. It was 1988 when David Henry Hwang's Tony award-winning play *M. Butterfly* finally generated a discursive space for the critique of the "Madame Butterfly" narrative as a racial and gendered fantasy of Orientalism.

M. Butterfly is a satirical distortion of the *Madame Butterfly* paradigm, as it presents a tragic story about a French diplomat falling in love with a Chinese opera performer whom he mistakes as a woman (the performer is a man masqueraded as a woman, since traditional Chinese theater bans women from the stage and all performer are male). Shockingly, the play was written based on a real story. Hwang wrote the play after reading in May 1986 the *New York Times* report of the trial of former French diplomat Mr. Bouriscot, who was accused of passing information to China after he fell in love with Mr. Shi, whom he believed for twenty years to be

¹⁴⁸ Ronald Kuchta, interviewed by Munroe and Tomii on December 1, 1988. *CICA*, vol. 33.

a woman.¹⁴⁹ This bizarre story illustrates how the century-old “Madame Butterfly” fantasy persisted in the 1980s determining the way many Westerners perceived Asians—as weak, exotic, and feminine.

The longevity of this Oriental fantasy was even more astonishingly evidenced in the production of *Miss Saigon*, the popular musical written in 1985 by Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg (the French duo also created the hit musical *Les Misérables*). *Miss Saigon* premiered in 1989 in London, and debuted on Broadway in 1991. As Esther Lee has argued in her history of Asian American theatre,

All of the Asian characters in *Miss Saigon* were, at best, unexamined stereotypes of Asians and Asian Americans, and the musical presented a deeply racist and problematic construction of post-Vietnam Orientalism. . . . [F]or the Asian American theatre community as a whole, the musical presented a major setback not only in terms of casting and stereotypes but also in terms of how the economic power of mainstream theatre has utterly dictated minority theatres.¹⁵⁰

The protagonist of the musical is a 17-year-old Vietnamese virgin named Kim, who falls in love with an American G.I., Chris, on her first day working as a prostitute. She is a twentieth-century version of Cio Cio San. Not only did the musical reiterate the Orientalism of *Madame Butterfly*, but it also caused controversy by hiring Caucasian actors to perform Vietnamese roles in “yellowface.”

Compared to Hwang’s blatant post-modern, post-colonial satire of the undying “Madame Butterfly” narrative, Kusama’s parodic performances of the Oriental fantasy were not only too early but also too elusive for Western spectators. She was practicing mimicry, challenging the

¹⁴⁹ This is discussed by Dorinne K. Kondo, *About Face: Performing Race in Fashion and Theater* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 31. Also see David Henry Hwang, *M. Butterfly* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1988), 25. *M. Butterfly* first appeared in *American Theater* 5 (July/August 1988) in a special pull-out section.

¹⁵⁰ Esther Kim Lee, *A History of Asian American Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 178.

stereotypes very subtly through her “geisha” dressing in everyday performance. In fact, Kusama practiced mimicry when mimicry was still an unknown strategy in discourses of performance and identity politics—which is the second possible reason.

The modern concept of mimicry as a strategy for intervention became widespread only in the late 1970s, in the wake of feminism and poststructuralism. Most notably, Luce Irigaray, in her seminal book *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977), promoted mimicry as a counter-strategy to try to recover the place of feminine exploitation, without being simply reduced to it.¹⁵¹ Based on the Freudian concept of the symbolic phallus and Plato’s theory of mimesis, she argued that female subjectivity had been positioned as a mere copy of male subjectivity. Mimicry, according to Irigaray, is “to submit herself—inasmuch as she is on the side of the ‘perceptible,’ of ‘matter’—to ‘ideas,’ in particular to ideas about herself that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make ‘visible,’ by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible.”¹⁵² Irigaray’s feminist discourse of mimicry notably coincides in time with the rise of the American photographer Cindy Sherman (b. 1954) in the art world. Unlike Kusama’s performative photographs, Sherman’s famous *Untitled Film Still* series (1977–1980) was aptly received by critics as a feminist critique of the male gaze in mass culture and were also related to the 1980s postmodern discourse of simulacra.

Kusama’s “geisha” parodies can also be explained by the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha’s notion of mimicry. In his 1985 essay “Signs Taken for Wonders,” Bhabha described mimicry as a parodic anti-colonial strategy or a “sign of spectacular resistance” (while he had

¹⁵¹ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 76.

¹⁵² Ibid.

initially criticized it as “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other as a *subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite*” in his 1984 essay “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” as his point there was to discuss how the colonialists mimicked the colonized to deride them).¹⁵³ As prominent theorists of mimicry or parody such as Irigaray, Bhabha, Jacques Lacan, and Judith Butler have all suggested, mimicry makes a successful tactic only when it reveals itself as something that is “almost the same but not quite.” Lacan writes of this necessary distinction,

Mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an itself that is behind. The effect of mimicry is camouflage. . . . It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled—exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare.¹⁵⁴

While mimicry must distinguish itself from the mimicked in order for it to be effective as an intervention strategy, it seems that Kusama’s “geisha” parodies rather complemented than disrupted the Oriental image projected onto her by her Western viewers. At a time when there was little awareness of racisms and sexism in the culture, they were not received as parodies. But as a Japanese woman, the staged persona was conflated with the spectators’ Western stereotypes of Asian women.

Third, when Kusama re-emerged on the Western-dominated international art scene in the early 1990s, after two decades of absence, preeminent feminist and psychoanalytic art scholars including Mignon Nixon, Amelia Jones, and Griselda Pollock attempted to historicize and

¹⁵³ Homi K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 172 and 122 respectively. “Signs Taken for Wonders” was first published in *Critical Inquiry* 12. “Of Mimicry and Man” was first published in *October* vol. 28.

¹⁵⁴ From Lacan’s *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, published in 1977 (written based on his seminars in 1964), quoted in Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 121.

contextualize her past work. Problematically, however, using the Western parameters of feminism and psychoanalysis, not only did they focus exclusively on her “self-display” or “self-exposure” photographs, seductively staged amid her *Aggregation* or *Obsession* sculptures, but they also approached those performative photographs as independent images rather than historical documents.

As noted earlier, the Body Art historian Amelia Jones has significantly framed artists’ photographic portraits as performative documents. Jones interprets Kusama’s narcissistic exhibitionism as a challenge to disinterested modern evaluation of artworks; she argues that the artist’s self-display challenges “the grain of the normative subject (the straight, white, upper-middle-class, male subject coincident with the category ‘artist’ in Western culture).”¹⁵⁵ Kusama enacted herself *as representation*. Similarly, the influential feminist and psychoanalytic art historian Mignon Nixon analyzes Kusama’s strategy “[t]o critique phallocentrism by compounding it, to parody the phallic symbol by its compulsive repetition,” thus linking the artist to the feminist art movement only.¹⁵⁶ According to Griselda Pollock the preeminent feminist art historian, Kusama’s self-exposure, which was harshly criticized in the 1960s, was “a pre-feminist artistic *pharmakon*: both symptom and parodic critique, both sign of the poison of and a cure for an impossible situation.”¹⁵⁷ She contends: “Femininity is performed in a variety of guises, performed in the old-fashioned sense, the kimono invoking both an assertion of cultural difference on the streets of New York and an intra-cultural critique of Japanese ideals of

¹⁵⁵ Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject*, 8–9.

¹⁵⁶ Mignon Nixon, “Posing the Phallus,” 113.

¹⁵⁷ Pollock, “Yayoi Kusama,” 108.

femininity.”¹⁵⁸ But what if the kimono was a critique of Western ideals of “Japaneseness” or “Asianness”?

In this light, it is evident that contemporary art scholars have analyzed how Kusama’s performance photographs of the 1960s appear to the post-modern, post-feminist eyes and minds of the 1990s, without a close investigation of the historical backgrounds of the photographs. A danger in such a method is that the “white” Western observer could ignore possible phenomenological problems resulting from Kusama’s gender and racial identity, as it is different from his/her own. An extreme example comes from *New Yorker*’s critic Calvin Tomkins. His article “On the Edge: A Doyenne of Disturbance Returns to New York” (1996) was published at a time when Kusama’s self-display photographs were avidly contextualized as feminist gestures. Tomkins criticizes the lionizing trend by saying, “Fair enough. Let’s just note, though, that in a frequently published photograph for which Kusama posed in 1966 [the photomontage that will be discussed shortly] ... her expression does not exactly project defiance.”¹⁵⁹ Blinded by Oriental stereotypes, he ignored the extravagant explosion of polka dots on her body and could not see that Kusama was possibly masquerading as a seductress.

2.5 Self-Exposure: Satire through Spectacle

In *Mythologies* (1957), Roland Barthes analyzes the sport of wrestling as spectacle.¹⁶⁰ The wrestlers make excessive gestures expected by the spectators, and these grandiloquent

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 108–109.

¹⁵⁹ Calvin Tomkins, “On the Edge: A Doyenne of Disturbance Returns to New York,” *New Yorker*, October 7, 1996, 102.

¹⁶⁰ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 2000).

gestures have no meaning but are signs of the wrestler's awareness of being watched and of his power to create spectacular entertainment. In the case of Kusama's performance of spectacles, however, as I have discussed above, there has been a critical problem with the reception. The Western spectators have not been able to read her excessive gestures as mere signs, since, I suggest, they perceive her Oriental body as an image rather than a performing subject. The excessively "Japanese" and "feminine" gestures have instead been observed as natural and normal for a Japanese woman.

By analyzing Kusama's performative exposure as mimicry of the Orientalist gaze, we arrive at a new interpretation from that proposed by feminist and psychoanalytic theories. Commenting particularly on Kusama's first nude photograph taken at her *Aggregation: One Thousand Boat Show* in 1963, Mignon Nixon highlights what she called "the splitting effect of the phalli-field."¹⁶¹ Midori Yoshimoto, commenting on the same photograph, suggests that Kusama's tilted posture might reference the typical posture to represent Japanese women in traditional Japanese paintings of the female nude.¹⁶²

On the contrary, I suggest that this photograph can be interpreted as Kusama's parody of Oriental female nudes in the tradition of Western art. It appears to me that with her back turned toward the viewer, the naked artist strikes the classical Odalisque pose—an invention of imperial French art that is familiar to us from the nude paintings by Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780–1867). Female slaves of an Ottoman sultan, odalisques became the objects of fantasy for European artists in the nineteenth century. Depicted nude, the sumptuous women reclined erotically, awaiting the male gaze. Kusama presents her naked body as part of the installation

¹⁶¹ Mignon Nixon, "Posing the Phallus," 114.

¹⁶² Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 64.

that she has created. Thus, she is both the subject and the object of the art. Turning her gaze away from the viewer, she appears indifferent to anything but her art: no one can possess her.

Kusama's self-display performance can be compared to the work of Carolee Schneemann, the aforementioned artist considered as a pioneer of feminist performance art who has spoken empathetically for Kusama. Schneemann is best known for her provocative, erotic self-shot film *Fuses* (1965), composed of painted sequences of her lovemaking with her then boyfriend and composer James Tenney, and the equally notorious naked performance *Interior Scroll* (1975), in which she stood on a drawing table, painted her body, and then extracted a scroll from her vagina while reading from it, thus suggesting the vagina as a source of intellect. The scroll was an excerpt from her book *Cézanne, She Was A Great Painter* (published in 1976), a title that feminizes the late-nineteenth-century French painter widely considered as a forefather of modern/abstract art. If *Fuses* was the artist's contribution to the pro-love politics of the '60s, *Interior Scroll* is now widely understood as her feminist deconstructions of gender stereotypes about art, creation, and female nude.

In 1964, for her artist friend Robert Morris's dance performance *Site*, Schneemann posed as Olympia, the protagonist of Edouard Manet's famous 1863 painting. While Morris created various movements with plywood panels prepared on stage, Schneemann remained motionless in the iconic reclining pose of Manet's prostitute model, thus exposing her "status" as a passive female nude body displayed for the viewer's gaze.¹⁶³ A "number of women in the 1960s engaged the space of the tableau and the insertion of their own bodies into a tableau-like or pictorial space," as artist Silvia Kolbowski noted in a 1994 round table discussion on "The

¹⁶³ This performance is analyzed in detail in Virginia Spivey, "Sites of Subjectivity: Robert Morris, Minimalism, and Dance," *Dance Research Journal* 35, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 113–130.

Reception of the Sixties” for the journal *October*.¹⁶⁴ The discussion, however, brought up names like Schneemann, Valie Export (b. 1940), and Hannah Wilke (1940-1993), unintentionally forgetting about women artists of color who were active in the ‘60s such as Kusama or Yoko Ono.

In another staged nude photograph, Kusama appears prostrate on a phallus-covered sofa, her body covered in polka dots. Her pose is strongly reminiscent of Paul Gauguin’s thirteen-year-old Tahitian lover portrayed in 1892 in his *Spirit of the Dead Watching*, another product of the French colonial history. Escaping the city of Paris, Gauguin is known to have found both artistic inspiration and sexual pleasure in the French colony in the Pacific Ocean. And the *Spirit of the Dead Watching* demonstrates the modern French painter’s romantic view of the primitive culture: his envy mixed with fear of their spiritual ascendancy is expressed in his juxtaposition of the Tahitian girl and the figure of the ghost.

In contrast, Kusama’s aggressive, independent self-presentation commands full authority over such supernatural powers and inspirations—in a similar way that Schneemann was in full charge of her own body and sexuality. This photograph is actually a work of photomontage, which Kusama made by combining her nude photograph by Hal Reiff with photographs of her *Accumulation No. 2* sofa (1962), her *Infinity Net* painting (circa 1959–61), and the sea of macaronis from the installation *Food Obsession* which premiered at her Castellance Gallery solo show *Driving Image Show* in 1964. This photomontage is thus a collective theater of her *oeuvre* thus far. Full of “Kusamas,” it represents her world and her visions. In it, she presents herself as a self-pleasing and self-inspired artist.

¹⁶⁴ Silvia Kolbowski, quoted in Rosalind Krauss, “Round Table: The Reception of the Sixties,” *October* 69 (Summer 1994): 10. Cited in David Levi Strauss, “Love Rides Aristotle Through the Audience: Body, Image, and Idea in the Work of Carolee Schneemann,” in *Carolee Schneemann: Up To and Including Her Limits* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996), 29.

In Kusama's staging of her body, we can sense that she was much aware of the power of being seen and the exhibition value of her body as a sign—a newly heightened kind of power at play in the age of mass media. This is most clearly exemplified in her photograph taken inside *Kusama's Peep Show* (1966), a hexagonal mirror installation sparkling with small flashing bulbs. This photograph was staged in a way that both Kusama (performing a peepshow girl) and a man with a camera (performing a voyeur) could be captured within the frame. Positioning herself between the white male voyeur in the frame and the anonymous viewer outside the frame, Kusama is the producer of this erotic spectacle and the director of the dynamic network of gazes both in and out of this photographic frame.

Kusama's parody of racial, ethnic and gender stereotypes significantly predates similar practices by the next generation of performance artists of color working in the margins of the American culture such as ASCO, James Luna, Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña whose performances played with racial and ethnic stereotypes. Working in light of civil rights movements of the late '60s and the '70s, they were thus in a "better" situation than Kusama did. ASCO was the Chicano artists' collective formed in the early '70s in East Los Angeles and their first project was *Walking Mural*.¹⁶⁵ In this street performance on Christmas Eve, the young, aspiring artists marched down Whittier Boulevard absurdly dressed as stereotypical characters from Chicano mural painting, poking fun at the Chicano art movement's insistence on national muralism. As the group's leader Harry Gamboa Jr. (b. 1951) explained, "Many of the original works of art to emanate from ['60s Chicano political activism] reflected a desire to create a sense

¹⁶⁵ ASCO is a reference to the Spanish for nausea, as in *me da asco*.

of identification with pre-Columbian roots and the inherent Mexican traditions.”¹⁶⁶ The romantic nostalgia for exotic native forms frustrated the young Chicano artists interested in contemporary forms of art and expression.

Embracing the postmodern zeitgeist on the rise, the ASCO artists also rejected the oppositional terms of the older generation’s identity politics. Criticizing the filmmakers involved with the Chicano Cinema movement for “making the same movie over and over again” and for trying to produce and circulate positive stereotypes of Chicanos, they produced *No Movies*, a series of still photographs in which they glamorized their appearances and performed the Chicano Hollywood stereotypes such as a Mexican gangster.¹⁶⁷ These staged photographs would be distributed to local media and films distributors, who nonetheless accepted them as authentic Chicano Cinema publications or as real Chicano gang violence.¹⁶⁸ As Chon Noriega has analyzed, Gamboa “rejects the moral certitude of an oppositional political art” and parodies the debate over a “liberal” versus “radical” ideological function for Chicano Cinema.¹⁶⁹ Both camps sought the same goal: the access to and success within the mainstream American film and television industry. This photograph illustrates ASCO’s postmodern skepticism of a “correct” or “true” ideology.

¹⁶⁶ Harry Gamboa, Jr., “Serpents in the City of Angels: After Twenty Years of Political Activism, Has LA Chicano Art Been Defanged? (1989),” rep. in Harry Gamboa, *Urban Exile: Collected Writings of Harry Gamboa, Jr.*, ed. Chon A. Noriega (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 67.

¹⁶⁷ Gronk, in “Interview: Gronk and Gamboa (1976),” in *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁶⁸ C. Ondine Chavoya, “No-Movies: The Art of False Documents,” in *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self*, eds. Coco Fusco and Brian Wallis (New York: International Center of Photography, 2003), 199.

¹⁶⁹ Chon A. Noriega, “No Introduction,” in Gamboa, *Urban Exile*, 17. For more on the *No Movies* series, see *Urban Exile*, 12-14, 27-31, 44-50, 82.

James Luna (b. 1950), a performance artist and a member of California's Luiseño tribe, critiqued the representation of Native Americans as extinct commodities in his widely acclaimed performances *The Artifact Piece* (1987) and *Take a Picture with a Real Indian* (1991). It should be noted that he came out of the '80s decade when "multiculturalism" was a new trend in American consumer culture, as it is most famously exemplified by the fashion brand Benetton's advertisements, iconic with colorful, "happy" photographs of people of color. In *The Artifact Piece*, first performed at the San Diego Museum of Man in 1987, Luna, wearing only a loincloth, laid down on a pile of sand inside a museum display case. This performance mimicked the sterile museums display of anthropological artifacts. The installation displayed objects that represented a modern Indian. The memorabilia included Luna's college degree, divorce papers, photos, record albums, and tribal affiliations. Luna performed *Take a Picture with a Real Indian* at anthropological museums. Dressed in three different alternating "costumes," he asked museum visitors to take a picture with him. A cultural experiment of sorts, museum visitors would line up to be photographed with an Indian wearing a loincloth, bone breastplate and a feather in his hair. But when the artist changed into cargo pants and a T-shirt, the crowd dispersed. Luna's radical performance echoed Kusama's 1966 Venice Biennale critique of the mainstream "white" audience's desire to demarcate the strange and exotic Other.

In his 1991 essay "Allow Me to Introduce Myself: The Performance Art of James Luna," the artist explains that he prefers to use his own body in his art because "the media of performance and installation offers an opportunity like no other for Indian people to express themselves without compromise in traditional art forms of ceremony, dance, oral traditions and contemporary thought. Within these (nontraditional) spaces one can use a variety of media such

as objects, sounds, video, [and] slides, so that there is no limit in how and what is expressed.”¹⁷⁰

Truman T. Lowe further commends the artist’s unique practice: “Through performance and installation, Luna is able—quite literally—to animate a contemporary Native perspective.”¹⁷¹

Similar to Luna, for their 1992 performance *Two Undiscovered Amerindians* Coco Fusco (b. 1960) and Guillermo Gómez-Peña (b. 1955) chose as their stages anthropological museums around the world specifically in the cities with colonial history such as London, Madrid, and different locations in Australia and the United States. Described by the artists as “reverse ethnography,” the performance enacted the once popular European and North American practice of exhibiting indigenous people from Africa, Asia, and the Americas in fairs and circuses. Calling themselves “specimens representatives of the Guatinaui people,” the artists dressed as and acted like “savages” in a cage for three days; they would play with voodoo dolls, be fed fruits by the spectators, and taken to the bathroom on leashed by guards. The reception was more shocking than interesting. Although the artists carefully chose to wear contemporary “Native American”-inspired clothing such as feathered accessories and even matching them with sunglasses, “a substantial portion of the public believed that our fictional identities were real ones.” And “a substantial number of intellectuals, artists, and cultural bureaucrats sought to deflect attention from the substance of our experiment to the ‘moral implications’ our dissimulation, or in their words, our ‘misinforming the public’ about who we were.”¹⁷² The

¹⁷⁰ James Luna, “Allow Me to Introduce Myself: The Performance Art of James Luna,” *Canadian Theatre Review* 68 (Fall 1991): 46–47; quoted in Truman T. Lowe and Paul Chaat Smith, *James Luna: Emendatio* (Washington, DC: National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, 2005), 14–16.

¹⁷¹ Truman T. Lowe, “The Art of the Unexpected,” in *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁷² Coco Fusco, *English Is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (New York: New Press, 1995), 37–38.

audience's tendency toward the literal and moral interpretations explained how powerfully the colonial history and its related fantasy and guilt remained broadly in the current reality.

Kusama's early work also predates the role-playing art practice by the '70s feminist and conceptual artists Eleanor Antin (b. 1935) and Cindy Sherman (b. 1954). Antin is the artist whose work best represents the practice of role-playing in the established (Western) art history. Combining her training in art, philosophy, writing, and acting, she began to create fictional narratives and personae in a multimedia performance work series known as *The King of Solana Beach* (1972–75), *The Angel of Mercy* (1976–78), and *Recollections of My Life with Diaghilev* (1974–89).¹⁷³ Antin declared in 1974,

I am interested in defining the limits of myself, meaning moving out to, in to, up to, and down to the frontiers of myself. The usual aids to self-definition—sex, age, talent, time and space—are merely tyrannical limitations upon my freedom of choice. . . . But gratuitous or random choices, as well as quick violent forays to the edge, are equally limitations on my understanding. I wanted to work with nuclear images, magnetic gravitational fields—geocenters of the soul. My sense was that they had to be permanent and mobile, not immutable or fixed, repetitive, like the parts of the Freudian allegory. I needed core images, something like Jungian archetypes that could couple, uncouple, and transform.¹⁷⁴

Thus she has created and performed the somewhat familiar yet atypical and bizarre personae, such as a king exiling powerlessly in Solana Beach in California and a black prima ballerina (named Eleanora Antinova) of the Russian Ballets Russes whose career fades into a soft porn actress in America. Such characters deploy the gender, class, and racial stereotypes associated with these occupations in order to deconstruct them.

¹⁷³ In the mid-1950s Antin studied writing and art at City College of New York (CCNY), philosophy at the New School for Social Research, and acting at the Tamara Daykarhanova School for the Stage in New York. See Howard N. Fox, *Eleanor Antin* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1999), 15–19.

¹⁷⁴ Eleanor Antin, "An Autobiography of the Artist as an Autobiographer," *L.A.I.C.A. Journal*, no. 2 (October 1974), 2; quoted in *Ibid.*, 58–59.

Sherman came to prominence as part of the postmodern generation of reactionary artists that included the ASCO group. In the artist's famous black-and-white photographic series *Untitled Film Still* (1977–1980), the artist portrays herself as familiar yet unidentifiable movie characters such as a seductive maid, a rape victim, an innocent runaway, and a perky librarian. She thus masquerades as unspecified *types* of film heroines. These heroines appear as different characters from different narratives, but Sherman's simulation of them reveals that they are all similarly vulnerable, sexualized, and invariably fictionalized by male producers who control the culture industry. These heroines are projections of what Laura Mulvey called the "male gaze" in her 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," a crucial text for second-wave feminism.¹⁷⁵ Sherman acknowledges the power of the media in shaping unrealistic models of femininity: "To pick a character like that was about my own ambivalence about sexuality—growing up with the women role models that I had, and a lot of them in films, that were like that character, and yet you were supposed to be a good girl."¹⁷⁶ Influential postmodern art critics Douglas Crimp (1980) and Craig Owen (1983) applauded the *Untitled Film Still* series as a timely success in terms of the medium (photography) and content (representation, feminism and postmodernism).¹⁷⁷

We must remember that in the 1960s Kusama did not have the luxury of widespread acceptance of performance art. And she was among the first female artists in the '60s to have

¹⁷⁵ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6–18.

¹⁷⁶ Sherman, interviewed by George Howell, "Anatomy of an Artist," *Art Papers* 19, no. 4 (July/August 1995): 7; quoted in Amada Cruz, Elizabeth A. T. Smith, and Amelia Jones, *Cindy Sherman: Retrospective* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1997), 2.

¹⁷⁷ Douglas Crimp, "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism," *October* 15 (Winter 1980): 91–101. Craig Owen, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism," in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), 57–82.

used her spectacularized body as a medium of art and publicity by stylizing and performing her exotic identity in the gallery and in the street. In the 1970s, there was an increasing tendency among the young generation of artists to analyze and expose stereotypes of ethnic and gender identities through exaggeration and amplification, as we have seen in the work of ASCO, Antin, Sherman, and Luna. The apt reception of performance art and staged photography in postmodern and multicultural movements owes much to the struggle that Kusama endured. Not only is it that Kusama employed Oriental fantasy/stereotypes in her performances when there was little critical recognition about racisms and sexism in the Western culture. But unlike the later artists, Kusama engaged the stereotypes in both of her art and life performances so subtly and ambiguously that it is difficult for the viewer to determine where critique begins and where the question of intentionality should be raised in analyzing her work.

2.6 Concluding Remarks

Starting with the observation that Kusama began to spectacularize and orientalize her appearance in the early 1960s, we have seen how Kusama's work in performance and persona cultivation began from a struggle for survival in the New York art world. A close look at Kusama's personal history within the cultural history of the New York art world has shown that for Kusama art could never be separated from self-marketing or from life. While she is often criticized for her self-promotion, it was in fact the harsh realities of the Western art market that taught her to play the "culture game" in order to promote artistic success. The preeminent contemporary African art critic Olu Oguibe (as quoted in Chapter 1) defines the Western art world as a "doubly predictable game space" for the artists whose origins are elsewhere, because,

first, the rules are set, and second, the aspirants have a limited chance of success.¹⁷⁸ It is, after all, a “culture game” arena where the non-Western artists have to—or choose to—play with the Western audience’s expectations and prejudices.

Recently, along with Kusama’s retrospective exhibition in 2012 at the Tate Modern, co-organized with the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, the French luxury fashion brand Louis Vuitton (a subsidizer of the exhibition) collaborated with the artist to release a collection of clothes, handbags, and other accessories. To advertise this limited edition of polka-dotted fashion goods, Kusama’s lifelike mannequins were displayed in the flagship stores’ windows around the world. Although it has taken over half a century since her debut in the late 1950s, the spectacular display of the red-haired Kusama in a polka-dotted dress was a telling indication that she has indeed cultivated a unique and profitable persona, apt for the global cultural industry in the contemporary art world. And it should be remembered that while she seems to have avidly participated in extensive extra-art activities, including the persona development, she has done so always in dialogue with the category of art. Not only is she a prolific artist, but she has also developed herself as art—a living art that transcends divisions of art, life, publicity, and politics.

¹⁷⁸ Oguibe, *The Culture Game*, 33.

3. YOKO ONO'S DRAGON LADY EVENTS

She is the most famous unknown artist. Everybody knows her name, but nobody knows what she does.

–John Lennon¹⁷⁹

Well the press referred to me as the Dragon Lady and for a long time I was not very happy about it. But at a certain point I said, look, the Dragon Lady is a beautiful concept because it symbolizes power and mystery. And since then, the moment I faced it, nobody has been interested in calling me a Dragon Lady anymore. It's very interesting how when you confront what you fear it disappears. Other than that, Empress T'zu-hsi [Cixi], the first Dragon Lady, was such an incredible woman, who was very powerful and actually protected China from foreign invasion. I feel very proud that I'm the second Dragon Lady. In a way T'zu-hsi was protecting her own country, China, which is a very tangible country and John and I were protecting a conceptual country.

–Yoko Ono (2002)¹⁸⁰

In 2001, at the age of 68, Yoko Ono (b. 1933) released her tenth solo album *Blueprint for a Sunrise*. On the cover photograph, she presented herself as Empress Dowager Cixi, whom she has identified as her Dragon Lady predecessor. A photograph of Ono's face was digitally inserted into the iconic portrait of the Chinese empress, *H. I. M., the Empress Dowager of China, Cixi*, painted by the Dutch American portraitist Hubert Vos in 1906 after his trip to Beijing where he had met the empress. In the original portrait, Dowager Empress Cixi holds a fan decorated with the intricate form of a red flower in full bloom to show off her long fingernails, a sign of nobility and high social status in traditional Chinese culture. In place of the fan, Ono is

¹⁷⁹ This is an oft-quoted description of Ono by her late husband John Lennon, but it is difficult to track down its original source. A most recent example of the media usage of this quote can be found in Charlotte Higgins, "The Guardian Profile: Yoko Ono," *The Guardian*, June 8, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/global/2012/jun/08/yoko-ono-retrospective-serpentine-conceptual>.

¹⁸⁰ Yoko Ono, quoted in Daniel Rothbart, "The Dragon Lady Speaks: An Interview with Yoko Ono," 2002, <http://danielrothbart.com/YOKO.html>. Originally published in *NY Arts Magazine* in 2002.

holding a “blueprint for a sunrise,” in a gesture to propose a vision of a utopian future.¹⁸¹ The entire album cover photograph, except for the blue “blueprint,” is colored in saturated red, as if reflecting her burning passion for conceptual art, one that is devoted to challenging and expanding viewers’ perceptions of art and life.

This chapter explores Ono’s public persona as it is deeply related not just to her art, life and career, but also to the history of Orientalism in the West, which is exemplified in the longevity of the so-called “Dragon Lady” stereotype that demonizes powerful, publicly conspicuous Asian women as mysterious, vicious, and dangerous Oriental femme fatale—out of fear of these women’s rising power, as will be discussed shortly. Based on the Fluxus concept of Event, a performance tactic that Ono started practicing in the mid-1950s, I will examine Ono’s on-stage (art) and off-stage (life) performances and her performativity of the Dragon Lady stereotype in/for the Western media, thus unraveling the complicated relations between performance and performativity, between history and individual experience, and between racism and sexism in Oriental discourse. As Ono once said, “[E]vents in life never happen alone and the history is forever increasing its volume.”¹⁸² This examination will reveal some of the racial and gender prejudices that have challenged and inspired the life and work of Ono. She suggests in the above-quoted statement that she started to consciously “confront” the public provocation

¹⁸¹ Four more such “blueprint” images are shown inside the CD booklet. These “blueprints” have resemblances to her *Franklin Summer* drawing series done in the summer of 1994. Asked to produce some drawings, she drew with dots and by employing the automatic writing method. She described this process as “very much like what one goes through in meditation, where one fights to keep one’s mind empty from thoughts in order to go into a deeper state of trance. These drawings therefore, are like the skyline created by the struggles of my logical mind and the automatic direction.” Yoko Ono, Achile Bonito Oliva, and Danilo Eccher, *Yoko Ono: 3 Rooms* (Milano: Skira, 1995), 48.

¹⁸² Yoko Ono, “To the Wesleyan People,” rep. in *Yes Yoko Ono*, ed. Alexandra Munroe and Jon Hendricks (New York: Japan Society; Harry N. Abrams, 2000), 290. I should note, however, that what Ono really meant in this statement was to encourage combining positive wishes, similar to what she meant when she more famously said, “A dream you dream alone may be a dream, but a dream two people dream together is a reality.”

only very recently. But through an analysis of her earlier work and its reception, I will show that since the 1960s she has willingly embraced prejudice as a source of her work with an aggressive attitude that characterizes her approach to art and life, and that her aggressive public performances have contributed to the transformation of the originally negative stereotypical role of Dragon Lady into a contemporary model of female power and liberation.

3.1 What is in the “Dragon Lady”?

Ono became a public persona in 1968, when she started her romantic and creative partnership with Lennon and attained worldwide notoriety for that. They first met in November 1966 in London during her solo show at the Indica Gallery, and began to be seen together in June 1968.¹⁸³ Ono was the first Asian woman to gain such a great visibility in the Western media, and no other Asian celebrity has since gained comparable visibility in Western culture. In the public opinions especially in the late ‘60s and early ‘70s, Ono was the quintessential Dragon Lady: she was an older woman and a mysterious, poisonous Oriental who had somehow managed to win over the heart of the superstar and break up his family and then his band. She then introduced him into avant-garde art and music and later would turn him into a househusband while she developed herself into a businesswoman. The obscurity and weirdness of her avant-garde art practice only amplified her dangerous mysteriousness. Her image projected by the press was that of the “wondrous mystic prince from the rock world dabbling with this strange Oriental woman,” as Lennon once described it.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ For their own accounts of the first meeting, see David Sheff, *All We Are Saying: The Last Major Interview with John Lennon and Yoko Ono* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2000), 102–104.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

The public image of the couple at the peak of their notoriety is epitomized in David Levine's caricature for *Esquire's* December 1970 essay titled "John Rennon's Excursive Gloupie." In it, Ono is a giant yellow-skinned figure holding a tiny beetle with Lennon's face, on a leash like her little pet. Her long full black hair has the texture of hard, dry, cracked wood—a hint of sexuality without sensuality. She is mysterious, domineering, seductive, and dangerous. In other words, she is depicted as a domineering Oriental femme fatale, or a Dragon Lady, and Lennon as her boy toy. Also note how the title of the illustration unashamedly derides Ono's double-otherness as a Japanese and a woman by calling her a "groupie" and misspelling 'r' with 'l.' This publication thus hints at the widespread racism and sexism and also at the general culture's ignorance of them.

The Beatles' fans outside the Apple offices would call out at her racist words like "Nip!" and "Chink!"¹⁸⁵ The graphic designer John Kosh, who was asked by Ono in November 1968, to design a book that would include examples of the extreme hate mail that was arriving at the Apple offices, remembers that "The mail was so ludicrous, so spiteful, you couldn't take it seriously." "She was being blamed for World War II and the death of British soldiers."¹⁸⁶ Moreover, when Lennon had his first art exhibition, which opened on July 1, 1968 at the Robert Fraser Gallery, as part of the event he released 365 white, helium balloons, each balloon attached with a note asking the finder to return the note to the gallery with a letter enclosed to Lennon. And the letters resulting from this invitation were "overwhelmingly critical of John's relationship

¹⁸⁵ Jerry Hopkins, *Yoko Ono* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company; London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1986), 89.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 92.

with Yoko, including several letters that were overtly racist.”¹⁸⁷

Ono wrote the following statements in the early 1970s:

What I learned from being with John is that the society suddenly treated me as a woman, as a woman who belonged to a man who is one of the most powerful people in our generation. And some of his closet friends told me that probably I should stay in the background, I should shut up, I should give up my work and that way I'll be happy. . . . Because the whole society started to attack me and the whole society wished me dead, I started to accumulate a tremendous amount of guilt complex, and as a result of that I started to stutter. I consider myself a very eloquent woman, and also an attractive woman all my life and suddenly because I was associated to John that I was considered an ugly woman, an ugly Jap who took your monument or something away from you.¹⁸⁸

It's hard to remember your slanted eyes and your skin in the melting pot of a recording session, but I suppose that is the first thing that hits them when they try to communicate. “That Jap. You don't know what she's thinking.” Next time you meet a “foreigner,” remember it's only like a window with a little different shape to it and the person who's sitting inside you.¹⁸⁹

These examples demonstrate that the public antipathy towards Ono, from the beginning, had a lot to do with the racism and sexism deeply embedded in the culture itself.

In the Introduction, I discussed how the Western stereotypes of East Asian women have long been dichotomous, thus preconceiving them as either the aggressive Dragon Lady or the submissive Lotus Blossom/Geisha Girl types. Ono was never a passive Asian woman of the Lotus Blossom type, but was in fact closer to the stereotype of the independent, confrontational and assertive Dragon Lady. In 1951, she was the first woman ever to be admitted to the

¹⁸⁷ Alan Clayson, Barb Jungr, and Robb Johnson, *The Incredible Life of Yoko Ono* (New Malden, U.K.: Chrome Dreams, 2004), 63.

¹⁸⁸ Yoko Ono, “Bonus Track: ‘I Learned to Stutter/Coffin Car,’” on Yoko Ono, *Feeling the Space* (1974; Rykodisc 1997); quoted in Tamara Levitz, “Yoko Ono and the Unfinished Music of ‘John & Yoko’: Imagining Gender and Racial Equality in the Late 1960s,” in *Impossible to Hold: Women and Culture in the 1960s*, ed. Avital H. Bloch and Lauri Umansky (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), 233.

¹⁸⁹ Yoko Ono, “Feeling the Space,” *New York Times*, August 24, 1973, 33; quoted in *Ibid.*, 221.

Philosophy Department at the prestigious Tokyo University. In the 1950s, she was one of the first Japanese women to pursue a career as part of the predominantly male, New York avant-garde art scene. She remembers the disillusionment of the American scholars of Japanese art who approached her in the 1950s expecting to see a beautiful, sensitive and passive woman.¹⁹⁰ She would then respond by “putting them off,” she says. She was really a “natural bad girl foremother,” in the curator Marcia Tanner’s words.¹⁹¹

Dragon Lady is a Western invention that has nothing to do with a dragon. The image of the dragon proliferates in Chinese (and East Asian) culture because it is a traditional symbol of prosperity and imperial power in China, contrary to the general Western impression of the mythic animal as a ghastly monster. How has the Chinese symbol of good luck and imperial power come to be linked with the negative stereotype for Asian women in the West? An exploration of Western representations of the stereotype and particularly of Dowager Cixi (1835–1908), the last empress of China whom Ono referred to as “the first Dragon Lady,” would provide an answer to this.

The term Dragon Lady was introduced in the 1930s by Milton Caniff’s comic strip for the Chicago Tribune New York News Syndicate (now Tribune Media Services), *Terry and the Pirates* (1934–1946), also available in radio and television series.¹⁹² In the series, Dragon Lady is an attractive but ruthless pirate queen whom the American protagonists Terry and Pat

¹⁹⁰ Yoko Ono, quoted in Midori Yoshimoto, “Instructions for Life: Rediscovering Yoko Ono,” *Dialogue* 4, no. 1 (2001): 20; and Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 44.

¹⁹¹ Marcia Tanner, “Mother Laughed: The Bad Girls’ Avant-Garde,” in *Bad Girls*, ed. Marcia Tucker (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1994), 59.

¹⁹² Philip H. Herbst, *The Color of Words: An Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Ethnic Bias in the United States* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1997), 72.

encounter during their adventures in China. The Chinese femme fatale villain is depicted with shiny curly black hair, long slanted eyes with long eyelashes, and a voluptuous body with an imposing stature, thus looking more Eurasian than Chinese. In his autobiographical preface to *Terry and the Pirates: China Journey* (1977), titled “Terry, the Pirates and I,” Caniff explains that his intention creating the comic series was “to grab the reader who thought he led a dull life and longed for the exotic charms of the Orient.”¹⁹³ Caniff’s vision exemplifies what Edward Said has characterized as Orientalism: Said has influentially defined Orientalism as a Western discourse of the imagined “Orient” (“a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire”) and the West’s exercise of power against the non-Western cultures and peoples resulting from white, male power-fantasy (thus with “sexist blinders”).¹⁹⁴ Created for an action-adventure comic targeting a young, male American audience, the Dragon Lady character is a composite representation of male fantasies about the Orient, women, power, and conquest.

The 1930s was also when Oriental themes became the rave in Hollywood and Anna May Wong (1905–1961) emerged as the first Asian movie star by playing Oriental femme fatales, usually in supporting roles of a seductress and/or a villain, in movies like *Daughter of the Dragon* (1931), *Shanghai Express* (1932), and *Daughter of Shanghai* (1937). The stereotypical roles offered to Wong often required her performance in suggestive and provocative scenes (which led many conservative Chinese and Chinese Americans to denounce her as a disgrace to

¹⁹³ Milton Caniff, *Terry and the Pirates: China Journey* (New York: Nostalgia Press, 1977). Quoted in Sheng-mei Ma, *The Deathly Embrace: Orientalism and Asian American Identity* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 14.

¹⁹⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, 202–203, 207.

China).¹⁹⁵ While Wong was highly exoticized and eroticized on screen, paradoxically she could never become a romantic heroine. In the United States, interracial marriage became fully legal only in 1967, and the anti-miscegenation culture of Wong's time in the 1930s prohibited kissing scenes between actors of different race groups. Since almost all male leading actors at the time were Caucasian (even Fu Manchu was played by actors like Warner Oland, Boris Karloff, and Henry Brandon in "yellowface"), if Hollywood producers wanted interracial kissing scenes in their movies, they had to hire white Euroamerican actresses to perform in "yellowface" makeup that made them look Asian. Wong never got a chance to be kissed on screen. She was a seductress and mistress, but never someone who deserved true love. Wong explained in a magazine interview titled "Sorry She Cannot Be Kissed" (1931),

But no film lovers can ever marry me. If they got an American actress to slant her eyes and eyebrows and wear a stiff black wig and dress in Chinese culture, it would be alright [*sic*]. But me? I am really Chinese. So I must always die in the movies, so that the white girl with the yellow hair may get the man.¹⁹⁶

Wong joked that her tombstone should read, "She died a thousand deaths."¹⁹⁷ In the "Yellow Peril" movies of the early twentieth century, the Chinese were always villains, who were forced to die in the end. The Oriental's death was a method to legitimate the ideology of "white" America. It was the same Eastern xenophobia that caused the racist and sexist backlash against

¹⁹⁵ See Graham Russell Hodges, *Anna May Wong: From Laundryman's Daughter to Hollywood Legend* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 51. For more on Wong, see also Karen J. Leong, *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 74–75. Anthony B. Chan, *Perpetually Cool: The Many Lives of Anna May Wong (1905-1961)* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2003).

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Audrey Rivers, "Anna May Wong: Sorry She Cannot Be Kissed," *Movie Classic*, November 1931, 41; quoted in Leong, *The China Mystique*, 71. I'd like to thank Prof. Elise Archias for pointing out that "getting the man" was a destructive idea, too, for feminists.

¹⁹⁷ Kelsey Wallace, "Adventures in Feministory: Anna May Wong," *Bitch Media*, October 24, 2011, <http://bitchmagazine.org/post/adventures-in-feministory-anna-may-wong>.

Yoko Ono in the '60s and '70s. Her relationship with Lennon was a taboo at the time, and they in fact remain the most famous/infamous interracial couple to this date.

Although the term Dragon Lady was introduced in the 1930s, Ono accurately traces the lineage of the stereotype back to Dowager Cixi, the de facto ruler of the Qing Dynasty for nearly half a century, from 1861 to 1908. It is, in fact, very possible that this notorious Chinese empress may have inspired Caniff's Chinese femme fatale cartoon character. A young girl from a low-ranking Manchu clan, Cixi was the teenage concubine of the Emperor Xianfeng. She gave birth to a son who became the Emperor Tongzhi (1856–1875) at the age of five upon Xianfeng's death in 1861. Overthrowing the regents whom Xianfeng had appointed on his deathbed, Cixi assumed regency over her young son's regime. When Tongzhi died at the age of nineteen, Cixi chose her own four-year-old nephew, Guangxu (1871–1908) as the next emperor and continued to rule from behind the curtains until her death in 1908. When Guangxu attempted a reform movement in 1898 (the failed Hundred Days' Reform), the conservative Cixi placed him under house arrest and is also alleged to have poisoned him. Stories of her cruelty ring through Chinese history.

Sterling Seagrave, the author of the biography *Dragon Lady: The Life and Legend of the Last Empress of China* (1993), suggests that Cixi's negative reputation that persists until today—and the many incorrect biographical details that promote her ruthless image—owes in great part to the bestselling biography coauthored by two British journalists based in Beijing, J.O.P. Bland and Edmund Backhouse, *China under the Empress Dowager* (1910).¹⁹⁸ In this early biography,

¹⁹⁸ Sterling Seagrave, *Dragon Lady: The Life and Legend of the Last Empress of China* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 11–12. At the time of the writing and publication of *China under the Empress Dowager*, J.O.P. [John Ottway Percy] Bland (1863–1945) was a Shanghai correspondent of the London *Times*, and Edmund Backhouse (1873–1944) was an unofficial editor and translator for George Ernest Morrison, a Beijing correspondent of the London *Times*. They also co-wrote *Annals and Memoirs of the Court of Peking* (1914).

Cixi is portrayed as a sexually promiscuous and brutal tyrant who assumed and retained power through sexual relations with the men in the palace, including eunuchs, and by killing anyone who stood in her path to power, even her own son. Bland and Backhouse also claimed that it was her sexual perversion and disastrous regency that led to the fall of the Chinese empire.¹⁹⁹ Seagrave rejects the book as a “scholarly hoax and deliberate pornography,” and describes Cixi instead as a lonely female leader struggling to govern a divided empire torn between the conservative, anti-foreign Manchu nobility and the reformist party who sought to open and modernize China.²⁰⁰ Though today Bland and Backhouse’s biography is largely discredited, the account profoundly shaped the way Cixi was viewed and imagined in the West.²⁰¹ Between the 1890s and the 1970s over a dozen books on Cixi were published in England, France, and America. And these “fictions,” as the literary scholar A. Owen Aldridge has related them, similarly portray the empress as pathologically obsessed by power and sex.²⁰² On one end of the

¹⁹⁹ Ancient Egypt’s Cleopatra has received the similar criticisms and distortions. I’d like to thank Prof. Maud Lavin for making note of this comparison.

²⁰⁰ Seagrave, *Dragon Lady*, 285.

²⁰¹ In 1976 Backhouse’s biographer Hugh Trevor-Roper exposed a diary quoted in the book to be a forgery, and since then the remaining sources and claims have also proved fraudulent. Doubts about the veracity of some of the book’s key sources, particularly about the so-called “Diary of His Excellency Ching-Shan” (in Chapter 17), began to emerge already in the 1930s. For this controversy, see William Lewisohn, “Some Critical Notes on the So-Called ‘Diary of His Excellency Ching Shan,’” *Monumenta Serica* 2, no. 1 (1936): 191–202. Hui-min Lo, “The Ching-Shan Diary: A Clue to Its Forgery,” *East Asian History* 1 (1991): 98–124. Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Hermit of Peking: The Hidden Life of Sir Edmund Backhouse* (Eland & Sickel Moon Books, 1993). Bland and Backhouse’s biography was originally received as an authoritative work and was used as a major source for subsequent research on Cixi and late-nineteenth-century China. See Sidney G. P. Coryn, “The Empress Dowager: An Authoritative Life of the Woman Who Ruled the Chinese Empire for Half a Century,” *New York Times*, November 26, 1910. The review writes, “Probably no such collection of Chinese documents has ever before been given to the world, or one that better reflects the realities of Chinese official life.”

²⁰² A. Owen Aldridge, “The Empress Dowager Ci-Xi in Western Fiction: A Stereotype for the Far East?,” *Revue de littérature comparée* 297, no. 1 (2001): 113–122. Aldridge’s discussion includes: Kathleen Gray Nelson, *Tuen, Slave and Empress* (1898); Eliza R. Scidmore, *China the Long-Lived Empire* (1900); Bland and Backhouse, *China under the Empress Dowager* (1910); Katharine A. Carl, *With the Empress Dowager of China* (1906); Princess Der Ling, *Two Years in the Forbidden City* (1911) and *Old Buddha* (1928); Charles Pettit, *La Femme qui command à*

extreme stands Lucien Bodard's *La Vallée des Roses* (1977), a fiction containing a detailed description of Cixi's orgasm during sex with her chief eunuch, ordered to explore all of her sexual parts.²⁰³

However, it is important to note that the demonization of Cixi in the West coincides with the decline of China's power on the world stage, and thus is a direct result of the West's rising colonialist view of the Qing Dynasty. China's defeat in the First Opium War (1839–1842) led to the signing of the Treaty of Nanking (1842)—now known as the first incident of the so-called “unequal treaties”—which forced China to legitimize opium import, open ports to foreign trade, and submit Hong Kong to the United Kingdom, among other demands. By 1900, China had lost a series of wars and signed numerous unequal treaties with foreign powers including France, Russia, Japan, and the United States. China's history during the second half of the nineteenth century is marked by continuous military, economic, political, and social decline. And the eventual collapse of the Qing Dynasty should be understood as a result of many historical factors and political conflicts, rather than solely Cixi's misrule. Cixi fell victim to a vindictive witch-hunt that sought someone to blame for the destruction of China by foreign, imperial powers.

Cixi's image in the West was blackened during the Boxer Rebellion (1898–1901), the climax in the continued tension between her conservative rule and the resistance from foreign powers and reformist Chinese. She allegedly supported the anti-Western, anti-Christian movement that opposed foreigners and Chinese Christians.²⁰⁴ With her aid, the rebellion

cinq cents millions d'hommes (1928); Bluebell M. Hunter, *The Manchu Empress* (1945); Maurice Collis, *The Motherly and the Auspicious* (1945); Peter Bourne, *Twilight of the Dragon* (1954); Muriel Molland Jernigan, *Forbidden City* (1954); Pearl Buck, *Imperial Woman* (1956); Lucien Bodard, *La Vallée des roses* (1977). Note here that Aldridge has categorized Bland and Backhouse's biography as a fictional work.

²⁰³ Lucien Bodard, *La Vallée des roses* (Paris: B. Grasset, 1977); quoted in Aldridge, 121-122.

²⁰⁴ See David Silbey, *The Boxer Rebellion and the Great Game in China*, 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012).

escalated into the notorious fifty-five-day siege of the Western legation in Beijing in 1900, only to be suppressed by the Eight-Nation Alliances armed troops (France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, Austria-Hungary, the United Kingdom, and the United States), which defeated the Chinese army and captured Beijing. The Boxer Rebellion “contributed to severe image problems for the Empress Dowager abroad,” as David Hogge argues based on the several caricatures of the empress produced by the Western press.²⁰⁵ In June 1900, the American newspaper *Atlanta Constitution* featured an illustrated mug shot of murderess Cixi with a caption that read,

This frowning, begowned old lady is an interesting feature of the ‘Boxer’ troubles. She bears a strong resemblance to Mrs. [Augusta] Nack, the New York murderess, and if gossip that has floated in from the Orient is reliable, she is aiding in wholesale slaughter by secretly encouraging the present uprising in China.²⁰⁶

In another example, the French magazine *Le Rire*’s cover on July 14, 1900 was a caricature of Cixi as a tyrant, holding a dagger dripping with blood and sitting next to a skewer of mutilated bodies and heads. Moreover, Germany’s *Der Floh* printed an illustration titled “Der Hexenritt in China” (“The Witch’s Ride in China”). Cixi is seen here as a “witch,” holding a broom and riding on a gigantic dragon, while Alliance soldiers aim spears at her. As such, while the “Dragon Lady” stereotype does not have a fixed set of visual characteristics for illustration, it can be depicted interchangeably as a witch or a murderess. In the repertoire of images, the Dragon Lady is the femme fatale Oriental.

²⁰⁵ David Hogge, “The Empress Dowager and the Camera: Photographing Cixi, 1903-1904,” *MIT Visualizing Cultures*, http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/empress_dowager/cx_essay01.html.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. Examples of these foreign press graphics of Cixi can be found on the *MIT Visualizing Cultures* webpage.

3.2 **“The First Dragon Lady”: Vos’s Portrait of Cixi**

Shortly after the Boxer Rebellion, the Qing court commissioned Western painters and also employed the then new medium of photography to produce Cixi’s portraits, which would then be sent to officials and foreign diplomats as gifts. This was to assuage the foreign powers and restore Cixi’s reputation, even though portraiture had been traditionally reserved for the deceased in China.²⁰⁷ It is interesting that Ono chose Hubert Vos’s portrait of Cixi for appropriation in homage in her *Blueprint for a Sunrise* album cover, while there are several other portraits she could have used. With a dragon depicted, the Vos portrait is an iconic image that has come to best represent the infamous Chinese empress, and thus an apt choice for Ono. But a further exploration of the painting is needed here to expose the male-oriented Orientalist vision of powerful Asian women embedded in the portrait.

Of the two Western portraitists invited to paint portraits of Cixi, first came the American Katherine Carl (1865–1938, sometimes spelled Katharine Carl) who spent nine months in China in 1903–1904. Then came the Dutch American portraitist Hubert Vos (1855–1935), who worked for Cixi from 1905 to 1906. Each painter completed two portraits, one official and one casual. Carl’s official portrait was exhibited at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis (China’s first formal participation in a world’s fair) and was later given to Theodore Roosevelt, who presented it to Smithsonian Museum of American Art. Vos’s official portrait remains in Beijing, in the Summer Palace.

While both painters’ official portraits follow the Chinese traditions for imperial portraiture with the frontal, symmetrical, and flatly decorative compositions, I draw attention to

²⁰⁷ See Hogge’s essay for an extensive history of the making of Cixi’s photographic portraits. Ibid.

the portraitists' informal paintings since they hint at the personal impressions of the empress.²⁰⁸

A comparison of their descriptions of Cixi reveals opposing viewpoints possibly resulting from the artists' gender difference (Katharine Carl a female painter and Hubert Vos a male painter) in treating the female ruler. It can be argued that the demonization of Cixi—and of the Dragon Lady stereotype itself—reflects a male fear of powerful women, who wield power in the presumed male public sphere.

Upon returning to the United States, Carl published *With the Empress Dowager of China* (1905). At one point in the book, she describes the empress as “at once a child and a woman with strong virile qualities,” partaking in the above-discussed Western myth of Cixi’s androgyny. But overall, Carl rejects what she calls the “false statements” of Western journalists and instead portrays a kind, loyal, and considerate woman with a solemn yet charming presence and graceful movements, resulting in “an unusually attractive personality.”²⁰⁹ Not only does she deny rumors that the empress had supported the Boxers and had plotted to murder the emperor, but she also reveals Cixi’s tender and feminine side by detailing her everyday indulgences such as her love of dogs and flowers.²¹⁰ Carl’s earnest impression of Cixi is reflected in her pictorial depiction as well, especially in her informal portrait, which was probably a casual addendum to the

²⁰⁸ Virginia Anderson, “‘A Semi-Chinese Picture’: Hubert Vos and the Empress Dowager of China,” in *East-West Interchanges in American Art: A Long and Tumultuous Relationship* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2012), 103, <http://smithsonianrex.si.edu/index.php/pop/issue/view/127>. For characteristics of Chinese imperial portraiture, Anderson cites Wen C. Fong, “Imperial Portraiture in the Song, Yuan, and Ming Periods,” *Ars Orientalis* 25 (1995): 47–60.

²⁰⁹ Katherine A. Carl, *With the Empress Dowager* (New York: The Century Co., 1906), xxi, 161.

²¹⁰ There are two other prominent female writers who, unlike male writers, extolled the Empress for her diplomatic skills, gracious warmth and intelligence in famous personal accounts: Sarah Pike Conger and Yu Derling. Sarah Pike Conger, *Letters from China with Particular Reference to the Empress Dowager and the Women of China* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1909). (Princess) Der Ling, *Two Years in The Forbidden City* (New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1911).

commissioned work sent to the Louisiana Exposition. The asymmetrical composition reflects a greater freedom from the conventions of Chinese painting, and the dominant use of bright yellow and other pastel tones creates a warm, lively mood. Carl captures the coy smile of a lovely young girl. The then 69-year-old empress is a vision of femininity and naivety: rosy cheeks glow in a round face, wide eyes gaze softly at the viewer, and pale hands with sensual, elongated fingers rest gently in her lap.

In comparison, Vos painted a ferocious Dragon Lady. On December 17, 1905 *The New York Times* heralded Vos as the first man to portray the Dowager Empress of China.²¹¹ In contrast with Carl's experience, Vos' account of his meeting with Cixi suggests that he was actually intimidated by her. He said in an interview:

Neither on any man's nor any woman's face have I ever seen greater will power expressed than on that of her Imperial Highness. You may not believe me, but I felt more than shy—I felt a wave of awe pass over me as I saw the woman who for nearly half a century has governed the greatest population of any nation on earth!²¹²

When the interviewer asked, "But you remembered that you were an American, and stood your ground?" Vos responded, "I could only bow!" In his personal letters, he wrote of the empress as "Erect, with a tremendous will power, more than I have ever seen in a human being. Hard, firm will and thinking lines, and with all that a brow full of kindness and love for the beautiful."²¹³

²¹¹ Author anonymous, "Painting an Empress: Hubert Vos, K. C. D. D., the First Man to Portray the Dowager Empress of China," *The New York Times*, December 17, 1905. This article also reports that the Dutch Legation chose Vos to do the "honor" of making a portrait of the empress, thinking that he was Dutch, but "it was not until he arrived [in China] that the important fact was known . . . that he had become meanwhile an American citizen."

²¹² Vos, quoted in Ibid.

²¹³ Hubert Vos and Eleanor Kaikilani Vos, "Adaptation of His Letters from Peking by his Wife, Lani, Thinking of a Magazine Article," (typed transcript), undated, Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum curatorial file, 6; quoted in Anderson, "'A Semi-Chinese Picture': Hubert Vos and the Empress Dowager of China," 102–103.

Vos's daunting experience of Cixi's charisma and regal authority is reflected in his pictorial productions. While in Beijing, he completed one portrait of Cixi, which remains on display in the Summer Palace. But after he returned to New York in 1906, he produced a second portrait of Cixi, this time with a figure of a ghastly dragon. Currently housed in the Harvard Art Museums collection, "It is unknown whether or not the empress was aware of the second portrait," as Virginia Anderson notes.²¹⁴ Evidently, this unofficial portrait is smaller in size, more realistic in style, and illusionistic in technique than the official, Summer Palace portrait. Cixi is seated rigidly upon a dark royal throne, and the viewer is overwhelmed by an experience of awe and intimidation before imperial power. Her face lined with wrinkles, she appears harsh and aged as she stares expressionless from the canvas. Vos also uses a much darker palette, which adds a sense of mystery and gravity.

The highlight of his portrait is the fierce-looking dragon, emerging mysteriously from the smoke-filled background, as if Vos had imagined and included it like the sitter's raging alter ego. It snarls as if it were alive, revealing sharp teeth and a pointed tongue. In Western culture, dragons are portrayed as evil creatures. The Bible, for example, describes Satan as "a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns" which "deceiveth the whole world" (Revelation 12: 2, 9).²¹⁵ However, in China, the dragon is traditionally a symbol of power and good luck, often used as a national symbol and emblem of imperial power. In fact, the Forbidden City has the

²¹⁴ Ibid., 109n30. Anderson conjectures that Vos painted this portrait "probably based on the original sketch he began at court." Ibid., 105. After he completed the full-size portrait, Vos wrote, "I have in the meantime my study from life, data, sketches, photos, etc. to paint a second picture for myself for exhibition and this time as old as she is I am gathering the different details I may need, so I am able to paint this picture in New York." Letter from Hubert Vos to "My dear Lani and Friends," (typed transcript), August 29, 1905, 5. Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum curatorial file, 1943,162.

²¹⁵ *The Holy Bible* (Cleveland: Collins World, 1975), 173. Authorized King James version, containing the Old and New Testament translated out of the original tongues and with the former translations diligently compared and revised by his Majesty's special command, appointed to be read in churches.

famous Nine-Dragon Wall, a wall filled with pictures of dragons, and this may have inspired Vos's depiction of a dragon in the empress's portrait. The conflicting references between East and West caused much public debate preceding the Beijing Olympics in 2008 on whether to use the dragon as the Olympic mascot.²¹⁶ Considering the cultural difference in iconography, we can postulate that the goblin-faced dragon in Vos's portrait mislead many Western viewers.

The extremely long fingernails, which the Empress actually had, are also signs of wealth and high social rank in China. Customarily grown by members of Chinese royalty and nobility, long fingernails were evidence of the impossibility to perform menial labor. However, for the foreign viewer unfamiliar with Chinese culture, Cixi's long fingernails would have evoked a sinister nature lurking in the ominous portrait. It is, in fact, this threatening fiend, not the idealized portraits commissioned for propaganda, which has come to best represent the enigmatic Chinese Empress in the West.

Viewed in retrospect, Cixi has clearly inspired a new female stereotype that no Western female public figure had offered—a mysterious, powerful, and dangerous Asian femme fatale, which has come to be called the Dragon Lady. According to Aldridge, androgyny is a unique feature of the fictional Cixi character established in the West, combining feminine sexuality and masculine despotism.²¹⁷

Consequently, the term Dragon Lady has been used to caricature women in positions of political power, who are often viewed as strong, aggressive, controlling, and thus threatening to the public arena of male dominance. For example, May-ling Soong (Madame Chiang Kai-shek

²¹⁶ Author anonymous, "Fiery Debate Over China's Dragon," *BBC*, December 12, 2006, sec. Asia-Pacific, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6171963.stm>. It writes, "Chinese dragons are supernatural symbols without the Western traits of aggression or maiden-eating."

²¹⁷ Aldridge, "The Empress Dowager Ci-Xi in Western Fiction," 120, 114.

and the First Lady of the Republic of China from 1948 to 1975) and Tran Le Xuan (Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu and the de facto First Lady of South Vietnam from 1955 to 1963) each have been branded a Dragon Lady. More recently, when Hilary Clinton (the First Lady of the United States from 1993 to 2001 and the Secretary of State from 2009 to 2012) announced her campaign for the 2008 presidential election, the *Houston Chronicle* published a review of her two new biographies headlined “Dragon Lady or Diplomat?”²¹⁸

Note here that all of these women became public figures and First Ladies following the political ascendancy of their husbands. They also shared public impression that they used (or misused) their husbands’ power to establish their own political power. The fact that these women have been derisively labeled and stereotyped as “Dragon Lady” indicates an uncomfortable admonition that they have more power than they are supposed to. It remains an anomaly for a woman to have power in political domains. When a woman has too much political influence, it is usually assumed that she has achieved the power wrongfully, through unlawful means and skills. The *Forbes*’ 2011 survey of “The 10 Worst Stereotypes About Powerful Women” include “Ice Queen,” “Single and Lonely,” “Masculine,” “Conniving,” “A Token” [of diversity] and “A Cheerleader.”²¹⁹ The Dragon Lady is a composite of these negative stereotypes. Its existence and validity in today’s society exemplifies a diverse range of limitations for women, especially Asian women who are presumed to be more conservative and submissive, involved in the workforce. Back in the ‘60s and ‘70s, it was a fatal stigma for many

²¹⁸ Ronald Brownstein, “Two Books about Hillary Rodham Clinton: Dragon Lady or Diplomat?,” *Houston Chronicle*, June 10, 2007, sec. Life, <http://www.chron.com/life/books/article/Two-books-about-Hillary-Rodham-Clinton-1808569.php#page-2>.

²¹⁹ Jenna Goudreau, “The 10 Worst Stereotypes About Powerful Women,” *Forbes*, October 24, 2011, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jennagoudreau/2011/10/24/worst-stereotypes-powerful-women-christine-lagarde-hillary-clinton/>.

independent and career-oriented women like Yoko Ono.

3.3 Fluxus “Events” and the Aesthetics and Politics of Experience

Ono has often declared that she works for “peace, and against ageism, racism and sexism.”²²⁰ Her aesthetics and politics as an artist and public figure, somewhat abstract and esoteric to many, can be explained through an understanding of her experience of World War II and the various racial and cultural prejudices that she endured as a child. She was well aware of such prejudices many years before she became associated with Lennon and received the public stigmatization of “Dragon Lady” in the late ‘60s. Born in Tokyo in 1933, Ono grew up in-between Japan and the United States because of her father’s frequent travels as a high-ranking banker (Yeisuke Ono was an executive at Yokohama Specie Bank, a semi-governmental foreign exchange bank). Ono’s family had a home in Tokyo, but lived in San Francisco between 1933 and 1937 and in New York between 1940 and 1941, before being advised to return to Japan due to the impending threat of war. She recalls that the social climate in America had already been “very anti-Oriental” even before the war.²²¹ “I would go to see a film, and find that the baddies in the film were Orientals. People booing in the dark. Some people threw stones at us in the streets. It was getting obvious that we were not welcome in the States.”²²² Soon after her family returned to Tokyo (with the exception of her father who was transferred to Hanoi and eventually sent to a concentration camp), WWII broke out.

²²⁰ Ono told this to Reuters News Agency around the time of her *Cut Piece* performance in Paris in September 2003. Quoted in Kevin Concannon, “Yoko Ono’s Cut Piece.”

²²¹ Yoko Ono, interviewed by Gloria Vando Hickok, “Yoko Ono: Wishes & Surprises,” *Helicon*, no. 20 (1989): 17.

²²² Ibid.

The fact that Japan and America became enemies during the war shocked the eight-year-old Ono, who associated herself with both nations. “I was devastated. Only a few months before that I was going to a Long Island school pledging allegiance to the flag every morning. I loved my American friends, and now suddenly they were at war with my people.”²²³ After devastating bombings in Tokyo in 1945, Ono’s mother moved the family to a rural farm village to find food and shelter. There, Ono would experience a different kind of racism from that she had faced in America. The local farmers were hostile to the Onos for being a rich, Americanized family, and Yoko and her two siblings were taunted by the village children for “smelling like butter” (*bata kusai*).²²⁴ The seemingly privileged life that Ono’s family led between two nations thus developed within the young Ono a traumatic awareness of her difference in both cultures.

Having been ostracized in both Japan and America, Ono seems to have learned that racial and ethnic prejudices exist in all societies. At an early age, she learned that we are often fooled by what we see and what we believe, but also that we only need to see things differently and broaden our minds in order to change the world around us. And this is exemplified by some of her early Event scores composed during her formative years. In the following examples, Ono asks her audience to try, at least once, to escape one’s own ego and become somebody else in order to broaden an understanding of oneself and as well as of others. *Body Sound Tape Piece* (spring 1964) reads:

Make body sound tapes of different
people at different times.
Of the old, young, crying, longing,

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Alexandra Munroe, “Spirit of Yes: The Art and Life of Yoko Ono,” in *Yes Yoko Ono*, ed. Alexandra Munroe and Jon Hendricks (New York: Japan Society; Harry N. Abrams, 2000), 13.

excited, calm, doubtful, etc.²²⁵

And similarly, *Falling Piece* (spring 1964) instructs:

Go outside of you.
Look at yourself walking down the street.
Make yourself tumble on a stone and fall.
Watch it.
Watch other people looking.
Observe carefully how you fall.
How long it takes and in what rhythm you fall.
Observe as seeing a slow motion film.²²⁶

Only someone deeply concerned with human relationships and layers of perceiving and understanding can write these, asking people to “go outside you” to look at yourself with an objective eye and to experience the world through other people’s eyes.

It appears that the special circumstances of her childhood developed not only an ambivalent sense of identity, but also a global mind, which understands identity (gender, race, class, etc.) as determined not by the individual alone but by the society and the culture. Evidently, throughout her career of over fifty years, Ono has frequently asserted that her art is intended to broaden people’s minds or change their perception of things:

The greatest struggle in your life is to have a wider perception of things.²²⁷

The only sound that exists to me is the sound of the mind. My works are only to induce music of the mind in people.²²⁸

After unblocking one’s mind, by dispensing with visual, auditory, and kinetic perceptions, what will come out of us? Would there be anything? I wonder. And

²²⁵ Yoko Ono, *Grapefruit: A Book of Instructions and Drawings* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), n.p.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Yoko Ono, *Imagine Yoko* (Lund, Sweden: Bakhall, 2005), 19.

²²⁸ Ibid., 29.

my Events are mostly spent in wonderment.²²⁹

A dream you dream alone may be a dream, but a dream two people dream together is a reality.²³⁰

As an artist, thinker and pacifist, Ono's work has been devoted to opening people's minds' eyes. While peace is an abstract idea for many people, it is interesting to note that when she says she works for "peace, and against ageism, racism and sexism," she equates peace with a world without prejudices regarding one's age, race, and gender.²³¹ This clearly comes from her direct experience of prejudices and stereotypes since her childhood.

This may be why Ono became an early practitioner of performance art, using her own body as a medium of art concerned with generating experiences (rather than objects). In order to understand her work in performance, we must first understand the Fluxus notion of "Event" performance that Ono had been practicing since the late 1950s. In 1953 she enrolled in Sarah Lawrence College and began to venture into the experimental arts scene of New York City, where she met her first husband Toshi Ichiyanagi (b. 1933) (married 1956–1962), an avant-garde composer. Through him she became acquainted with John Cage (1912–1992) and his students who would soon form the Fluxus group of artists, musicians, and writers. Cage's classes at the New School for Social Research (1957–59) taught chance as a central component of composition, and the students included George Brecht (1926–2008), Dick Higgins (1938–1998), La Monte Young (b. 1935), and Jackson Mac Low (1922–2004). Fluxus had a loose

²²⁹ Yoko Ono, "To the Wesleyan People," rep. in *Yes Yoko Ono*, ed. Alexandra Munroe and Jon Hendricks (New York: Japan Society; Harry N. Abrams, 2000), 290.

²³⁰ Ono, *Imagine Yoko*, 35.

²³¹ Ono told this to Reuters News Agency around the time of her *Cut Piece* performance in Paris in September 2003. Quoted in Kevin Concannon, "Yoko Ono's Cut Piece."

membership, and although the participants had different philosophies about art, the common interest was to practice and promote a living art that would transcend divisions of art, culture, politics and life.

Beginning in the winter of 1960, Ono, with Young, hosted a series of experimental performance events in her loft on Chambers Street (also known as Chambers Street Concert series). Art historian Midori Yoshimoto has argued that the Chambers Street Concert series inspired George Maciunas (1931–1978) to create his own concert series, which then became the basis for Fluxus.²³² However, as Yoshimoto and Kathy O’Dell (1997) have argued, female contributors to Fluxus such as Ono, Alison Knowles (b. 1933), Kate Millet (b. 1934), Shigeko Kubota (b. 1937), and Carolee Schneemann (b. 1939), are often ignored in historical narratives of Fluxus.

Events, invented by George Brecht while taking Cage’s class, can be characterized as simple but creative and imaginary experiments set in everyday situations. Events are intended to provide the viewers/participants with primary experiences (rather than painted or sculpted objects for “high art” purchase or contemplation). For example, Brecht’s score for *Flute Solo* Event (1962) outlines two actions:

- disassembling
- assembling

It was that simple and ordinary. Similarly, Fluxus artists believed that the acts of coughing, smiling, preparing a meal, and sleeping in a gallery were all possible works of art. They exchanged Event scores and the cards often via mail (“mail art”), expecting the scores to be

²³² Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 85. Yoshimoto discusses how Ono is unfairly mentioned only as the “owner” of the loft while Young is usually credited as the organizer. Ono addresses the early years of the Chambers Street Concert series during her interview with Julia Peyton-Jones and Hans Ulrich Obrist in Kathryn Rattee, Melissa Larner, and Rebecca Lewin, eds., *Yoko Ono: To the Light* (London: Serpentine Gallery, 2012), 37.

performed in action or through the imagination.²³³

Art historian Hannah Higgins (2002) describes Events and Fluxkits as “generators of primary experiences.”²³⁴ It is this that distinguishes Fluxus work from other experimental groups and aesthetic philosophies. Borrowing Hilary Putnam’s and Edward S. Reed’s notions of experience, Higgins explains:

As generators of primary experiences, Fluxkits and Events “allow us to experience things for ourselves,” thereby generating a mechanism for our “understanding [of] our place in the world,” in Reed’s terms, and thinking “all the way to objects themselves,” in Putnam’s.

From person to person, these understandings, however similar, also differ in significant ways. Put differently, in offering a primary experience of matter as art, Fluxkits and Events have ramifications that both do and do not necessarily include the normative context called fine art. The multiple experiences of Fluxkits and Events suggest ways of understanding the contested relation many Fluxus artists have to the term *art* and its association with such features as name, date, style, psychology, context, and fixed meaning.²³⁵

If such diverse and unconventional work of Fluxus must be generalized and categorized, the best definition would be *intermedia*, Fluxus artist Dick Higgins’s term (1966) for works that fall between media.²³⁶ The aforementioned *Water Yam* is intermedia, for example, because it exists in between traditionally divided art and life categories such as poetry, design, performance, typing, and mailing.

It would be a wrong approach if one asks what are more “artistic” elements than others in intermedia Events, especially with an artist like Yoko Ono who has so long been a media artist

²³³ The Fluxkit (or Fluxbox) was another innovative method practiced by Fluxus artists. The first Fluxkit was *Water Yam*, a collection of Brecht’s Event cards dated variously between 1963 and 1970.

²³⁴ Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 37.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Dick Higgins, “Intermedia,” *Something Else Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (1966); rep. in Dick Higgins, *Horizons: The Poetics and Theory of the Intermedia* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 18.

and public figure and who has also so closely and continuously knitted together her art and life experiences. Rather, we must discuss her public Events and activities as Events. The media spectacles that Ono and Lennon notoriously staged in the late 1960s such as the *Bed-In* performance and the *Imagine Peace* billboard campaign can thus clearly be understood as an extension of the intermedia Events and Event cards, which became part of the public mainstream culture.

The seemingly non-artistic public appearances by Ono, for example, captured in paparazzi photographs of her getting out of a limousine to attend fundraising events, can also be seen as performances or Events in this regard. This is explained by her use of white as the symbolic color for the merged identity known as LennOno. When they began to be seen in public in June 1968, lunching together and going to the new Apple offices together, they wore matching white kaftans. For example, the documentary film of their Montreal *Bed-In* in 1969 (titled *BED PEACE*, made available for free on YouTube in 2011) begins by showing LennOno and Kyoko (Ono's daughter with Tony Cox who would be taken away by the father in 1971 and would not be reconnected with Ono until 1994) arrive at an airport in a white limousine and dressed in white clothing, from head to toe.²³⁷ It is important to note that the couple wore white as a reference, only when they wanted to stage themselves and aestheticize their activities, when they put up a show. When they wore white, it signified that they were performing, whether it was just a lunch out together amid paparazzi or a more artistic event like *Bed-In* (1969) during which they invited the world press to their honeymoon hotel room to protest war in favor of world peace. This indicates that they framed their goings-out as intermedia Events, in the spirit

²³⁷ Yoko Ono and John Lennon, *BED PEACE Starring John Lennon & Yoko Ono*, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mRjjiOV003Q&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

of Fluxus. Always in the public eye, they knew that their appearances on television and magazines would somehow “affect the world.”²³⁸ From the beginning, LennOno understood very well any symbolic significance that their interracial union would have in the culture and society. Together they consciously adopted white as *their* persona for public appearances.

It should be remembered, however, that Fluxus art has often appeared obscure to many people because of its non-normativity and its proximity to everyday objects and actions. It has long escaped public understanding and appreciation. LennOno’s *Bed-In* Events were ridiculed as “Joko” by the press, which was acutely directed at Yoko rather than John.²³⁹ This was a period when the concept of “performance art” itself did not exist in the public imagination. The first survey style “Performance Art” history book, authored by RoseLee Goldberg, was published in 1979, and it focused almost exclusively on on-stage performances (including theater and dance performances), barely touching upon the subtle and mundane everyday aesthetics characteristic of Fluxus Events.²⁴⁰

Ono reveals her affinity with Fluxus and its interest in experience-as-art when she speaks or writes the following passages, for example:

Everyday experience is a work of art.²⁴¹

My art is an ever-changing process just like life itself. . . . I have never believed in definite things.²⁴²

²³⁸ Ono, *Imagine Yoko*, 69.

²³⁹ Andrew Solt and Sam Egan, *Imagine: John Lennon* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1988), 147.

²⁴⁰ RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*, Revised and expanded ed. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001).

²⁴¹ Ono, *Imagine Yoko*, 15.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 61.

When you make something, even if no one sees it, it affects the world.²⁴³

Furthermore, in her essay dated January 23, 1966, “To the Wesleyan People,” Ono describes Event as a medium to “unblock one’s mind” and “a dealing with oneself” (as opposed to Happening described as “a get togetherness”).²⁴⁴ She also explains an Event score as, for her, “something that starts it [an Event] moving” analogous to words like “wish” or “hope.” It can generate a change, any change, and all changes. Such accounts reveal her philosophy as an artist who hopes to generate “open” situations that can forever affect the audience’s experience (of art, life, things, people, etc.). She says, “The struggle with art, for me, became about the concept of whether you were stating your ego through your work or creating an environment where other people can be creative as well.”²⁴⁵ The audience members help to shape and develop the Event. Though the artist provides instructions for a myriad of possible thoughts and actions, the viewer must complete the experience through creative participation.

Lighting Piece, written in the autumn of 1955, is one of Ono’s earliest Event scores, which instructs simply: “Light a match and watch till it goes out.”²⁴⁶ She originally performed this piece in 1961 during her first recital in New York at Carnegie Recital Hall and then in May 1962 during her first concert in Tokyo at Sogetsu Art Center. Ono explained that she intended this performance to provide each audience member with “his/her unique experience by feeling an

²⁴³ Ibid., 69.

²⁴⁴ Yoko Ono, “To the Wesleyan People,” rep. in *Yes Yoko Ono*, ed. Alexandra Munroe and Jon Hendricks (New York: Japan Society; Harry N. Abrams, 2000), 290.

²⁴⁵ Ono, *Imagine Yoko*, 41.

²⁴⁶ Barbara Haskell and John G. Hanhardt, *Yoko Ono: Arias and Objects* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 1991), 33.

‘atmosphere’ and a ‘flow of air’ in the darkness, or by seeing what one wishes to see by lighting matches, or by walking to grope for performers.”²⁴⁷ However, the artist also recalls that the performance received “a storm of reaction” from the Japanese journalists, who particularly “focused on character assassination” (They complained about the darkness because they could not photograph the event, but Ono insisted on keeping the space dark following her performance intention, and the journalists could not accept her aggressive attitude).²⁴⁸ What is important to point out here is: the audience did not see any art in the Event, but only saw Ono the person instead. After this Event, Ono suffered from a deep depression and admitted herself to a hospital, where she stayed for several weeks in 1962. This was the beginning of the hypercriticism and public slander that would continue throughout her life and career.

Although conceived during her pre-Lennon years, Ono’s momentous performances of *Cut Piece* (1964) and *Bag Piece* (1964) express the pain of living under hostile scrutiny, which she experienced and understood as a young woman whose identity was situated in the gap between Japan and America, and between her pursuit of avant-garde art and the public cultural standard. *Cut Piece* premiered in Japan in 1964. In this piece, Ono knelt on stage and invited the audience to come up, one by one, to cut a portion of her clothing to take with them.²⁴⁹ She

²⁴⁷ Yoko Ono, quoted in Toshi Ichiyanagi, “Saizen’ei no koe: Donarudo Richie no hanron” (Voice of the Most Avant-Garde: Objection to Donald Richie), *Geijutsu Shincho* 13, no 8 (1962): 138; quoted in Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 94.

²⁴⁸ Yoko Ono, *Instruction Paintings* (New York: Weatherhill, 1995), 6–7.

²⁴⁹ Ono first performed *Cut Piece* in July 20, 1964 in Kyoto, Japan, as part of the “Contemporary American Avant-Garde Music Concert: Insound and Instructure” at the Yamaichi Concert Hall. After the Kyoto stage, she performed it five more times in four different cities: in Tokyo (as part of the *Yoko Ono Farewell Concert: Strip-Tease Show* at the Sogetsu Kaikan Hall on August 11, 1964); New York (at the Carnegie Recital Hall in March 1965); twice in London (as part of the *Destruction in Art Symposium* on September 28 and 29, 1966); and recently in Paris (at Theatre Le Ranelagh on September 15, 2003). Ono’s writings on *Cut Piece* upon her 2003 performance can be found in Yoko Ono, *Touch Me* (New York: Charta Art Books, 2008), 22.

remained motionless and silent until the audience stopped participating. The *Cut Piece* score was written in two versions, one for a single performer and the other for a group. The “First Version of Single Performer” instructs,

Performer sits on stage with a pair of scissors in front of him. It is announced that members of the audience may come on stage—one at a time—to cut a small piece of the performer’s clothing to take with them. Performer remains motionless throughout the piece. Piece ends at the performer’s option.²⁵⁰

The “Second Version for Audience” says,

It is announced that members of the audience may cut each other’s clothing. The audience may cut as long as they wish.²⁵¹

The fact that the second version asks the audience members to “cut each other’s clothing” makes a remarkable reminder that Ono’s Events often test and experiment with, even perhaps encourage, mutual understandings among individuals and different groups of people. Equal relationships are envisioned here.

Seemingly, Ono gave and the audience took. But it is also true that *Cut Piece* would have never been realized without the audience’s participation through the act of “cutting.” Not only did she offer and display herself on stage as a motionless work of art to be looked at, but she also asked the viewers to interact, thus turning art’s passive spectators into active participants. Through the activation of the viewer, the power relations were (at least theoretically) leveled out between the artist ego and the audience ego.

The artist’s multifaceted politics and utopian vision can be further understood with her composition and performance of *Bag Piece* (although *Cut Piece* has become Ono’s best-known Event because many feminist critics since the ‘90s have promoted it as a proto-feminist work).

²⁵⁰ Quoted in Haskell and Hanhardt, *Yoko Ono: Arias and Objects*, 92.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

In contrast with *Cut Piece*, in which Ono offered her body fully on stage and asked the audience to violate it by cutting her clothing, in *Bag Piece* she concealed her body. The two pieces, both dealing with issues of social relationship and identity, thus can be seen as a counterpart to each other, and they are the two Events that Ono performed most often in the mid-1960s, during her pre-Lennon years.

Written in 1962 and performed frequently in the mid-‘60s with her second husband, artist Anthony Cox (or Tony Cox), *Bag Piece* calls for usually two people to enter a large bag, take off their clothing, put it back on, and then exit the bag:

After the curtain has gone up (or if there is no curtain, at a designated time after the announcer announced the piece) two performers walk onto the stage.
Performers may be two males, two females, or a mixed couple.
Performers carry a bag large enough for both to get inside of.
Bag made of non-transparent material.
Both performers get inside of bag.
Both remove all clothing while inside of bag.
Both put all clothing back on.
They come out of bag.
They exit with bag from stage.²⁵²

Some of the questions raised here are: Do you really believe the performers would take off all clothing inside the bag? How much can you trust when you cannot see? How much would you trust if you could see? Is what you see a reality? Is what you know a truth? Is seeing believing? Is imagining believing? Does seeing or not seeing affect your relationship with the performers? Do you even care about these questions? *Bag Piece* was also known as *Stone Event* because it

²⁵² Alexandra Munroe and Jon Hendricks, eds., *Yes Yoko Ono*, exh. cat. (New York: Japan Society; Harry N. Abrams, 2000), 276. The *Bag Piece* score was first published in 1966 in Ono’s self-published *Strip Tease Show*, but the earliest recorded performance of the piece was in May 1962, by a male performer during the *Works of Yoko Ono* event at Sogetsu Art Center. Ono is recorded to have first performed it in July 1964 during the *Insound and Instructure* concert at Yamaichi Hall in Japan. A 1966 *Village Voice* reports that Ono and Cox once conceived of “a large bag in Central Plaza that could be filled by an audience of 200 people removing their clothing and putting it back on while the performers fulfilled their duties outside the bag.” David Bourdon, “A New Direction,” *The Village Voice*, March 24, 1966, sec. Art, University of Illinois at Chicago Daley Library Microforms.

creates silhouettes like stones: “The point was the outline of the bag, the movement of the bag: how much we see of a person. Inside there might be a lot going on. Or maybe nothing’s going on,” Ono explained.²⁵³ This piece addresses “seeing” through mind and “knowing” through imagination. It challenges the audience to realize that our mind sight is not the only way to see and that we can know better when we see with our mind’s eye.

3.4 **“The Second Dragon Lady”: Ono’s Aggression for Peace**

Much of the existing scholarship on Ono’s work is dominated by feminist criticisms, while feminism is just a part of her much larger politics—for “peace, and against ageism, racism and sexism.”²⁵⁴ As Kevin Concannon (2008) has argued, however, it was only since the 1990s that the majority of authors began to write about Ono’s work as “proto-feminist,” though in the 1960s neither the artist nor the critics discussed it as such.²⁵⁵ These feminist criticisms, as Concannon correctly points out, typically cite the artist’s best-known performance from the 1960s, *Cut Piece*, thus “recasting [it] as one-dimensional.”

In contrast, I use the following examination of Ono’s other life and art “Events” to argue that she used her own body phenomenologically and turned herself into an Event itself. She consciously performed as an intermediary between her personal, public and artistic persona. The fluid boundaries between the private and the public, and the real and the performed reflect the

²⁵³ Sheff, *All We Are Saying: The Last Major Interview with John Lennon and Yoko Ono*, 108.

²⁵⁴ Ono told this to Reuters News Agency around the time of her *Cut Piece* performance in Paris in September 2003. Quoted in Kevin Concannon, “Yoko Ono’s *Cut Piece*.”

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 84. Concannon points to Barbara Haskell and John G. Hanhardt’s 1991 exhibition catalog as the first text to apply a feminist framework, including *Cut Piece* under the category of “Feminism: Violence and Liberation” (rather than under “Early Performance Work”). See Haskell and Hanhardt, *Yoko Ono: Arias and Objects*.

enduring influence of the Fluxus spirit and philosophy in her artistic practice. While she was well aware of her infamy (as shown above), she did not try to resist or minimize the projected stereotypes, but used her Oriental body aggressively in pursuing her politics of experience hoping to “unblock” the mind and “widen” the perception of her audience. She continued to assert her presence against the hegemony of the white, male, and Orientalist culture and society. Unlike the Western representations of Dragon Ladies, Ono’s self-presentations never employed an image of dragon, but instead associated her Oriental body and her assertive personality with neutral and universal images such as Eve and color white.

Lennon’s first collaborative album, *Unfinished Music No. 1: Two Virgins*, was provocative in several ways, intermediating various issues, events and spaces in life. It was released in November 1968 (on the 11th in the U.S. and on the 29th in the U.K.), shortly after Lennon’s divorce from Cynthia Lennon in October, thus announcing the union of Lennon and dismissing the marital experience of their previous marriages. The album was recorded in May at Lennon’s Kenwood house while his wife was out of town, and so it implicitly acknowledged their long rumored extramarital affair. More shockingly, both Ono and Lennon appeared completely naked on the album jacket cover: the front photograph showed them frontally nude and the rear showed them from behind. Some Beatles fans were so shocked that they burned copies of the album. The controversial album cover was impounded as pornography in several jurisdictions, though some distributors decided to carry it by covering the album jackets with brown wrappers.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁶ For example, see anonymous author, “A Jersey Prosecutor Bans Sales of a Beatle’s Album,” *New York Times*, January 25, 1969. It reports that New Jersey’s Union County Prosecutor Leo Kaplowitz “issued a ‘don’t sell or else’ ultimatum to record dealers in the county in connection with the Beatles’ album *Two Virgins*, whose front and back covers of the album depict John and Lennon and his Japanese girl friend, Yoko Ono, in the nude. Members of the prosecutor’s staff and the police in Mountainside seized 22,300 of the album covers, 3,300 with records, at Bestway Products Company in Mountainside.”

“By today's standards, this might not seem remarkable,” reflects co-founder and publisher of *Rolling Stone* Jann Wenner. “In 1968, it was utterly astonishing. People did not pose naked, let alone famous people; and John was at the peak of his Beatles fame, a revered household icon around the world. Thus, these pictures were a revolutionary statement.”²⁵⁷ But Tamara Levitz exposes the underlying sexism implicit in Wenner’s remark. “Many women posed nude in the 1960s, even in almost every issue of his [Wenner’s] magazine.”²⁵⁸ “By emphasizing John’s rather than Yoko’s nudity, Wenner implicitly acknowledges that what most shocked him and others about this photograph is how it questioned the traditional practice of objectifying nude female bodies for the benefit of male spectators,” Levitz notes.²⁵⁹ Photographing their naked bodies in equal exposure was Ono’s idea. In a 1970 *Esquire* interview, Lennon said that she pushed him to disrobe for the photo shoot. In the same interview, he is also quoted saying Ono led him to see the other Beatles differently, as “always tut-tut-tutting over our shoulders all the time.”²⁶⁰

Lennon’s double nude photograph, especially along with the album title of *Two Virgins*, evokes the image of Adam and Eve. That this interracial couple posed as the first man and woman created by God is provocative and significant in terms of race issues. Interracial relationships were taboo back in the ‘60s. In the United States, interracial marriage remained illegal until 1967. It was historically “more accepted” in the United Kingdom, but a survey

²⁵⁷ Jann S. Wenner, “The Ballad of John and Yoko,” in Munroe and Hendricks, *Yes Yoko Ono*, 60.

²⁵⁸ Levitz, “Yoko Ono and the Unfinished Music of ‘John & Yoko’: Imagining Gender and Racial Equality in the Late 1960s,” 220.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Charles McCarry, “John Lennon’s Exclusive Groupie,” *Esquire*, December 1970, 250.

shows that in the 1980s, as much as 50% of the public were against marriage across ethnic lines.²⁶¹ Also, by Western art conventions, Adam and Eve were “white.” This is why the Jamaican-American artist Renée Cox’s 1996 self-portrait as a nude black female Christ (*Yo Mama: Last Supper*) was controversial.

Yet it was not just the nudity and the biblical reference that was controversial, but also the experimental musical content inside the *Two Virgins* album. The album consists of “whistling, caterwauling, groaning, wailing, moaning, shrieking, samplings of old records, the sound of guitars being tuned and strummed, background noise, scraps of conversations,” something that The Beatles’ fans would have never expected of the rock star.²⁶² The screaming and gasping sounds, characteristic of Ono’s vocal style, were bizarre and disturbing to listen to, although they have since been linked to primal therapy, as experienced in their 1970 therapy sessions with Arthur Janov. Ono’s (and Lennon’s) interest in primary experience, which defines Fluxus experience as discussed earlier, continued in the recording of *Unfinished Music No. 2: Life with the Lions*, released in May 1969. Similar to the first album, the successor consists of instrumental improvisations, Ono’s sonic screaming, LennOno chanting the text of press clippings, their baby-fetus’s heartbeat (who was later miscarried), silence, and random radio dialing.²⁶³

After the scandalous release of *Unfinished Music No. 1*, LennOno made a significant appearance at *The Rolling Stones Rock and Roll Circus* television concert event on December 11,

²⁶¹ James Matthews, “Mixed Marriage ‘More Accepted’ In Britain,” *Sky News*, December 11, 2012, <http://news.sky.com/story/1023609>.

²⁶² Francine Prose, *The Lives of the Muses: Nine Women and the Artists They Inspired* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002).

²⁶³ John Lennon and Yoko Ono, *Unfinished Music #2: Life With The Lions* (Rykodisc, 1997).

1968. Though the concert was planned as a television special to be aired on BBC, the broadcast was withheld by the Rolling Stones, who were not satisfied with their performance, and was released as a film first in 1996. LennOno had made official appearances together at Coventry Cathedral in June and also on the *David Frost Show* in August to stage collaborated conceptual art Events,²⁶⁴ but *The Rolling Stones Rock and Roll Circus* was the couple's first official public appearance as musical partners after their first album's release in November. Also importantly, it was the first time that Lennon would perform in public without the rest of The Beatles, since the band's formation in 1960. It should be also noted that Ono was one of the only two female musicians invited to the concert event; the other was Marianne Faithful, who at the time was dating Mick Jagger.

Special attention should be drawn to LennOno's costumes at this event. It was a concert with a circus theme, organized and produced by Jagger and directed by Michael Lindsay-Hogg.²⁶⁵ The participating musicians, the most popular rock stars of the time such as The Rolling Stones, The Who, and Eric Clapton, were asked to dress up in extravagant costumes. Serious performers of art/life Events as they were, Lennon and Ono donned costumes to ridicule and play up their public image: Lennon as a buffoon and Ono as a witch. She wore a long black robe and a pointed hat, and her long black hair flowed loosely down her face, framing her slanted eyes and wide lips. Lennon was dressed as a clown, in a striped jumpsuit with ruffs at the neck. They thus playfully parodied their own media caricatures, which portrayed Ono as a wicked

²⁶⁴ On June 15, 1968, during the First National Sculpture Exhibition at Coventry Cathedral in England, LennOno collaborated on *Acorn Event*. In August, they appeared on *David Frost Show* and Ono performed her *Painting to Hammer a Nail* with the talk show's guests. See Solt and Egan, *Imagine: John Lennon*, 132.

²⁶⁵ See Michael Lindsay-Hogg, *The Rolling Stones Rock and Roll Circus*, DVD (New York: Abkco Films, 2004). Michael Lindsay-Hogg, *The Rolling Stones' Rock and Roll Circus* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1991).

foreign witch who had cast a spell over the beloved buffoon rock star and destroyed his career. This image of LennOno—Ono as a manipulative witch and Lennon as her boy toy—is evident in the aforementioned *Esquire* caricature by David Levine. Also, Lennon had recently been selected as “Clown of the Year” 1969 by the *London Daily Mirror*.²⁶⁶

However, Ono did not seem to care. In 1974, she further developed the “witch” concept to write a song titled “Yes, I’m a Witch” (she would use the same title for her remix album released in February 2007). The opening lyrics read:

Yes, I’m a witch, I’m a bitch. I don’t care what you say.
My voice is real, my voice is truth. I don’t fit in your ways.
I’m not gonna die for you. You might as well face the truth.
I’m gonna stick around for quite awhile.
Yes, I’m a witch, I’m a bitch.
Each time we don’t say what we wanna say, we’re dying.
Each time we don’t say how do we feel, we’re dying.
Each time we gotta do what we wanna do, we’re living.
Each time we open our minds to what we see, we’re living.²⁶⁷

If Ono simply dressed as a witch for the 1968 concert, the song “Yes, I’m a Witch” verbally expressed a critical embrace of her negative public image. In a fearless defiance of public opinion, Ono transgressed social and cultural norms and to do whatever she believed to be real, true, and right. Few female artists of the time had the aggressive humor to provoke the public and use negative public opinion as a source of creation.

After her romantic and creative partnership with Lennon was launched in 1968, *Bag Piece* (which she performed frequently in the mid-1960s with Cox) was developed into *Bagism*, an important concept in LennOno’s collaboration that more directly addressed her critique of

²⁶⁶ Jonathan Cott and Christine Doudna, eds., *The Ballad of John and Yoko*, 1st ed. (Garden City, NY: Dolphin Books, 1982), xxi.

²⁶⁷ This song was included in the album *A Story*, recorded in 1974; but this album was released only in 1992 as a part of *Onobox*, the 6-disc collection of her work from 1968 to 1985.

prejudices and stereotypes. In March 1969, they wedded in Gibraltar, spent their honeymoon staging their first *Bed-In* Event in Amsterdam, and on the last day of the honeymoon the newlyweds flew to Vienna and held a clamorous Event called *Bagism Press Conference*.²⁶⁸

At Vienna's Sacher Hotel, the couple invited the international press to a hotel room and from inside a large white bag discussed "a total communication," a communication not hindered by the communicators' appearances. Here is an excerpt from the interview:

... I think that it's very important that we're communicating now just by words. We are making a total communication without thinking, as John said, about what sort of face you have or what sort of taste you have in your clothes, etcetera. And those things usually disturb and lock the mind of people, and they can't communicate totally.²⁶⁹

Their intention was thus to satirize the judgment of others on the basis of their outward appearance, such as skin color, hairstyle, attire, gender, and age. This act of stereotyping was a subtle form of violence. "Total communication" meant a mind-to-mind communication without being able to look at the other person, and thus the viewer could be unhindered by prejudice and stereotype. It should also be pointed out that what are often referred to as their "anti-war" performances such as *Bed-In* and *Bagism* were not specifically anti-war or anti-establishment demonstrations. The concept was much broader: "against any form of violence," as Lennon remarked during a *Bed-In* Event.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ The first *Bed-In* was held in the Amsterdam Hilton in March 25–31, 1969. The second *Bed-In* was in Montreal's Queen Elizabeth Hotel from May 26 to June 2, 1969. The first time Lennon performed *Bag Piece* in public was during their *Alchemical Wedding* performance at the Royal Albert Hall on December 18, 1968, where they remained still inside a white bag for thirty minutes on stage while a musician played the flute. See The Beatles Bible, "John Lennon and Yoko Ono Appear Onstage in a White Bag," accessed October 9, 2011, <http://www.beatlesbible.com/1968/12/18/john-lennon-and-yoko-ono-appear-onstage-in-a-white-bag/>.

²⁶⁹ The Beatles Ultimate Experience, "John Lennon & Yoko Ono: Bagism Press Conference 3/31/1969," The Beatles Interviews Database, *Beatles Ultimate Experience*, accessed October 10, 2011, <http://www.beatlesinterviews.org/db1969.0331.beatles.html>. The interview was transcribed by www.beatlesinterviews.org from audio copy of the press conference.

²⁷⁰ Quoted in Kristine Stiles, "Unbosoming Lennon: The Politics of Yoko Ono's Experience," *Art Criticism* 7, no. 2 (1992): 37.

After this “conference” Event, LennOno would occasionally appear in public fully covered in a white sack, for example to “An Evening with John and Yoko” film screening at the New Cinema Club (September 11, 1969) and to the Hyde Park protest speech against the 1961 hanging of James Hanratty (December 15, 1969).²⁷¹ Because LennOno’s bodies were fully covered for these public appearances, there were even rumors that they might be anonymous substitutes, not LennOno. They thus played with their celebrity status in these Events that intermediate between private and public experiences of art, culture, politics and life.

Particularly interesting about their *Bagism* Events in relation to their public identity is the use of the color white. Ono previously performed *Bag Piece* always in a black bag. But when she performed *Bagism* with Lennon, they always used a white bag. White, as discussed above, was a color that signified LennOno’s partnership in both art and life; it is also likely that they intended white to connote their merging of aesthetic and political concerns. Ono’s distinct use of the two colors suggests a probability that might be her connotative comment on race issues—“black” and “white” literally. Although she has never explained about her frequent use of white, this is a possible reading since she and Lennon were deeply concerned with racism as discussed above.

Binary symbolism is a major characteristic of LennOno’s work. The couple often used their identities metaphorically, to signify the merger of man/West and woman/East. For example, the title of the song “The Ballad of John and Yoko,” written by Lennon and released by the Beatles in May 1969, was a play on the title of Rudyard Kipling’s poem of 1889, *The Ballad*

²⁷¹ According to Getty Images, some such events include: *Today* television show presented by Eamonn Andrews on April 1, 1969; *An Evening with John and Yoko* film screening at the New Cinema Club on September 11, 1969; Plastic Ono Band’s performance at Lyceum Ballroom, London on December 15, 1969; and Hyde Park protest speech against the hanging of James Hanratty for the 1961 “A6 murder” on December 15, 1969. In April 1969, LennOno also co-founded a public relations company called Bagism Productions Ltd.

of *East and West*. Another prominent example is *Acorn Event*, LennOno's very first collaborative conceptual art Event, staged in June 1968 during the First National Sculpture Exhibition at Coventry Cathedral in England. In the cathedral yard, LennOno planted two acorns, one facing East and the other facing West, thus symbolically representing their union in terms of their different cultures. The acorns were "not only a symbol of Peace, but a symbol of East and West coming together" which would "keep multiplying forever," as Ono explained with her characteristic utopian hopefulness.²⁷² If Ono (and Lennon) employed black and white as metaphors of themselves, then it is possible that "black" would refer to Ono since Lennon is definitely more associated with "white" than "black."

White, indeed, is the best color to represent not only peace but also Ono's philosophy (and now Lennon's too) of art as an open "wish" to "unblock one's mind." In the West, white is a non-color—the color of purity and innocence, without taint, sin, assumption, or prejudice.²⁷³ It is also a color open to changes and influences. It best exemplifies Ono's open mind, pacifism and utopian worldview.

Let us return for a moment to *The Rolling Stones Rock and Roll Circus* concert, which, as discussed earlier, was an important event because it marked LennOno's television debut as musical partners. Ono's performance of a "witch" extended beyond her costume to an

²⁷² Yoko Ono, "ACORN EVENT by Yoko Ono," *Imagine Peace*, 2008, <http://imaginepeace.com/archives/4473>. Within a week, however, the acorns were dug out and stolen by some fans, and Ono and Lennon went on to mail two acorns "to each of the World Leaders at the time," with a letter asking that the acorns be planted for peace (titled *Acorn Peace*). In Spring 2009, Ono commemorated the 40th anniversary of the first mailing of *Acorn Peace* by mailing 123 *ACORN PEACE* boxes to "world leaders and heads of state, hoping they will plant them in their garden and grow two oak trees for WORLD PEACE." For the 2009 event, see Yoko Ono, "YOKO ONO's ACORN PEACE Spring 2009 - Sending to 123 World Leaders," *Imagine Peace*, 2009, <http://imaginepeace.com/archives/6633>.

²⁷³ For more on white in the Western cultural context, see David Batchelor, *Chromophobia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000).

aggressive avant-garde concert on stage charged with characteristic disruptive eccentricity. Ono interrupted and intruded on the stage of The Dirty Mac, a superstar group put together for the event that included John Lennon, Eric Clapton, Keith Richards and Mitch Mitchell. While these rock stars played the Beatles track “Yer Blues” (written by Lennon in 1968), Ono performed her *Bag Piece* near a speaker next to them. She entered a large black bag, moved around inside it changing the shape of the bag, and exited as the song ended. Having emerged from the bag, Ono sang “Whole Lotta Yoko” in a jam with French violinist Ivry Githis. This performance both shocked and irritated the audience because the song, devoid of lyrics, consisted solely of her chanting and screaming.

Ono’s interruption of the rock stars’ stage with *her* presence and particularly with her avant-garde performance exemplifies what the feminist cultural critic Maud Lavin has theorized as a positive force of female aggression. While women’s aggression has traditionally been “repressed, frowned upon as inappropriate behavior, or branded as low class” and “restricted to meaning harm to another,” Lavin redefined aggression positively as “the use of force to create change—fruitful, destructive, or a mix of the two.”²⁷⁴

Ono continued to taunt the audience at the Toronto Rock ‘n’ Roll Revival concert on September 13, 1969. She disrupted what would otherwise have been a typical ‘60s rock scene her Oriental Dragon Lady persona. As Lennon and the Plastic Ono Band guest members Eric Clapton, Klaus Voorman, and Alan White performed “Blue Suede Shoes” (written and recorded by Carl Perkins in 1951, considered one of the first rock-and-roll songs), Ono entered a large

²⁷⁴ Maud Lavin, *Push Comes to Chove: New Images of Aggressive Women* (Cambridge, Mass: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2010), 3.

white bag.²⁷⁵ This time, the white color of the bag matched the color of the suit Lennon was wearing, and caused the duo to stand out as the spotlight hit the stage. Completing her performance of *Bag Piece*, Ono continued her female aggression and avant-garde transgression by improvising moaning, groaning, screaming, and wailing to “Yer Blues” and “Cold Turkey.”²⁷⁶

However, when the tape of *The Rolling Stones Rock and Roll Circus* was finally released on film in 1996, Ono’s *Bag Piece* performance had been completely erased from the Dirty Mac’s concert, as if the producers as well as the audience wished it never happened in the first place.²⁷⁷ The film does not show a full view of the stage by editing “Yer Blues” with close-up shots of the band members’ faces and instruments. Consequently, searching for the Dirty Mac’s “Yer Blues” performance on the Internet brings up no results whatsoever of Ono’s *Bag Piece* performance even though it happened simultaneously on the same stage. It was as if she was never wanted there and so had been edited out entirely from the show, from the documentation, and from the history.

3.5 **Concluding Remarks**

In her latest comment on her *Bag Piece* performance, Ono says, “I slipped into the bag,

²⁷⁵ See the video *Blue Suede Shoes - John Lennon & Plastic Ono Band - Toronto 1969*, 2010, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FuEMdfwmQTM&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

²⁷⁶ See the video *Cold Turkey - John Lennon & Plastic Ono Band - Toronto 1969*, 2010, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Muz3_2w4ff6Q&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

²⁷⁷ This clip is available on YouTube. *Styles P. Feat. Cella Dwellas and The Dirty Mac-- “Rock and Roll Circus” (Produced By Twisted Metal)*, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzBeTd9qsQk&feature=youtube_gdata_player. The full shot of The Dirty Mac’s stage with Ono performing *Bag Piece* can be found in the 2004 DVD version of the film, in the “Sideshow” extra tracks.

and voila! I was immediately free of sexism, racism, ageism. What a relief! As I was enjoying looking at the world through the black light, I suddenly panicked that I couldn't find the exit.”²⁷⁸

Events ever evolve and so our experiences do.

We have examined Ono’s Events—both her on-stage (“art”) and off-stage (“life”) performances—by tracing her development from a wartime kid torn between Japan and the United States, to an emerging Fluxus artist, to the romantic and creative partner of rock-and-roll superstar, to infamous public persona. No other artist has practiced art and life of such radical conceptualism and experimentalism using the whole world as the spectators and participants. And only few other women in history had so publicly demanded and exercised power. As a political artist, she has continued to create and explore subtle and confrontational methods to disrupt social and cultural norms, including white supremacy and patriarchy.

In 2006, in the wake of a recent lawsuit involving Ono’s longtime driver, who was charged in a blackmailing plot to extort \$2 million or to kill Ono and her son, *The New York Times* published an article titled “Protecting the Private Side of Yoko Ono’s Life.” The sympathetic report refers to the complexities of Ono’s life, governed by dichotomy:

On one hand she is, as she has always been, the traditional Japanese woman of aristocratic roots, raised to cover her mouth when she smiles, they said. On the other, she is a canny businesswoman and pop culture icon who sings, paints, travels widely and once held a news conference in bed with Lennon.²⁷⁹

“People have this image of her as a crazy, evil Dragon Lady,” explains Ono’s close friend for over twenty years Brian Hendel. “But when they meet her, they quickly see she is soft-spoken

²⁷⁸ Yoko Ono on her Facebook page on November 17, 2013. <https://www.facebook.com/yokoonopage>

²⁷⁹ Alan Feuer and Robin Pogrebin, “Protecting the Private Side of Yoko Ono’s Life,” *New York Times*, December 15, 2006, www.nytimes.com.

and has a gentle soul.”²⁸⁰ We do not know how much of this perceived dichotomy results from preconceptions or from Ono’s real personality. There is no clear boundary between one’s inner and outer identity, especially in cases of celebrities like Ono whose “life” is out there in the mass media.

But what is clear is that the above comments exemplify binary assumptions—being a Japanese woman of aristocratic roots is put in opposition with being a canny businesswoman and pop culture icon. Her feminine soft-spoken behavior and traditional manners of smiling with her mouth covered clash with her controversial political performances such as *Bed-In*. This only confirms that stereotypes have indeed largely governed the public view of the Japanese artist, and also that her intermedial Events (rooted in her formative days of Fluxus) have not been received as performances or even as “art.” This, in turn, hints at a relatively conservative view of art among the public. The otherness of her Oriental body, the strangeness of avant-garde art, and the aggressiveness of her feminist actions all helped the formation of her reputation as a Dragon Lady, a public persona so large that it has long overshadowed her identity as a serious artist, a feminist and a pacifist. She has gained exceptional visibility and forceful power for a woman—an Asian woman—to attain in Western culture. As a conscious foreigner and public figure, she has long performed offered and performed herself to the public media, and “Yoko Ono” continues to generate conversation, sensation and discourse about art, music, culture, race, gender, and sex.

In November 2012, Ono launched a menswear collection in collaboration with the fashion company Opening Ceremony. The collection was designed based on drawings that the artist had sketched in 1969 as a wedding gift for Lennon. Titled *Fashions for Men*, the collection

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

is equal parts conceptual art project and clothing design: it includes, for example, trousers with a large handprint on the crotch area, sweatshirts with a line drawing of what looks like a woman's butt or a man's balls men's, necklaces in the shape of boobs, and men's bras with LED lights in the nipple area. *The Huffington Post*'s report of the launch asked, "Did Yoko Ono just *yoko* the whole clothing industry?"²⁸¹ "Yoko" is used as a verb here almost as a synonym for bitching, destroying, or subverting. A rule changer, she laughs at and transgresses norms, expectations, and assumptions. It must require her immense determination, wisdom, aggression, humor, and frustration. She remains the true Dragon Lady—and a most phenomenal Event.

²⁸¹ Jessica Misener, "Yoko Ono's New Clothing Line For Opening Ceremony Is Brain-Meltingly Weird," *Huffington Post*, November 28, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/28/yoko-ono-clothing-line-opening-ceremony-photos_n_2203667.html.

4. MARIKO MORI'S *MADE IN JAPAN* AND THE GLOBALIZATION OF JAPANESE POP CULTURE

The first feeling one got upon walking into the show [*Mariko Mori* at the American Fine Arts], and this was consensus, was that *we have finally found the cutest diva in the world*.

—Christian Haye (1995)²⁸²

The cute “Hello Kitty”-like outlines which define Mori’s cyborgs stand in for a simplified subject who’s rejected adolescent trauma and adult free-will. Her characters symbolize the giving up of the body and its bland, Disney-esque re-animation in order to join the social “group’s” acculturated desires.

—Michael Cohen (1997)²⁸³

In Mori all the cyborgs are as sweet and harmless as Hello Kitty. The implication is that we already live in a world where the machines are on the whole more colorful, lively and interesting than the people.

—Norman Bryson (1998)²⁸⁴

After her New York gallery debut in March 1995 at the American Fine Arts gallery, the young Japanese artist Mariko Mori (b. 1967) quickly rose to international stardom.²⁸⁵ She signed to be represented by the then rising Deitch Projects, where she had her second, even more successful solo show in April 1996. The two consecutive shows featured what has since become known as her *Made in Japan* series, which continues to be her best-known work to date.²⁸⁶ They are

²⁸² Christian Haye, “Mariko Mori: American Fine Arts, New York,” *Frieze*, no. 24 (October 1995): 68. My emphasis.

²⁸³ Michael Cohen, “Mariko Mori: Plastic Dreams in the Reality Bubble,” *Flash Art* 30, no. 194 (June 1997): 94.

²⁸⁴ Norman Bryson, “Cute Futures: Mariko Mori’s Techno-Enlightenment,” *Parkett*, no. 54 (1998): 79.

²⁸⁵ The American Fine Arts show (22 Wooster Street) is Mori’s first well-attended solo show in New York City. In 1993 she had a small-scale solo show in an empty office in Times Square as part of the *Close-Up* art exhibition series, which went unnoticed.

²⁸⁶ *Made in Japan* was the title of her Deitch Projects show (April 1996), premiered at Tokyo’s Shiseido Gallery in September 1995. This show featured four new photographs: *Empty Dream* (1995), *Beginning of the End* (1995), *Last Departure* (1996), and *Miko no Inori*. These were similar in both concept and style to those shown at the American Fine Arts, except that Mori had now incorporated more advanced technologies in representing the postmodern Japanese culture and society.

billboard-sized color photographs of Mori posing in urban Tokyo dressed in cute, futuristic costumes that make her look like popular Janimation characters such as Hello Kitty, Astro Boy, and Sailor Moon. With these photographs, Mori became the poster child for a globalizing Japan in the Western media landscape in the late 1990s. All the major art magazines—*Artforum*, *Art Journal*, *Flash Art*, *Frieze*—printed large and shiny color photographs of Mori and her work, and as I remember, she was one of the first new and few Asian faces that appeared in art history textbooks in the late 1990s.²⁸⁷ However, when the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (MoT) opened Mori's solo exhibition in early 2002, people already called it a "retrospective" show.²⁸⁸ This means she had reached the pinnacle of her career in less than ten years since its launch. And we can interpret the artist's meteoric rise as a cultural phenomenon and evidence of the unprecedented rise of Japan on the global cultural landscape during the '80s and '90s.

This chapter reconsiders Mori as the Western-dominated art world's J-pop artist by exploring the relationship between her *Made in Japan* series and the globalization of Japanese popular culture in the 1990s. Though fervently received in the Western art world, Mori's international acclaim failed to resonate in her native Japan. At the same time, however, Western reviews of Mori's photographs focused on the visual style and the banal content, failing to consider the Japanese context, thus leaving the relationship between Mori (art) and *manga/anime* (pop culture) unexplored. I will argue that this was because Mori arrived on the New York art scene at a time when Western understanding of Japanese popular culture was nascent (while we

²⁸⁷ For example, see Jonathan Fineberg, *Art since 1940: Strategies of Being*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 494–495.

²⁸⁸ Monty DiPietro, "Mariko Mori at the Tokyo Museum of Contemporary Art," n.d., an online exhibition review on *Assembly Language Toronto Tokyo*, <http://www.assemblylanguage.com/reviews/MoriMoT.html>

will also see that by the 1990s the Western perception of Japan have significantly changed and the Orientalist stereotypes, discussed in the preceding chapters about Yayoi Kusama's and Yoko Ono's careers in the 1960s, have also become much alleviated). Similar to Kusama, Mori rarely gives specific explanations about her intentions behind her work, and when pressed to explain, she talks abstractly and impersonally, leaving much room for the viewer's own associations and interpretations. Thus I would like to note that Mori's "voice" or agency would have to be minimized in this exploration.

First, through an analysis of the evolution of Japanese economic and cultural power, I demonstrate how the popularity of Mori's work in New York City—and in the international art world—reflects trends in globalization in the 1990s, particularly what Koichi Iwabuchi has described as the "recentering [of] globalization" by Japan through consumer culture.²⁸⁹ I will discuss the Japanese mass cultural aesthetic of *kawaii* ("cute") in Mori's art and persona, and will further explore her work's Japaneseness by testing it against Western concepts of feminism and postmodernism. But it is her exploitation of Japanese femininity that explains her unpopularity among Japanese art critics. Last, I reveal the contemporary art-historical significance of Mori's use of J-pop aesthetics and politics by presenting a genealogy of contemporary Japanese art stars in the West. I argue that that the genealogy represented—in the order of ascendance—by Yasumasa Morimura (b. 1951), Mariko Mori, and Takashi Murakami (b. 1962) parallels the shift of the image of Japan from a techno-power dystopia to cute, and to cool dreamland of commodity culture. This chapter thus engages in the discourses of globalism, nation-branding, and the postmodern conflation of art and pop culture.

²⁸⁹ Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization*.

4.1 J-Pop Cuteness: from Astro Boy to Sailor Moon and Mariko Mori

Before studying art at the Chelsea College of Art and Design in London (1989–1992), Mori had started work as a fashion model in Tokyo and also studied fashion design at Bunka Fashion College (1986–1988). In fact, she designed all of the garments used in the *Made in Japan* photographs as well as modeled in them.²⁹⁰ Though she has never spoken about the source of inspiration for her costume designs, it is evident to many viewers that her references are Japanese *manga* (comics) and *anime* (animation). In *Play with Me* (1994), for example, Mori is à la mode of Sailor Moon: the pleated miniskirts matched with knee-high boots and the two high pigtailed on her hair that fall long below the waist. In *Love Hotel* (1994) and *Red Light* (1994), in which the artist suggestively poses as a teenage prostitute, the silver robotic headpiece resembles the spiky hairdo of Astro Boy, the Japanese equivalent of Walt Disney's Mickey Mouse. In fact, Mori has praised the legendary creator of *Astro Boy*, Osamu Tezuka, as the moral teacher of her generation.²⁹¹ And she has also compared her art-making practice to *manga*: "I'm interested in [*manga*] because they reflect people's desire, but I also enjoy looking at them. It's the same with my work—I don't make it only because I have to, but also because I enjoy it."²⁹²

²⁹⁰ Some of these costumes were also displayed in Mori's American Fine Arts gallery show. According to Roberta Smith, who reviewed the show for the *New York Times*, the actual costumes were displayed in front of the photographs and enclosed in clear plastic time capsules, thus keeping with the futuristic theme of the photographs. Smith, however, thought this presentation was "unnecessary." See Roberta Smith, "Art in Review: Mariko Mori," *New York Times*, March 31, 1995.

²⁹¹ Margery King, "Mori Pop," in *Mariko Mori*, by Dominic Molon et al. (Chicago: Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art; London: Serpentine Gallery, 1998), 38.

²⁹² Blair, "We've Got Twenty-Five Years: Interview with Mariko Mori."

However, it is interesting that early commentators on the series, including Christian Haye, Michael Cohen, and Norman Bryson (all quoted above), noticed a certain Japanese pop aesthetic in Mori's costumes which they simply related to Hello Kitty, while Sailor Moon actually makes a better parallel. This was because Mori arrived on the New York art scene at a time when the Western understanding of Japanese popular culture was still limited. It is important to note, for example, that *Sailor Moon* and Mariko Mori debuted in the United States the same year—1995. The *Sailor Moon* animation series premiered on American television in September 1995, six months *after* Mori's exhibition at the American Fine Arts gallery.

“Japanese animation is starting to sweep through the world, becoming the nation's first big pop culture export,” the *New York Times* proclaimed on September 17, 1995, the week that Japan's latest hit *Sailor Moon* made its American television debut after its success in over 20 countries in Asia and Europe including Spain, France, Italy, and Hong Kong.²⁹³ As the report's title indicates, Japan was emerging as a new “superpower of superheroes.” Created by the female *manga* artist Naoko Takeuchi in 1992, *Sailor Moon* revolves around five pretty schoolgirls—the protagonist and her girlfriends—who can transform into superheroines by activating magical powers of their jewelry. By the time the series was exported to the United States in 1995, it had become a \$1.5 billion merchandising franchise, which included

²⁹³ Andrew Pollack, “Japan, a Superpower Among Superheroes,” *New York Times*, September 17, 1995. In New York City, *Sailor Moon* was broadcast on Channel 11. The report also mentions how Hayao Miyazaki's animation *My Neighbor Totoro* sold 450,000 video copies in the U.S. since its release date in July 1994. The explosion of Japanese animation reverberated around the world, from the R-rated midnight movie in New York, *Urotsuki Doji: Legend of the Overfiend*, to the popular hit, *Dragon Ball Z*, in France and Spain, to the line of children in Vietnam awaiting the latest episode of *Doraemon*. Also, we should remember that this was just after Japan's economic bubble bursting (early '90s) and just before the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis.

videogames, stage musicals, toy dolls, and icons imprinted on everything from clothes to notebooks.²⁹⁴

Early reviews of Mori's photographs also generally focused on the visual surface without considering the Japanese context, and their review titles highlight the empty feel of the work associated with fashion and trends. For example, Kathleen Magnan wrote about "the cyber chic of Mariko Mori" (1996), Michael Cohen reviewed "plastic dreams in the reality bubble" (1997), and Norman Bryson theorized about "Mariko Mori's techno-enlightenment" (1998).²⁹⁵ The world was at the time anxiously anticipating the end of the twentieth century, and the fear of the new millennium was reflected in the rise of horror and science fiction movies like the *Matrix* series and remakes of *Star Wars* and *Godzilla*. It appears that the Western art critics found Mori's cutification of apocalyptic futurism exciting and fresh, but did not notice (or chose to ignore) the relationship to the global spread of Japanese popular culture.

The cute futurism in Mori's style can be discussed in relation to the proliferation of cute-looking robots in Japanimation and also the dominant *kawaii* aesthetic in Japanese consumer culture. It can be thus argued that she was the first Japanese pop artist—a title usually attributed to Takashi Murakami, who became active a few years after Mori. Mori also provides an early example of the so-called postmodern conflation of art and fashion or art and entertainment—an ongoing issue in contemporary art practice and discourse.

As Frederik Schodt argues in his popular book, *Inside the Robot Kingdom: Japan, Mechatronics, and the Coming Robotopia*, the Japanese have long exhibited an enthusiastic,

²⁹⁴ "Sailor Moon," *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, March 2, 2014, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sailor_Moon&oldid=597880500.

²⁹⁵ Kathleen F. Magnan, "The Cyber Chic of Mariko Mori," *Art Asia Pacific* 3, no. 2 (1996): 64–67. Cohen, "Mariko Mori: Plastic Dreams in the Reality Bubble." Bryson, "Cute Futures."

almost devotional attitude towards technology and its integration into society. Ever since modern Western technology was introduced in Japan in the mid-nineteenth century, the Japanese have religiously embraced it. The Japanese firmly believed that robots would liberate the people from labor.²⁹⁶ Comparing the prevalent image of robots and cyborgs in Japanese and American popular culture, Schodt explains that in the West, robots are perceived as dark and dangerous monsters bent on the destruction of humanity as reflected in the Frankenstein narrative. In contrast, robots in Japanese popular culture such as *Astro Boy* and *Doraemon* are cute, benign, and friendly.

Robots and cyborgs began to appear in *manga* and *anime* as early as the 1950s, the decade during which Japanese animation developed its own identity while hybridizing Disney's products. In 1951, the legendary *manga/anime* artist Osamu Tezuka created what would become the prototype of Japanese cute robots, *Astro Boy* (originally *Tetsuwan Atom*, or "Mighty Atom").²⁹⁷ In the plot set in the anticipated year of 2003, *Astro Boy* is an atomic fission-powered robot built by a mad scientist to replace his lost son. But he is sold to a robot circus, and later adopted by Dr. Packadermus J. Elephun, who kindheartedly takes care of many robots at his home.²⁹⁸ There, *Astro Boy* learns how to act like a human and even goes to school like a

²⁹⁶ Frederik L. Schodt, *Inside the Robot Kingdom: Japan, Mechatronics, and the Coming Robotopia*, 1st ed. (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1988).

²⁹⁷ The character started in 1951 as a minor character in Tezuka's *Atom Taishi* ("Ambassador Atom"), but in 1952 he was given his own comics series *Tetsuwan Atom*. Anne Allison alludes to the significance of the cute and benevolent robot *Astro Boy* in postwar Japanese society that it "served as a new type of hero through which a generation of war-weary Japanese could begin to re-envision their country: as one built on technology, energized through hard work and good will, and devoted to a new world order of machines and peace." Anne Allison, "Sailor Moon: Japanese Superheroes for Global Girls," in *Japan Pop! Inside the World of Japanese Popular Culture*, ed. Timothy J. Craig (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2000), 262.

²⁹⁸ I owe this plot of *Astro Boy* to Jeff Yang, Dina Gan, and Terry Hong, *Eastern Standard Time: A Guide To Asian Influence on American Culture from Astro Boy to Zen Buddhism* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 65–66.

regular boy, while simultaneously developing powers to save humanity from evil robots. Some sort of a combination of Pinocchio and Frankenstein, Astro Boy is however neither a lying boy nor a harmful monster, but a good boy-robot who becomes a savior of the world. Another outstanding example of Japanese cute, good robots is the plump cat protagonist of the *Doraemon* comic series, started in 1969 by Fujiko Fujii (*manga* artist duo consisting of Hiroshi Fujimoto and Motoo Abiko). Doraemon is an intelligent robotic cat sent to earth from the twenty-second-century future to help a clumsy schoolboy named Nobita. The cat-robot not only helps Nobita with schoolwork, but also becomes something of a life mentor for the boy. Their adventures teach a young audience to respect others and the environment.

A central aesthetic in Japanimation—and also more broadly in contemporary Japanese consumer culture—is *kawaii* (“cute”). *Kawaii* is a modern Japanese expression that emerged in the late 1960s among schoolgirls and by 1992 became “the most widely used, widely loved, habitual word in modern living Japanese.”²⁹⁹ Although it is translated into English as “cute” and “childlike,” *kawaii* refers to a much more complicated aesthetic: the so-called *kawaii* cult or syndrome was a phenomenon among Japanese youth that celebrated “sweet, adorable, innocent, pure, simple, genuine, gentle, vulnerable, weak, and inexperienced social behavior and physical appearances,” as Sharon Kinsella, the first Western scholar to examine the phenomenon, defines it.³⁰⁰ Extremely popular in 1980s Japan were girly or tomboyish clothes with frills and ribbons, baby foods and sweet desserts like ice cream, cakes, and milk drinks, and teen idol stars.

²⁹⁹ *CREA* (November 1992), 59, cited in Sharon Kinsella, “Cuties in Japan,” in *Women, Media, and Consumption in Japan*, ed. Lise Skov and Brian Moeran (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 220–221.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 220.

For example, Seiko Matsuda (b. 1962) is a living icon of *kawaii*, who began her long musical career as an *idoru kashu* (“idol singer”) of the new musical genre “J-pop” in the ‘80s.³⁰¹ The term “J-pop” was created by the media to distinguish the unique Japanese idol pop music from foreign music (it later inspired the development of K-pop, or South Korean pop music, in the ‘90s). “Matsuda was flat-chested and bow-legged,” describes Sharon Kinsella. “On TV she wore children’s clothes, took faltering steps and blushed, cried, and giggled for the camera. ... She published several books for her fans, filled with large wobbly handwriting, small words and ‘heart-warming’ poems.”³⁰² The cute J-pop princess performed a fragile, sentimental and pitiful young girl reminiscent of *shojo manga* (“girls comics”) heroines. And viewed in retrospect, her persona exemplifies the sentimental feminine Japanese *kawaii* in the 1980s before it evolved into a more cool, quirky and kitschy cultural style. As Kinsella traces *kawaii*’s evolution: “It gradually evolved from the serious, infantile, pink, romanticism of the early 1980s to a more humorous, kitsch, androgynous style which lingered on into the early 1990s.”³⁰³

The *kawaii* phenomenon’s international icon is Hello Kitty.³⁰⁴ In 1974, in response to the cute handwriting craze among schoolgirls, the developing stationery company Sanrio created a white, pink-ribboned bobtail cat character. Hello Kitty became the prototype for character merchandising in Japan, which is now a huge transnational industry and represents the full

³⁰¹ From 1986 to 2002, Matsuda recorded J-pop songs in English in an attempt to target a global market. “The Right Combination,” a duet with Donnie Wahlberg, a member of American boy band New Kids on the Block, ranked 54 on Billboard Top 100 in 1990 (no. 2 in Canada and no. 11 in Australia).

³⁰² Kinsella, “Cuties in Japan,” 235.

³⁰³ Ibid., 220.

³⁰⁴ See Christine R. Yano, *Pink Globalization: Hello Kitty’s Trek across the Pacific* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2013).

commodification of the *kawaii* sentiment into the quirky-cute kitsch consumer culture. The most luxurious example of this would be Japanese pop artist Takashi Murakami and French luxury brand Louis Vuitton's collaborated collections of fashion accessories, launched in 2003 and 2007. Famous for blurring the line between high and low art, Murakami developed the now famous "Superflat" art theory and style in 2000 and has also established his quirky-cute cartoon character Mr. DOB into a desirable fashion commodity, which was used to "re-interpret" the Louis Vuitton logo in the collaborations (Murakami's work will be discussed further later).

Mori grew up in Tokyo in the 1980s, the peak decade of the *kawaii* phenomenon in Japan. She was a product of the postmodern capitalist Japanese culture and a part of the wealthiest generation in Japan's history known as *shinjinrui* generation ("new human race") of the 1980s. Mori's work as an artist and designer is clearly rooted in the postindustrial Japanese culture and society, and this was already exhibited in her earliest key work, *Market Value* of 1991, for example. Printed in the London-based art magazine *Artforum*'s May 1992 issue, the full-length photograph features the artist advertised as a glamorous object for consumption. Mori is dressed in a revealing tight outfit. Her measurements—Height 5'7, Bust 32, Waist 23 ½, Hips 34 ½, Shoes 5/24 ½, Hair Black, Eyes Brown—are listed in the corner of the photograph in both English and French.

Mori was not only performing a target consumer of the popular culture being a teenage schoolgirl, but she was also an "insider" of the industry actually working as a model. And her work as an artist expresses her fascination with and understanding of the J-pop cuteness and its industry. Particularly, she played with the J-pop *idoru kashu* phenomenon in her 1995 production *Birth of a Star*. Now in the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, *Birth of a Star* is a 3-D photograph accompanying a music composed by Mori. In the life-sized

photograph, the artist appears as a cyborg version of a cutesy J-pop idol, with plastic legs and empty eyes. Thus Mori has co-opted the J-pop music and fashion at its peak of popularity both locally and internationally to make art. It is as if she is simulating her stardom in the art world by transforming herself into a J-pop star. It is also important to note that Mori's concept for this photograph predated the debut of Kyoko Date, the world's first computer-generated pop singer or "cyber idol," manufactured in 1997 by Japanese HoriPro.

Furthermore, in 1998-1999, Mori collaborated with the magazine *Parkett* to manufacture and sell 99 special editions of *Star Doll*, a 26cm-high doll designed based on her image in the *Birth of a Star* photograph. Wearing replicas of the same headphone, microphone, cropped leather top with plastic shoulder pads, and punk-inspired miniskirt with Scottish check patterns, the doll is now sold for \$70,000 on eBay (as of April 2013). This production of Mori dolls demonstrates the artist's serious background/involvement in the consumer culture industry. Not only does she play with Japanese pop icons such as *idoru kashu* and Japanimation characters, but she would also very much like to become one and she has in fact become one—the art world's "cutest diva," as *Frieze* art critic Christian Hays exclaimed (quoted in the beginning of the chapter) upon visiting her New York gallery debut show in 1995.

Debuted in New York the same year, Mori and *Sailor Moon* share some resemblances that reveal the time and the trend. Both represent a peculiar kind of *kawaii* associated with the Japanese *shojo* ("girls") culture particularly during its risky hybridization of romantic girliness and seductive sexiness. The *kawaii* syndrome began as a subculture among Japanese schoolgirls engrossed in *shojo manga*, a genre of *manga* marketed to a young female audience, developed during the 1970s' influx of female *manga* artists and writers. This was when what are known as the three major *kawaii* characteristics of the *shojo manga* style were established: the heroines'

huge sparkly eyes filled with stars and glittering dots, blooming flowers, and the infantilization of the female body by covering breasts with ribbons, bows, and lace.³⁰⁵ However, the innocent, wide-eyed girls in *shojo manga* have since undergone sexy makeovers. In the late '70s, *shonen manga*, marketed to a male audience, began to borrow from *shojo manga* and combine the cute, large-eyes with a sexy, voluptuous body for the girlfriends of leading action heroes.³⁰⁶ The combination of “cute” and “sexy” would then become the idealized female figure in both *shojo* and *shonen* comics and animations, a celebrated example being *Sailor Moon*. This would also become a new kind of transnational stereotype for Japanese and in general Asian women, which is seen to be perpetuating the male gaze and male fantasy in mass cultural representations of women and femininities.

For this reason, Western feminist critics like Mary Grigsby have criticized *Sailor Moon* as superheroine meets Barbie: “Of the available traditional roles ascribed to women in Japan, the sexual playmate role is the most closely linked to Sailormoon [*sic*].”³⁰⁷ In the internationally popular animation series, *Sailor Moon* and her “Sailor Scouts” (her four other schoolgirl sidekicks) all look the same except for different hair color and slightly different hairstyles, as Grigsby notes. They are interchangeable each with large sparkly eyes of a Western doll, tiny waists and long legs of a *Sports Illustrated* cover model. In May 1998, Anne Allison surveyed over 300 U.S. fans of *Sailor Moon*. And her research revealed that the age of fans ranged from 9

³⁰⁵ Kanako Shiokawa, “Cute But Deadly: Women and Violence in Japanese Comics,” in *Themes and Issues in Asian Cartooning: Cute, Cheap, Mad, and Sexy*, ed. John A. Lent (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999), 101.

³⁰⁶ Shiokawa, “Cute But Deadly.”

³⁰⁷ Mary Grigsby, “Sailormoon: Manga (Comics) and Anime (Cartoon) Superheroine Meets Barbie: Global Entertainment Commodity Comes to the United States,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 32, no. 1 (Summer 1998): 72.

to 36 and one-third of them were male, though the content of the *manga* series is the adventures of five magical schoolgirls.³⁰⁸ Some feminist cultural critics interested in “good” versus “bad” representations of women condemned the pedophilic and pornographic desires encouraged by *Sailor Moon*, evidenced for example in the circulation of pirate videos in which the “Sailor Scouts” are raped or have sex with one another.³⁰⁹ This is not, however, an extraordinary phenomenon in Japan, where *otaku* (men obsessed with *anime* and *manga* especially with violent and erotic contents) is not a mere subculture but a mainstream culture (as will be further discussed later).

Similarly to Sailor Moon, Mariko Mori has also been accused of provoking Oriental eroticism in the audience. Reviewing Mori’s *Made in Japan* exhibition at Deitch in 1996, Richard Vine expressed his concern in an article for *Art in America*: “There will be those who accuse Mori of being too much of a tease, a high-tech geisha for the 21st century. Undeniably, she has gone to school on Japanese soft-core-porno comic books.”³¹⁰ The preeminent Japanese curator and critic Fumio Nanjo made a similar observation when he surmised that the major factor of Mori’s success was “a kind of exoticism that meets Western expectations of the Japanese.” He saw that the geisha-goddess was transformed into a robotic cyber-goddess.³¹¹

³⁰⁸ Anne Allison, “Can Popular Culture Go Global?: How Japanese ‘Scouts’ and ‘Rangers’ Fare in the U.S.,” in *A Century of Popular Culture in Japan*, ed. Douglas Slaymaker (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), 147.

³⁰⁹ Kim Eastham, “Moonstruck,” *Tokyo Journal* (July 1994): 16; cited in Grigsby, “Sailormoon: Manga (Comics) and Anime (Cartoon) Superheroine Meets Barbie,” 72.

³¹⁰ Richard Vine, “Mariko Mori at Deitch Projects and Other Venues,” *Art in America* 84 (September 1996): 107.

³¹¹ Quoted in Jieun Rhee, “From Goddess to Cyborg: Mariko Mori and Lee Bul,” *N. paradoxa* 14 (2004): 8. Rhee quotes from Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, “Visual Salvation in the 21st Century,” a conference paper presented in the panel “Creativity from Destruction: Japanese Pure Land Eschatology in its Social and Aesthetic Dimensions” at the Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting, San Diego, in March 2000.

Nanjo was surprised when Mori received the prestigious *Menzioni d'Onore* at the 47th Venice Biennale in 1997 for *Nirvana*. Mori exhibited two pieces in the Biennale—*Nirvana* (1997), a seven-minute 3-D video installation, in the Nordic Pavilion and the *Empty Dream* (1995) from the *Made in Japan* series in the Corderie.³¹²

In the 1997 Japanese Pavilion, Nanjo had curated Rei Naito, a female, Tokyo-based artist known for her serene, minimalist architectural installations associated with Zen philosophy. Considering the curator's preference, it seems that his skepticism arose from Mori's unrestrained use of her own image. "Mariko Mori, who was a fashion model before becoming an artist, certainly exploits both her beauty and her sexuality in these photographs," as Jonathan Wallis describes it.³¹³ In Mori's *Made in Japan* photographs, not only did the artist dress in a cute and sexy costume of a Japanese android, but she also posed like a fashion model, thus turning herself into an erotic object for the male gaze.

But a close observation of the photographs reveals that unlike the assumptions of the negative critiques, Mori was playing with stereotypes in much more complex and nuanced ways. As a former fashion model, not only was she aware of her beauty and sexuality and of the ways she can use them. But also suggested earlier, her costumes for the series, which *she* designed, were pastiches of Japanese pop culture signifiers that exhibit her deliberation and critical engagement with mass cultural images of Japanese women and the "made in Japan" consumer products. The below discussion of her engagements with feminisms and postmodernism would

³¹² See Marcia E. Vetrocq, "The 1997 Venice Biennale: A Space Odyssey," *Art in America* 85, no. 9 (September 1997): 66–77, 121.

³¹³ Wallis, "The Paradox of Mariko Mori's Women in Post-Bubble Japan," 5.

further reveal the complex and interesting layers of the *Made in Japan* series. Mori was not an ordinary eye candy or poster girl that she seemingly was.

4.2 **Mori, Feminism, and Postmodernism**

Mori's *Made in Japan* series not only considered the critical significance of a new Japanese culture industry, but also explored a new direction in postmodernist Western art on the threshold of a new millennium. In a review of her Deitch Projects show, Robert Mahoney critically examined three vogues in the contemporary art market relevant to the success of Mori's work.³¹⁴ The critic understood Mori as a fulfillment of a "union that art and fashion had been trying to consummate." Second, the artist's photographs had the look of "casual antiphotography," an increasingly popular style in art photography with an intended snapshot or vernacular aesthetic. Third, Mahoney suggested that Mori is among the new generation of third-wave feminist artists interested in deconstructing traditional feminine stereotypes by creating new "bad girl" images.

Mori has explained that her "cyborg" characters are metaphors of young Japanese women trapped in a high-tech but still traditionally sexist society. In an interview with Dike Blair, conducted shortly after the American Fine Arts solo show, Mori explained: "The women are cyborgs—there is the 'School Girl,' the 'Office Lady,' and the 'Prostitute.' I call them cyborgs to speak metaphorically of the woman's role in Japan—it's a kind of social comment."³¹⁵ In a 1998 interview with Kathryn Hixson, Mori further elaborated:

³¹⁴ Robert Mahoney, "Morimania: Welcome to the New Century," *Artnet Magazine* (April 1996). http://www.artnet.com/magazine_pre2000/features/mahoney/mahoney4-30-96.asp.

³¹⁵ Blair, "We've Got Twenty-Five Years: Interview with Mariko Mori."

Ten years ago I decided to leave my own country to get the freedom to do what I wanted to achieve in my life. The position of women in Japan wasn't accommodating my desire or ambition. When I returned to Tokyo after going to school abroad, these pictures . . . were my reaction to Japan after having opportunities in the West to pursue my ambitions. I found that I wanted to communicate some things about Japan, and these were my demonstration to that society, it was my personal reaction to Japan.³¹⁶

In the photograph *Tea Ceremony*, set in the financial district in Tokyo, Mori performs an “office lady” cyborg, serving tea or coffee to men, to reveal the gender hierarchy in the Japanese workplace. The “Office Lady,” widely called *o-eru* (O.L.) in Japan, was a new job category for young women in the 1980s—a phenomenon resulting from the rise of Japanese women's workforce participation. These women were considered modern and liberated enough to have careers in the male-dominated business world, but in reality they mostly served tea and made photocopies in an oppressively patriarchal work environment.

In photographs like *Red Light* and *Love Hotel*, Mori addresses another chronic social disorder—prostitution. Mori stated, “There's a popular kind of telephone club (*Telekura*) for older business men who wait in the small service office for a call from a high school girl.”³¹⁷ In Japan, teenage prostitution was not banned until 1999 and the *Telekura* “dating” services would distribute flyers to schoolgirls on the street.³¹⁸ The young girls who responded to the ads would go on dates with older men. Sex was exchanged for money. In *Love Hotel*, the man's suit jacket hanging on the wall indicates the schoolgirl's male partner, unseen in the photograph, is most likely a much older businessman paying her for sex.

³¹⁶ Kathryn Hixson, “Future Perfect: An Interview with Mariko Mori,” *New Art Examiner* 26 (January 1999): 45.

³¹⁷ Blair, “We've Got Twenty-Five Years: Interview with Mariko Mori.”

³¹⁸ Wallis, “The Paradox of Mariko Mori's Women in Post-Bubble Japan,” 9.

Remarkably, however, Mori's feminist view has received very little attention from Western art historians. This is most likely because her cyborg characters often appear "cute" and pleasing rather than "bad" to the male gaze. Mori portrays conventional female characters, the prostitute, the server, or the show window girl. And so critics like Robert Raczka described Mori's feminism as "postfeminism in which once abhorred roles are tweaked to create opportunities for female empowerment within the existing social order, or at least to expand the menu of choices about which one needn't feel *guilty*."³¹⁹

In a 2008 article "The Paradox of Mariko Mori's Women in Post-Bubble Japan," Jonathan Wallis carefully argues that Mori's feminism should be understood within a Japanese cultural and social context distinct from Western feminism, which emphasizes empowerment through revolt and aggression. Mori displays her understanding of the cultural differences in practicing and defining feminisms in an interview with *Interview* magazine in 1999,

I am interested in femininity that's soft and accepting but strong at the same time. Sometimes it's stronger to be passive. When you are aggressive, you don't receive anything; you can only receive by being soft, by listening. I know that people in the West think Eastern women are submissive, but I don't see it that way. I see it as a great feminine aspect. I'd like to achieve that myself.³²⁰

In a 2000 interview, Eleanor Heartney asked Mori for her definition of "feminism."

I don't quite know what feminism means today. The definition was clearer in the 60's and 70's, and I respect what was done at that time. Feminists of that time opened the door for my generation. But I don't believe that women have to stand against men, or prove that they are stronger or more powerful. I believe that they are different, that they do different things. . . . I certainly disagree with systems in

³¹⁹ Robert Raczka, "Mariko Mori: The Andy Warhol Museum," *New Art Examiner*, November 1998, 46.

³²⁰ Neville Wakefield, "Interview with Artist Mariko Mori," *Interview* (June 1999): 2. Quoted in Wallis, "The Paradox of Mariko Mori's Women in Post-Bubble Japan," 6.

Japan that restrict opportunities for women, but I don't want to repeat what was done in the '60s and '70s.³²¹

According to Wallis, Mori's response reflects a Japanese (rather than Western) perspective toward gender, as she "accepts socially assigned roles for women and men" and "approaches empowerment in art through acceptance and passivity."³²² This attitude is different, for example, from the so-called "girl power" feminism (a part of third-wave feminism) that was prominent in Western popular culture in the 1990s, which was embodied by "bad-girl" personalities like Madonna and the Spice Girls. Japanese feminist scholar Kanai Yoshiko has characterized the '80s generation as "post-feminists," who do not hesitate to express antifeminist politics and believe their generation is far from the '70s feminism; they would "dress themselves up to be pretty and cute and fear the smelly and the dirty; it is difficult therefore for them to share concerns based on the experience of the oppression of women, regarding the reality of an ageing society, childbirth and childbearing, or the environmental crisis."³²³ Although the Western third-wave feminism included reclaiming of femininities, the Japanese feminism appeared far more feminine, passive, and ironic.

Western art critics have often created a relationship between Mori and Cindy Sherman—among other performative photographers—as if the former is derivative of the latter, while both deal with postmodernist representations of women. Both artists perform photographically classic

³²¹ Eleanor Heartney, "Mariko Mori: In Search of Paradise Lost: Interview with Eleanor Heartney," *Art Press* 256 (April 2000): 40.

³²² Wallis, "The Paradox of Mariko Mori's Women in Post-Bubble Japan," 5–6. For more on Mori's feminism analyzed within a Japanese context, see Robert Fouser, "Mariko Mori: Avatar of A Feminine God," *Art/Text* 60 (April 1998): 34–36. Fouser uses the phrase "Yamanote feminism," referring to the wealthiest district of Tokyo.

³²³ Kanai Yoshiko, "Issues for Japanese Feminism," in *Voices from the Japanese Women's Movement*, ed. AMPO-Japan Asia Quarterly Review (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), 3–4; in Wallis, "The Paradox of Mariko Mori's Women in Post-Bubble Japan," 6.

imagery and narrative models drawn from popular culture.³²⁴ Reviewing Mori's first New York exhibition of the *Made in Japan* photographs in 1995, Roberta Smith described Mori's work for the *New York Times* as "combining aspects of Cindy Sherman and Jeff Wall."³²⁵ The aforementioned review for *Art in America* by Richard Vine (1996) suggested her practice be understood as "perhaps as an updated Cindy Sherman, without the deadly earnestness."³²⁶ And the Nordic Pavilion's catalog at the 1997 Venice Biennale stated that Mori's work is "something of an Oriental [*sic*] answer to artists such as Cindy Sherman or Matthew Barney."³²⁷

However, it is Japanimation rather than Western postmodern art that reveals more about Mori's imagery, fantasy, and practice of masquerade. Most notably, the masquerade figures prominently in many popular *anime* series, particularly in the *maho shojo* ("magical girls") genre represented by such classics such as *Cutey Honey* (1973–74, 1992–93), *Magical Princess Minky Momo* (1982–83, 1991–92), and *Sailor Moon* (1991–97). What distinguishes the Japanese superheroines from their Western equivalents is that they can transform into multiple secret identities, whereas the Western superheroes or superheroines have only one other secret identity, for example, from Clark Kent to Superman, from Bruce Wayne to Batman, and from Diana Prince to Wonder Woman.

The ability to transform into multiple personae is a central component of storyline development in Japanese fiction. In the *Cutey Honey* animation series, for example, the

³²⁴ For example, see Crimp, "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism."

³²⁵ Smith, "Art in Review: Mariko Mori."

³²⁶ Ibid. Vine, "Mariko Mori at Deitch Projects and Other Venues."

³²⁷ Jon-Ove Steihaug, "Naturally Artificial—A Pastoral in Five Parts," Nordic Pavilion catalogue, XLVII Venice Biennale, 1997; quoted in Fouser, "Mariko Mori: Avatar of A Feminine God," 36.

schoolgirl protagonist Honey Kisaragi can transform into seven different identities: sword-wielding “warrior of love” Cutey Honey (her primary “true identity”); motorcycle biker Hurricane Honey; rock star singer Misty Honey; flight attendant Idol Honey; camerawoman and reporter Flash Honey; and classy fashion model Fancy Honey.³²⁸ The story encourages the fantasy of a young female audience imagining adult social life as an exuberance of fancy jobs and magical personae. Importantly, the climax of each episode is the heroine’s transformation sequence. The heroine excites the curiosity of young male and female viewers by transforming into new personae fully naked. When Honey shouts “Honey Flash!” as she touches the red heart-shaped jewel of her magical necklace, the transformation begins. Her body floats into the air and spins in slow motion as her clothes are ripped off. Her firm, orange-sized breasts and ripe, curvilinear hips are revealed. The camera zooms in for a close-up before the character is clothed in the next, tight “Honey Flash” bodysuit.³²⁹

In *Sailor Moon*, arguably the epitome of the Japanese *maho shojo* genre, it takes a full 45 seconds for the 14-year-old Tsukino Usagi (“moon’s bunny”) to transform into the supernatural Sailor Moon.³³⁰ As the theme music plays, she undresses and then dresses again in slow motion. She dons a sailor bodysuit with a large red bow, followed by red knee-high boots, a pleated miniskirt, and jeweled headband. In each episode of the *anime* series, the morphing sequence appears not once, but five times, since all of her “Sailor Scouts” members go through a similar

³²⁸ In the original *manga* series by Go Nagai, however, Cutey Honey has only one other secret identity.

³²⁹ See a collection of the *Cutey Honey* transformation sequences on YouTube uploaded by “onthehalfshel”: *Cutey Honey Transformations 1*, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mWRC1pHI6c0&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

³³⁰ See *Sailor Moon*’s morphing sequences on YouTube uploaded by “danoogy”: *Sailor Moon Transformations [HQ]*, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsX0VHMw_Z8&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

yet shorter metamorphosis. Like *Cutey Honey* and many other popular Japanese cartoons, *Sailor Moon* has encouraged various spin-offs and meta-series. Sailor Moon has become the cute android *par excellence*.

Mori's practice of costuming is also closely related to the Japanese subcultural activity of *cosplay* ("costume play"), a hyperreal custom originated from Japanese *manga* and *anime*. *Cosplay* participants dress up as fictional characters from *manga*, *anime*, and video games. It should be noted here that Mori introduced *cosplay* to the art world before it gained global awareness and popularity beyond Japan. Only after the 2000s have *cosplay* festivals and Japanese comics conventions become commonplace in many cosmopolitan cities of the world like New York, Chicago, Paris, and London. *Cosplayers: The Movie*, released in 2009 by Martell Brothers Studios, notes "There are over 90,000 registered members of cosplay.com."³³¹ The same year, the *New York Times* reported that thousands of teenagers showed up for the 2009 New York Anime Festival (hosted annually since 2007), "dressed in the style of their favorite Japanese animated cartoon characters."³³²

In the *Made in Japan* series, Mori appears to have created her own *manga/anime* series in which she transforms from one *kawaii* cyborg after another. She creatively appropriated and explored Japanese subculture long before it became a cosmopolitan trend. The exotic new

³³¹ The movie was released for free viewing on YouTube and Crunchyroll. Watch it on *Cosplayers: The Movie (Video Documentary About Anime Fandom)* (Martell Brothers Studios, 2010), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZvD1wzIOJtA&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

³³² Bill Cunningham and Simone S. Oliver, "On the Street: Animated," *New York Times*, October 3, 2009, <http://video.nytimes.com/video/2009/10/03/style/1247464976097/on-the-street-animated.html>. For more on the Festival, see George Gene Gustines, "New York Anime Festival," *New York Times*, December 7, 2007, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9904E3D7133BF934A35751C1A9619C8B63&scp=4&sq=cosplay&st=nyt>.

aesthetic is probably what added an appeal to her photographs when presented in international art exhibitions in the late 1990s.

4.3 Shifting Images of Global Japan

In the West, Mori's work has barely been explored in depth in relation to Japanese pop culture, but in Japan she is not considered a Japanese artist. Despite her celebrity in Western art metropolises, she has long been estranged from the Japanese art scene, because of the lightweight pop imagery of her work, as discussed above, and also because she is a female artist and an artist educated abroad in London and in New York. Thus, what emerges here is a double-discrepancy between the worlds of art and pop culture and between Japan and the West—yet further intertwined with problems of gender and sexuality. (The chauvinism of the mainstream Japanese art scene is reflected in previous chapters of this dissertation: Yoko Ono and Yayoi Kusama have both vocally denounced its discriminatory practices. I have also discussed earlier in this chapter how the influential art critics like Fumio Nanjo and Richard Vine suspiciously viewed Mori's work for exploiting her beauty and sexuality, denouncing the blatant commercialism of her artistic practice).

I now turn to demonstrate how and why Mori has been largely ignored in international discourses on Japanese Pop Art, while she was the first Japanese artist to gain visibility in the West by deploying the visual language of *manga*, *anime*, and the *kawaii* aesthetic. The above discussion on the relation between Mori's work/persona and Japanimation suggested that the artist was an early adopter of J-pop culture elements. Below I provide a historical examination of the Japanese art trends that have shifted rapidly; this trending correlates with the dynamics of the globalization in Japanese popular culture. I trace the evolution of a global Japanese image

from a techno-power in the 1980s, to a cute-Japan in the late-1990s, and then to a cool-Japan in the early 2000s. Each phase is epitomized by the three personae who represent “contemporary Japanese art” in Western art history—Yasumasa Morimura, Mariko Mori, and Takashi Murakami—respectively. By tracing these symbolic figures and images, we can make visible the otherwise invisible missing points in recent art history, reclaim Mori as a major Japanese Pop artist, and address the fickle trending in contemporary art and culture system. I also hope to show that the reception of these Japanese artists in the West has been influenced by the national image of Japan.

4.3.1 Techno-Japan and Yasumasa Morimura

In 1972, the Japanese government established the Japan Foundation, an institution devoted to international dissemination of Japanese culture. The success of the effort to conquer a global cultural market was visible by the mid-1980s. The Japan Foundation organized exhibitions of modern and contemporary Japanese art in major museums in the United States and Europe.³³³ A primary example of the expansion of Japanese art is the exhibition *A Cabinet of Signs: Postmodern Art from Contemporary Japan* curated by Richard Francis at Tate Liverpool in 1991. Francis was one of the eight British curators who had been invited by the Japan Foundation in 1983 to study both new and traditional Japanese art. The exhibition featured

³³³ The examples include: “Reconstructions: Avantgarde Art in Japan 1945-1965” (1985) organized by the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, and the Japan Foundation; “Japan des Avants Gardes 1910-1980” (1986-87) organized by the Centre Georges Pompidou and The Japan Foundation; “Gutai: Japanese Avantgarde 1954-1965” (1991) organized by Darmstadt and the Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Modern Art; “Japanische Kunst der 80er Jahre” (1990) organized by the Frankfurter Kunstverein; “A Cabinet of Signs: Postmodern Art from Contemporary Japan” (1991-92) organized by the Tate Gallery, Liverpool; “Against Nature: Japanese Art in the Eighties” (1989-90) organized by the Grey Art gallery and Study Center, New York University, the List Visual Arts Center of MIT, and the Japan Foundation; and “A Primal Spirit: Ten Contemporary Japanese Sculptors” (1990) organized by the Los Angeles Country Museum of Art in association with the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo. I extract this information from Alexandra Munroe, “Wandering Position: Conceptual Art in the Post-Hirohito Era,” *Flash Art* 25, no. 163 (April 1992): 74n1.

Japanese new-media artists Yasumasa Morimura, Emiko Kasahara, Kosugi+Ando, Tatsuo Miyajima, Hitoshi Nomura, Shinro Ohtake, and Hiroshi Sugimoto, all concerned with expressing the postmodern metropolitan experience of contemporary Japan. Francis proclaimed in his *Selectors' Note* that “Their confidence reflects the extraordinary vitality of Japanese culture and its congruent economic emergence during the last forty years.”³³⁴

Japanese appropriation artist Yasumasa Morimura was the biggest star to emerge from the Tate Liverpool exhibition. With the *Daughter of Art History* series (started in 1985), he became the first contemporary Japanese artist to gain both critical attention and ample media exposure in the West. In the photographs, Morimura inserted his own face and/or body into iconic images from Western art history, such as paintings by Leonardo da Vinci, Diego Velázquez, Rembrandt van Rijn, Vincent van Gogh, Édouard Manet, and Frida Kahlo. In the beginning, he restaged the masterpieces and performed the role of the original subjects, but later he would also use the then new digital technology to cut and paste photographs, making the simulation more seamless. Morimura deliberately selected nineteenth-century European paintings that were popular among the Japanese. For the Tate Liverpool exhibition, he also appropriated six Victorian paintings from the museum collection.

Morimura has explained that in the *Daughter of Art History* series he wanted to express his crisis of identity as a Japanese artist due to the Westernization of Japanese art and culture:

Both in knowledge and technique, the art education I received [in Japan] was based in the Western tradition. Thus, despite being Japanese, it's little wonder that I've chosen to focus thematically on Western art history in my own artistic endeavors. . . . If anything, the resulting mental state is distorted, disturbing, and strange.³³⁵

³³⁴ Richard Francis and Fumio Nanjo, “Selectors’ Note,” in Richard Francis et al., *A Cabinet of Signs: Contemporary Art from Post-Modern Japan* (Liverpool: Tate Gallery Liverpool, 1991), 6.

³³⁵ Yasumasa Morimura, *Daughter of Art History: Photographs by Yasumasa Morimura*, Foreword by Donald Kuspit (New York: Aperture, 2003), 113.

He decided to embody a Western influence that had become inextricable from his psychological make-up.³³⁶ By substituting his face for the subject in Western art masterpieces, he expressed the Japanese yearning for Western art and culture evident in Japan at the time and thus raised questions about the hegemony of Western culture within Japan. The critique was especially poignant, at a time when the Japanese were rapidly ascending as important players in European tourism and also in the Western culture industry, for example, buying out Impressionist paintings and major production companies in Hollywood.

After World War II, Japan quickly recovered from the devastations and gained the phrase “economic miracle” as early as 1962.³³⁷ Through the 1970s and 1980s, Japan’s industrial productivity increased at the fastest rates in the world.³³⁸ By the end of the 1980s, Japan had become the world’s second largest economy (after the United States) and had joined the ranks of developed nations. In 1986, Sony’s cofounder and former chairman Akio Morita published a book proudly titled *Made in Japan* (It was the same title as Mori’s solo show at Tokyo’s Shiseido Gallery in 1995 and at New York’s Deitch Projects in 1996). In this autobiographical

³³⁶ Ibid., 114. For more on the *Daughter of Art History* series, see Junichi Shioda, Yoko Hayashi, and Akio Obigane, *Morimura Yasumasa: Self-Portrait as Art History* (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1998). Morimura, *Daughter of Art History*. Joonsung Yoon, “Seeing His Own Absence: Culture and Gender in Yasumasa Morimura’s Photographic Self-Portraits,” *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 1, no. 3 (November 2002): 162–169.

³³⁷ In 1962 the British magazine *Economist* ran a feature story on Japan’s postwar “economic miracle.” Cited in Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*, 2nd ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 24. From 1950 to the 1973 oil crisis, Japan’s GNP expanded by an average annual rate of more than 10 percent, which was an unprecedented record in world history (This record remained unique until the economy of the People’s Republic of China grew with the comparable speed in the 1980s). Ibid., 243–244. After the oil crisis, Japanese economy once again rapidly recuperated, while the former world powers such as the United States and Western European countries continued to struggle at least through the early 1980s with problems like inflation and unemployment.

³³⁸ Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 297. On this point, Gordon refers to Ronald Dore, *Stock Market Capitalism, Welfare Capitalism: Japan and Germany versus the Anglo Saxons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 225. Through the 1970s and 1980s, Japanese economy grew with average annual rates of GNP growth ranging from 4 to 5%.

book, Morita traces the development of Sony from Japan's first tape recorder, the 1946 Type-G, to a transnational conglomerate:

In 1953, "Made in Japan" was regarded as meaning very cheap, poor quality. When we started up our exports, the regulations said we had to put "Made in Japan" on them. But we were ashamed, so we made the label as small as possible. Later, when we announced that we intended to build factories in the US and Britain to make televisions, we saw a very odd reaction. Our customers preferred to buy Sony television sets labeled "Made in Japan."³³⁹

By the early 1980s, the American perception of "Made in Japan" products had significantly changed. In 1983, the *New York Times* article titled "Hard-Hit Sony Girds for a Fight in the American Electronics Market" reported the shift from "the code phrase for shoddy merchandise that it was in the '50s" to "the seal of distinction that it is today."³⁴⁰ The Sony company and the phrase "Made in Japan" epitomized the nation's ability to make high-quality products such as Betamax videocassette tape recorders, Walkman portable radios, and Trinitron color television sets.

In the 1970s, Japanese electronics companies like Sony and Matsushita (also known as Panasonic) competed with U.S. companies for the development of audiovisual products, but eventually emerged as victors. Japanese companies "invaded" Hollywood also: Sony purchased Columbia Pictures in 1989 and Matsushita purchased MCA (Universal Pictures) in 1990, only to resell it to Canada's Seagram five years later. It was around the same time that a Japanese businessman made world news by purchasing Vincent van Gogh's *Portrait of Dr. Gachet* and Pierre-Auguste Renoir's *Bal du Moulin de la Galette* for the sum of 160 million dollars—the

³³⁹ Quoted in Yang, Gan, and Hong, *Eastern Standard Time*, 309.

³⁴⁰ Steve Lohr, "Hard-Hit Sony Girds for a Fight in the American Electronics Market," *New York Times*, August 14, 1983, sec. Business, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.cc.uic.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/122096101/abstract/13BA6768F529BD9EDF/1?accountid=14552>.

sixth and the eighth most expensive paintings ever purchased (as of December 2013). In the 1980s, the Japanese automobile industry, represented by companies like Toyota, Nissan, Mazda, and Subaru, also expanded significantly in the international market, threatening American national pride in the automobile industry.³⁴¹ On the videogame market as well, Japan's Nintendo succeeded in "supplanting America's indigenous production."³⁴²

Around the same time, what David Morley and Kevin Robins have defined as Techno-Orientalism emerged in the West. In their 1995 book *Spaces of Identity*, Morley and Robins declared Japan an electronic landscape:

Japan has become synonymous with the technologies of the future – with screens, networks, cybernetics, robotics, artificial intelligence, simulation. . . . If the future is technological, and if technology has become "Japanised," then the syllogism would suggest that the future is now Japanese, too. The postmodern era will be the Pacific era. Japan is the future, and it is a future that seems to be transcending and displacing Western modernity.³⁴³

According to Morley and Robins, the economic rise of Japan threatened a Western identity long based on the modernist binary of Self versus Other, East versus West, and modern versus traditional. Techno-Orientalism was thus an "Orientalism in reverse," restructuring power relations between the Orient and the West.³⁴⁴

³⁴¹ A noteworthy incident in this regard is the murder of Vincent Chin in 1982 in Detroit. A Chrysler employee attacked the Chinese American with a baseball bat supposedly over the loss of American automobile manufacturing jobs to the Japanese. See Christine Choy and Renee Tajima-Pena, *Who Killed Vincent Chin?*, Documentary, 1987.

³⁴² Joe Wezorek, "Japanese Dominance of the Video-Game Industry and the Future of Interactive Media," in *The Japanification of Children's Popular Culture*, ed. Mark I. West (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 91. Warner Communications' mismanagement of Atari in the mid-1980s bankrupted the American game industry and created a void that was filled by Nintendo. But Wezorek's historical approach to the game products credits Japan's skills in producing the games that continuously fulfills a need in America.

³⁴³ David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries* (London: Routledge, 1995), 168.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 164.

Concern for the rising power of Japan is reflected in recent portrayals of Japan and the Japanese in science-fiction, for example in the film *Blade Runner* (1982) directed by Ridley Scott, the comic series *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* created by Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird (1984), and William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer* (1984):

Within the political and cultural unconscious of the West, Japan has come to exist as the figure of empty and dehumanized technological power. It represents the alienated and dystopian image of capitalist progress. This provokes both resentment and envy. The Japanese are unfeeling aliens; they are cyborgs and replicants. But there is also the sense that these mutants are now better adapted to survive in the future.³⁴⁵

In the cyberpunk classics *Blade Runner* and *Neuromancer*, Japan is portrayed as a post-industrial dystopia where high-tech machines have escaped the control of their human creators.

Therefore, in the early 1990s, the Western art critics perceived Morimura's *Daughter of Art History* series differently than the artist had intended. The photographs were very popular, but at the same time, the presence of the artist's male Japanese body in the photographs loomed as a reminder of Japanese encroachment on the Western market. As Gilda Williams points out,

At a time when the Japanese were buying van Gogh's *Sunflowers* and the image rights to the Sistine Chapel, Morimura's pictures were a commentary on Western fear of the then emerging Far Eastern economic might. The unspoken anxiety was that Western culture was not only being admired and supported, but co-opted, corrupted and possessed.³⁴⁶

The reception of Morimura in the West was thus closely related to the changing landscapes of the world politics and economics.

In the spring of 1992, *Flash Art* magazine invited critics and scholars to contribute to a special issue "Japan Today." In the opening essay on contemporary art in Japan, Alexandra

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 170.

³⁴⁶ Gilda Williams, "What Are You Looking At?," *Tate Etc.*, no. 2 (Autumn 2004): n.p., <http://www.tate.org.uk/tateetc/issue2/whatareyoulookingat.htm>.

Munroe declared: “The Asian Century is imminent, and Japan is leading it. Japan’s economy, now the world’s second most powerful, may one day soon eclipse that of the U.S.”³⁴⁷ Francesco Bonami’s essay “Yasumasa Morimura: Double Exposure” begins with an observation of the recently visible Japanese economic might:

A century ago, the ancestors of Hiroshi Yamaguchi, president of Nintendo Company Ltd., were selling karuta, a particular type of playing card decorated with seasonal flowers and very popular among the Japanese elite as a gambling pastime. Today, video games such as “Super Mario Brothers” have taken the West by storm, and Yamaguchi is intent on buying a Seattle baseball team despite the fact that he has never so much as been to a game before. As far as Japan is concerned, the most efficient way to mold its own roots onto Western culture, capture it, and perfect its needs is by appropriating its more patent expressions and colonizing itself therein, all in the name of an Asian tradition which they only apparently renounce.³⁴⁸

An implicit assumption in this essay is that Japan has evolved under Western influence and thus is still derivative and imitative of modern Western culture and society. By strictly distinguishing the West versus the East and also the “old” Japan versus the “new” Japan, Bonami argues that “Morimura could easily drift in one of two directions: an investigation into the artificial culture that has given him unnatural needs, or he could yield to a nostalgic search for the origins his generation has abandoned.”³⁴⁹ Instead, the artist employs a “hybrid metamorphosis”—his photographs create a parallel between the two traditionally colliding cultures.³⁵⁰ Thus, even in

³⁴⁷ Munroe, “Wandering Position,” 74. According to the brief biography at the end of the essay, Munroe at the time was an independent curator and was also organizing an exhibition of Japanese avant-garde art for the Yokohama Museum of Art.

³⁴⁸ Francesco Bonami, “Yasumasa Morimura: Double Exposure,” *Flash Art* 25, no. 163 (April 1992): 82.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 83.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

art criticism, Techno-Orientalism was evident and influenced the general perception of Japan, the Japanese artist, and his artwork.

4.3.2 Cute-Japan and Mariko Mori

The second phase of Japan's image in contemporary Western discourses is characterized by the focus on cuteness resulting from the transnational rise of Japanimation, and as we have observed above, Mori captures the epitome of that phase. However, below I also argue that she is absent in the discourse: Japanese art critics and curators together promoted Japanese male artists who were associated more with "cool" than with "cute" within the multifarious *kawaii* phenomenon. Notably, the aforementioned *Flash Art*'s special issue on contemporary Japan was the first time an English-written art magazine addressed the Japanese *kawaii* commodity culture in depth, but the emphasis was placed heavily on male artists such as Morimura, Murakami, Yukinori Yanagi (b. 1959), and Taro Chiezo (b. 1962). The influential Japanese art critic Noi Sawaragi applauded Murakami and Chiezo as emerging avant-garde artists who make "self-critical" art, that is, concept-based installation works that employ "cute" mundane objects for the purpose of critique.³⁵¹ In Murakami's earliest major work, *Randoseru Project* (1991), the artist recreated the Japanese children's uniform backpacks *randoseru* (the design of which is the same as military backpacks) from exotic animal skins, thus transforming them into luxury goods that would be also hung on a commercial gallery wall. In a similar move, Chiezo's seminal *Post Human Piece at Street of Tokyo* (1991) consists of toy truck engines covered with frilly *kawaii*-

³⁵¹ Noi Sawaragi and Fumio Nanjo, "Dangerously Cute: Noi Sawaragi and Fumio Nanjo Discuss Contemporary Japanese Culture," *Flash Art* 25, no. 163 (April 1992): 77. In the following essay, however, Dana Friis-Hansen argues that these same artists were working within the distinctively Japanese modern paradigms of *shinjinrui* or *otaku*, being less strategically critical of the commodity culture than American or European postmodern artists of the 1980s. Dana Friis-Hansen, "Empire of Goods: Young Japanese Artists and the Commodity Culture," *Flash Art* 25, no. 163 (April 1992): 78–81.

style dresses for girls. As such, both Chiezo's dress-covered trucks and Murakami's randoseru juxtapose Japanese militarism with contemporary *otaku* and *kawaii* syndromes. And their take on the *kawaii* fashion is much more masculine than Mori's.

Female Japanese pop artists addressed the '90s *kawaii* culture from a distinctively "pink" and girly perspective. *The Pinku House* (1991) created by Minako Nishiyama (b. 1965) is a bedroom decorated with curtains and wallpapers full of pink hearts and frills. Mori's earliest installation, *Snow White* (1993), is another important example of the female gaze of Japanese popular and consumer culture. *Snow White* is a glass coffin that contains cosmetics products, neatly arranged according to colors of beige, pink, red, and black, and the trappings of beauty were juxtaposed with a sobering reminder of death; a black-and-white photograph of the artist in an ornate white frame hung on the wall. Both artists portray the overwhelming excessiveness of infantile cuteness in Japanese culture and society. Mori associates it with mortality (of her own), while Nishiyama evokes its morbidity.

The 1990s discourse of contemporary Japanese art reveals a problematic failure to include female artists. Not a single woman artist was promoted by the aforementioned *Flash Art*'s special issue on "Japan Today." Moreover, of the eight artists included in Tate Liverpool's *A Cabinet of Signs* exhibition, only one was a woman (Emiko Kasahara). The reason for this gender inequality in international representation of Japanese artists lies in the discrimination of larger social structures in Japan and the West. The courageous arguments of American feminist art historian Linda Nochlin in the 1971 essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" apply to the contemporary art scene of Japan: the social expectations for women in Japan were radically different from the expectations for men, and women were not given equal opportunities to pursue an education in art and were often ignored by critics and the press.

The 1990s still signaled a change in the traditionally male-dominated art world, however. Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929) was chosen as the first woman artist to represent Japan at the Venice Biennale in 1993. Miwa Yanagi (b. 1967) also gained critical acclaim on the international art scene as a feminist Japanese artist. In her seminal series *Elevator Girls* (1994–99), Yanagi critiqued Japanese homogenization of femininity by simulating typical or imagined situations where hired women perform as elevator girls. Dressed in department store uniforms, the young elevator girls appeared like mannequins, similar to the cyborg characters that Mori portrays in her *Made in Japan* photographs.³⁵²

The shift of Japan's image in the 1990s was due to the growing international popularity of Japanese culture. Japanese exports in the 1980s focused on automobiles and electronics, but in the 1990s Japanese popular culture emerged as a major contender for export. Japanese cultural critic Koichi Iwabuchi notes that Japanimation (a neologism in the 1980s to distinguish Japanese comics, animations, and videogames) became an essential element in “the discursive construction of Japanese national identity.”³⁵³ The phenomenal success of the 1989 sci-fi animated Japanese blockbuster hit *Akira* (1989) in the United States began to attract unprecedented international academic and media attention to Japanese popular culture. And since then, Iwabuchi argues, “the focus of Japanese interest in its global cultural power has gradually shifted from the sophistication of its technologies to the appeal of its original cultural

³⁵² For more on Miwa Yanagi, see Miwa Yanagi, *Miwa Yanagi*, English language ed. (Kyoto: Tankōsha, 2009).

³⁵³ Koichi Iwabuchi, “‘Soft’ Nationalism and Narcissism: Japanese Popular Culture Goes Global,” *Asian Studies Review* 26 (December 2002): 451. Iwabuchi's main argument in this article is that the progress of globalization of Japanese popular cultural products has only revealed that keeping Japanese animation industry “Japanese” was impossible and ironic because the exports became more “odorless” or *mukokuseki* (non-national). He argues that “the complexities and contradictions imbricated in transnational cultural flows are discounted in Japan's soft nationalism and narcissism, the project of articulating a distinct Japanese cultural excellence in the transnational consumption of Japanese popular culture.”

products,” which he describes as a shift from “techno-nationalism” to “soft nationalism.”³⁵⁴

Once *anime* and *manga* found an international audience, Japan began to use them in the branding of the nation both inside and outside the country. In the early 1990s, reports on the popularity and success of Japanimation in the United States and Europe flooded the Japanese press and renewed a sense of pride in the nation during the economic recession.

Iwabuchi’s notion of Japan’s “soft nationalism” is closely related to the concept of “soft power” developed by political scientist Joseph Nye in such works as *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nation of American Power* (1990) and *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (2004). “What is soft power?” questions Nye. “It is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments.”³⁵⁵ In contrast with traditional forms of power such as military force, soft power arises from the appeal of a country’s culture, foreign policies and political values in international politics. Nye argues that the United States has been able to achieve a global hegemony through its “soft co-optic power,” that is, the power of “getting others to want what you want” through symbolic power resources such as culture and media.³⁵⁶ During the Cold War, the U.S. government disseminated Disney animations, Hollywood movies, jazz music, and Abstract Expressionist art in countries that were seen as vulnerable to Communism. The enticing consumer culture products evoked American freedom and affluence, and the spread of American culture contributed to a popularization of inherent American ideology.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, 1st ed. (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), x.

³⁵⁶ Joseph S. Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), 188.

In his 1990 book, Nye contends that Japan, despite global economic power and mass dissemination of consumer commodities, has yet to appeal to a broader set of values comparable to the influence of American media and consumer culture.³⁵⁷ Japanese audiovisual exports, Iwabuchi derides, are “culturally odorless.”³⁵⁸ Unlike the international success of McDonald’s due to its association with a modern American lifestyle, “the use of the Walkman does not evoke images or ideas of a Japanese lifestyle, even if consumers know it is made in Japan and appreciate ‘Japaneseness’ in terms of its sophisticated technology.”³⁵⁹ Other scholars like Mike Featherstone (1995) and C. J. Wan-Ling Wee (1997), writing in the mid-1990s about the globalization of Japan, similarly remarked that Japanese consumer goods lacked an idea of Japan and failed to sell a Japanese way of life.³⁶⁰

However, the situation changed drastically in the mid-1990s when, due to phenomenal transnational fame and popularity, Japanimation became synonymously associated with a distinctive “Japanese” style. This does not necessarily mean that Japanimation would automatically evoke the idea of a Japanese lifestyle. Instead, a peculiar, quirky cuteness branded Japanimation and other Japanese consumer commodities. Notably, from 1994 to 1995, Annalee Newitz surveyed American interest in Japanese animation and her findings reflected an exponential growth over the past six years among white teenagers and young adults, aged

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 194.

³⁵⁸ Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization*, 27.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 28.

³⁶⁰ Mike Featherstone, *Undoing Culture: Globalization, Postmodernism, and Identity* (London: Sage, 1995), 9. C. J. Wan-Ling Wee, “Buying Japan: Singapore, Japan, and an ‘East Asian’ Modernity,” *Journal of Pacific Asia* 4 (1997): 21–46. Both texts quoted in Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization*, 28.

between 15 and 25.³⁶¹ Newitz's study also shows that those American fans were attracted to a certain explicit Japaneseness in the various genres of Japanese animation, whether it was romantic comedy, horror, or science fiction. These Japanese products (and including Mori's persona in the international art world) were definitely not odorless; instead, they had strong Japanese odors.

4.3.3 Cool-Japan and Takashi Murakami

Japanese Pop Art partook in transforming Japan's image from "cute" to "cool." The art movement, as hinted earlier, emerged in the early 1990s, with male artists and critics as leading figures. Significantly, in March 1992, Noi Sawaragi (the aforementioned critic who championed Murakami's art as a critique on the *kawaii* syndrome) and Kiyoshi Kusumi, editor of the Japanese art magazine *Bijutsu Techo*, together coined the term "Neo Pop" in the magazine's special issue on that trend. In his essay entitled "Lollipop: That Smallest Form of Life," Sawaragi argued that Japanese Neo Pop (represented by artists like Murakami, Kenji Yanobe, and Noboru Tsubaki), similar to American Neo Geo, has the power to deconstruct the social system of representation through appropriation of the visual language of popular culture.³⁶²

The new nationalism resonates strongly in the Japanese discourse of contemporary Japanese art, particularly Japanese Pop Art. Alexandra Munroe explains,

The close of the Showa era in 1989 stimulated new public debate about the long-buried question of the culpability of the Japanese people in the perpetration of

³⁶¹ Annalee Newitz, "Magical Girls and Atomic Bomb Sperms: Japanese Animation in America," *Film Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (1995): 14n1, 14n4. She surveyed the fans found on the Internet and the University of California-Berkeley anime club.

³⁶² See Midori Matsui, "Murakami Matrix: Takashi Murakami's Instrumentalization of Japanese Postmodern Culture," in Takashi Murakami, Paul Schimmel, and Dick Hebdige, *Murakami*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007), 85.

atrocities and aggressions, committed under Emperor Hirohito's imperial command between 1931 and 1945. . . . The suppression of Japan's militarist past could no longer be sustained. Remarkably, those too young to have known the war firsthand, or to remember the devastation and impoverishment of the immediate postwar years, were fascinated by what the media unleashed after four decades of silencing discourse on Japanese militarism. Rather than continue the charade of shame and ignorance, younger Japanese dared to explore a new nationalism symbolized by Shintaro Ishihara, the popular but controversial governor of Tokyo who came to power in a landslide victory in 1999, advocating a stronger Japanese military against the protests of Japan's Asian neighbors.³⁶³

It was in the 1980s, the decade of "Japan as Number One," that a young generation of Japanese rediscovered a lost nationalism. This was the same generation that later witnessed the burst of the "bubble economy" and faced the hardships of an economic recession.

This complex relationship between a new Japanese nationalism and an awareness of global interest in Japanese culture is apparent in the multifarious work of Murakami. Above we briefly observed his earliest key installation *Randoseru Project* (1991) and his internationally famous collaborations with Louis Vuitton (2003 and 2007). He spent about a year between 1994 and 1995 in New York to participate in P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center's International Studio Program. After returning to Tokyo, he began to establish his own art style, theory, and enterprise that was similar to Andy Warhol's Factory, but one that was based on the Japanese phenomena of *anime* and *otaku*. It was as if he had learned in New York how to succeed as a Japanese artist in the global age and he must have also sensed that Japanimation was rapidly forming global fandom. His "Hello, You Are Alive: Tokyo Pop Manifesto" (1999) affirms:

The art world in the West is searching for the next new theory. This search has reached as far as Asia, a less-Westernized cultural sphere in which Japan, and its capital Tokyo, are receiving the most attention. . . . Postwar Japan was given life and nurtured by America. We were shown that the true meaning of life is meaninglessness, and were taught to live without thought. Our society and

³⁶³ Alexandra Munroe, "Introducing Little Boy," in *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture*, ed. Takashi Murakami (New York: Japan Society; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 254–255.

hierarchies were dismantled. We were forced into a system that does not produce “adults.” The collapse of the bubble economy was the predetermined outcome of a poker game that only America could win. Father America is now beginning to withdraw, and its child, Japan, is beginning to develop on its own. The growing Japan is burdened with a childish, irresponsible society; a system guaranteed to thwart the formation of super wealth; and a pervasive anti-professionalism.³⁶⁴

Murakami blames American domination of Japan for the infantilization of Japanese culture.

Influenced by childlike styles of *anime* and *manga*, his “Superflat” aesthetic intended to reclaim the infantilization of Japan and to transform the toy-obsessed culture into a unique national asset.

The “Tokyo Pop Manifesto” was developed into “The Super Flat Manifesto” and released in tandem with the *Superflat* group show of Japanese pop artists (including those managed by his company Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. such as Mr. and Chiho Aoshima). Murakami curated the show in 2000 at the Parco Gallery in Tokyo and Nagoya. He defines Superflat as “a sensibility that has continued to contribute to the construction of Japanese culture as a worldview.”³⁶⁵ He further argued that the Superflat sensibility, although originally Japanese, would soon become a global sensibility.

The problematic of the nationalistic and anti-American politics of Superflat (Tokyo Pop) has yet to be carefully examined in Western art criticism. In 2001 the *Superflat* exhibition opened at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles to fervent public enthusiasm. The audience poured in to see the pornographic *anime*-inspired images, such as the life-sized

³⁶⁴ Takashi Murakami, “Superflat Trilogy: Greetings, You Are Alive,” in *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan’s Exploding Subculture*, ed. Takashi Murakami (New York: Japan Society; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 152. The “Tokyo Pop Manifesto” was originally published as Takashi Murakami, “Hello, You Are Alive: Tokyo Pop Manifesto,” *Kokoku hiho* (“Advertisement Criticism”), no. 226 (April 1999): 60-69. *Kokoku hiho*’s “Tokyo Pop” special feature also included Noi Sawaragi’s “What is Tokyo Pop?” and Murakami and Yasumasa Morimura’s dialogue “Japanese art fluctuates between the Western idea of art and its domestic form.”

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 154–155. The “Super Flat Manifesto” was originally published in Takashi Murakami, *Supa Furatto = Super Flat* (Tokyo: Madorashuppan, 2000), 5.

installation of a blue-haired naked girl with gigantic lactating breasts.³⁶⁶ The show attracted nearly 100,000 visitors and travelled to Minneapolis's Walker Art Center and Seattle's Henry Art Gallery. And Murakami decided to ride his wave of success and develop the *Superflat* show into a trilogy: the second exhibition of the trilogy opened in 2002 at the Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain in Paris (*Coloriage*), and the grand finale was in 2005 at the Japan Society in New York (*Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture*). Alexandra Munroe, then director of the Japan Society Gallery, explained that the exhibition was conceived as the centerpiece of the institution's season of events that offer various perspectives on the global appeal and significance of Japan's popular culture.³⁶⁷ The Japan Society published a gigantic catalog, which included a historical anthology of Japanese *anime* and *manga*, focusing on action and science fiction genres, with detailed captions and color reproductions.³⁶⁸

The rise of Murakami in the West since 2000 coincides with Japan's "Cool Japan" nation-branding campaign. As American journalist Douglas McGray has argued in "Japan's Gross National Cool" (2002), the Japanese government, media, and industry collectively rested "in the purported expansiveness of its soft-power capital" to promote its "cool" youth pop culture in international politics and economics—a decision made due to its increasing popularity across the globe.³⁶⁹ The most official expression of the "Cool Japan" campaign can be found in the

³⁶⁶ See Michael Darling, "Plumbing the Depths of Superflatness," *Art Journal* 60, no. 3 (2001): 76–89.

³⁶⁷ Alexandra Munroe, "Acknowledgements," in Takashi Murakami, *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture* (New York: Japan Society, 2005), viii.

³⁶⁸ See Murakami, *Little Boy*.

³⁶⁹ Douglas McGray, "Japan's Gross National Cool," *Foreign Policy*, June 2002, 44–54. For more on the "Cool Japan" strategy, see Michal Daliot-Bul, "Japan Brand Strategy: The Taming of 'Cool Japan' and the Challenges of Cultural Planning in a Postmodern Age," *Social Science Japan Journal* 12, no. 2 (October 2009): 247–266. Also see the "Cool Japan: Media, Culture, Technology Research Project" website at MIT and Harvard: <http://web.mit.edu/cooljapan/about.html>.

government's use of popular Japanimation personae as cultural ambassadors. In March 2008, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced the robotic cat character Doraemon as the national "cartoon culture ambassador." And two months later, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism announced Hello Kitty as Japan's official ambassador of tourism to China and Hong Kong.³⁷⁰ In March 2009, the Japanese government even launched *kawaii taishi* ("Cute Ambassadors")—three female models (Misako Aoki, Yu Kimura, and Shizuka Fujioka), who appeared in Japanese global events representing, respectively, "Lolita," "Harajuku," and a uniformed schoolgirl.

Through the "Cool Japan" nation-branding process, *anime* and *manga* became global signifiers of "cool."³⁷¹ During this process, even the previously "cute" culture icons (and residues) began to appear "cool," as they were branded as such by the government. As Christine Yano examined in her 2008 article "Wink On Pink":

The Japanese government . . . has chosen to capitalize on cuteness as a new, youth-oriented way to brand Japan—relinquishing images of samurai warriors and dark-suited bureaucrats for a newer, frankly commercial, overtly playful aesthetic. If the Japan of old was epitomized by sober, warrior-infused masculinity accompanied by gracious kimono-clad women in an atmosphere of high aestheticism, then this newly promoted Japan may be epitomized by pink-clad girls, animated fantasies, and winking Kitty logos.³⁷²

³⁷⁰ These examples are retrieved from Christine R. Yano, "Wink on Pink: Interpreting Japanese Cute as It Grabs the Global Headlines," *Journal of Asian Studies* 68, no. 3 (August 2009): 685. In the late 2000s, Japan's local governments also each created its own mascot (called *yuru-kyara*, meaning "light" or "weak" character), all of which are commonly characterized by cute and round features. For a newspaper report on this trend, see Philip Brasor, "The Obsession Over Those Dumbed Down Cute Mascots," *The Japan Times*, August 3, 2008, sec. Media Mix, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/fd20080803pb.html>.

³⁷¹ Arthur Lubow, "The Murakami Method," *The New York Times*, April 3, 2005. Quoted in Dick Hebdige, "Flat Boy vs. Skinny: Takashi Murakami and the Battle for 'Japan,'" in Murakami, Schimmel, and Hebdige, *Murakami*, 41.

³⁷² Christine R. Yano, "Wink on Pink: Interpreting Japanese Cute as It Grabs the Global Headlines," *Journal of Asian Studies* 68, no. 3 (August 2009): 684.

USA Today and *Fortune* magazine would also feature stories and photographs of Hollywood celebrities and Wall Street business executives with Hello Kitty purses and notepads.³⁷³

Examples of the coolification of Japanese *kawaii* street fashion could be found ubiquitously, but most obviously, in the fashion and accessories industry. Inspired the Hello Kitty fad and the proliferation of cute keychain accessories, celebrities like Gwen Stefani and Paris Hilton and even high fashion European designers like Prada and Dolce & Gabbana launched collections evocative of Japanese street fashion.

On Murakami's part, the artist and entrepreneur developed his cartoon avatar, Mr. DOB (conceived in 1993), into one of the world's most expensive and coolest symbol of luxury fashion. The collaboration between Murakami and French fashion house Louis Vuitton in 2003, mentioned earlier, was met with wild acclaim both in the art and fashion market. Just like other typical cute and quirky Japanese accessories, Mr. DOB has an enormous face, big ears, wide eyes and long eyelashes. But this is a special, cooler character because it is "art," designed by an international art star. The idea that this character blurs the lines between high art, *otaku* subculture, and luxury fashion has a tremendous mass appeal. Murakami has explained Mr. DOB as "an inquiry into the 'secret of market survival,' or the 'universality' of characters like Mickey Mouse, Sonic the Hedgehog, Doraemon, Miffy, Hello Kitty, even the Hong Kong-made rip-offs."³⁷⁴ Since his conception in 1993, Mr. DOB underwent changes in the design: the

³⁷³ These are discussed in Christine R. Yano, "Monsterring the Japanese Cute: Pink Globalization and Its Critics Abroad," in *In Godzilla's Footsteps: Japanese Pop Culture Icons on the Global Stage*, ed. William M. Tsutsui and Michiko Ito (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 154–157.

³⁷⁴ Takashi Murakami, "Life as a Creator," in *Takashi Murakami: Summon Monsters? Open the Door? Heal? Or Die?*, exh. cat. (Tokyo: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2001), 133; quoted in Murakami, Schimmel, and Hebdige, *Murakami*, 125.

originally benign and humorous Mr. DOB has become an increasingly dark and aggressive character. This transformation parallels the change in vogue from cute to cool.

The art promoted by Murakami through the series of publications and exhibitions was deeply masculine and “cool,” as it originated from and intertwined with the young male *otaku* subculture. This Japanese aesthetic would soon eclipse the more feminine *kawaii* side of Japanese pop culture aesthetics. The international fame of Murakami also eclipsed the celebrity of Mariko Mori. The *Little Boy* exhibition catalog includes Midori Matsui’s “Transformations of Cute Subculture in the Art of the Japanese Nineties,” which is the most comprehensive historical analysis of the subject to this date, but the author does not consider Mori’s contribution at all.³⁷⁵ Another defining art-historical text on *kawaii*, Yuko Hasegawa’s “Post-Identity Kawaii: Commerce, Gender and Contemporary Japanese Art” (2002), pays little attention to Mori’s *Made in Japan* photographs.³⁷⁶

4.4 Concluding Remarks

Although Mori was the first Japanese artist to emerge on the Western art scene (even before Takashi Murakami), employing and exploiting imagery from Japanese popular culture, including Japanimation, J-pop, *kawaii*, and *cosplay*, this has been under-explored in depth in art history. Mori arrived in the Western art world in the mid-1990s, at a time when its knowledge of Japanimation and contemporary Japanese pop culture were still immature. But her era quickly

³⁷⁵ Midori Matsui, “Beyond the Pleasure Room to a Chaotic Street: Transformations of Cute Subculture in the Art of the Japanese Nineties,” in *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan’s Exploding Subculture*, ed. Takashi Murakami (New York: Japan Society; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 209–239.

³⁷⁶ Yuko Hasegawa, “Post-Identity Kawaii: Commerce, Gender and Contemporary Japanese Art,” in *Consuming Bodies: Sex and Contemporary Japanese Art*, ed. Fran Lloyd (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), 127–141.

faded: by 2002 she had been replaced with Murakami to “represent” the growing Japanese soft power in the Western media landscape and she had also had her “retrospective” exhibition in Japan. This exploration of Mori’s work in relationship to contemporary Japanese cultural trends and the phenomenon of globalization has revealed distinct phases of Japan’s image (or image-making) on a Western-dominated global culture scene. It has also highlighted the mid-1990s as a significant moment in history in terms of the world’s awareness of Japanese soft power. An old adage in Asia says that history is a mirror of the future. This look back into the ‘90s art scene may help us estimate the future’s art waves from East Asia. For example, currently in South Korea, there is an emerging group of young artists whose works deal with Korean pop culture or K-pop. The following chapter will examine how the Korean artist Nikki S. Lee, among other contemporary artists in the twenty-first century, has dealt with the issues of identity and personae in the art world.

5. CONCLUSION

To conclude this dissertation on artists' personae, I consider some recent events that can speak for the rising significance of personae in contemporary art. By analyzing recent persona-based work exemplified by the New York-based Korean artist Nikki S. Lee (b. 1970), the British street artist Banksy (a pseudonym for an artist whose personal information is largely unknown), and the New York-based Serbian artist Marina Abramović (b. 1946), I will illustrate and emphasize the roles of—and the artists' clever use of—celebrity, branding, and mass media in the current art world system, thus pulling together the issues that were raised in the Introduction. It is the contemporary art system and the ways the driving institutions operate that increases the importance of artist personae.

5.1 **Also Known As...**

Nikki S. Lee's practice provides an interesting case because in it she wittily deals with her intercultural experience as a Korean sojourner in America and also as an art star. The story of how she became an "artist" and even an art star in New York is itself reflective of the real situations of the art market. Born in 1970 in Korea, Lee moved to New York City in 1994 to enroll in the Fashion Institute of Technology, after majoring in photography at Chung-Ang University in Seoul. As a child, she wanted to become an actress, but she came to the conclusion that she was not pretty enough to make it in the image-conscious entertainment business. Instead, she decided to pursue photography. Her studies at FIT (1994–96) and then at NYU (1996–99) focused on commercial and fashion photography. She interned with the renowned commercial photographer David LaChapelle as part of her studies at NYU. Lee, still, never thought of becoming an artist. However, in 1998, art dealer Leslie Tonkonow approached the

NYU student, impressed by her photographic series *Projects*, in which Lee performed identities that are not originally hers, such as a punk and a drag queen (this series will be further described shortly). *Projects* (1997–2001) began as a class project and developed through the support of the Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects (533 West 22nd Street, New York).³⁷⁷ After her first solo show in 1999, Lee became a rising star on the international art scene.

Thus New York was where Lee was given the new identity of an “artist.” It was also the city where she was first exposed to the world of “high” art, where she immersed herself in reading about art and explored art galleries.

While at NYU, I met this guy who started taking me to galleries and introduced me to different books, and it really affected me. Personal relationships are everything! People ask me who my influences are—Nan Goldin, Cindy Sherman—but for me, it’s the people around me. ... I’d seen Cindy Sherman’s work at school, but I didn’t really pay attention at that time. I was just interested in commercial and fashion photography. I liked the film stills, but I was more into the people getting published in *Vogue*.³⁷⁸

Perhaps it was this “naïve” commercialism that has led to the creation of the now famous *Projects* series and that has attracted the attention of the art world.

In the *Projects* series of photographs, Lee appears in disguise to assume identities from a variety of ethnic communities and subculture groups, such as punk, drag queen, lesbian, yuppie, senior citizen, strip dancer, swing dancer, hip-hop groupie, and Hispanic and Japanese street kids. For each project, she spent a few weeks or months with each group to befriend them, study and adopt their particular modes of dress, hair, makeup, and facial and gestural expressions.

Once she “became” a community member (through losing weight, learning skateboarding, hiring

³⁷⁷ Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects was Lee’s representative gallery until 2007.

³⁷⁸ Lee, interviewed by Vicario, in Russell Ferguson and Gilbert Vicario, *Nikki S. Lee: Projects* (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2001), 98.

a professional makeup artist, etc.), she would ask a friend or passerby to take a snapshot of the group. Lee always used a cheap point-and-shoot camera that could be easily purchased at a convenience store, and each photograph was printed with the date that such cameras mark automatically upon setup. The *Projects* series thus contained many theoretical components that appealed to art critics and historians: questions of identity, authorship, appropriation, boundaries between fiction and reality, performance and photography, and art and vernacular photography.

Many viewers fascinated by her mimicry also became curious to know about the artist—who she is, what she really looks like, what her real identity is. Many critics, however, assumed that Lee was an American artist of Korean descent who was concerned with identity politics in art. Jennifer Dalton introduced the artist as “the Korean-American Lee” and discussed the artist’s photographs in terms of racial performance concepts of “assimilation” and “passing.”³⁷⁹ In a special issue of *Art Journal* on “Art and History at the Limits of Whiteness,” Maurice Berger focused on Lee’s *Yuppie Project*, in order to delve into the politics of race.³⁸⁰ However, the artist has stressed that she never intended a political critique, nor was she conscious of issues of race or racism: “People bring that up and ask me because they think I’m Korean American. But *I’m Korean Korean* and I didn’t grow up with racism issues at all. ... So I had no awareness about minority or race in America.”³⁸¹ “There is only one race” in Korea, she said.³⁸² This is

³⁷⁹ Jennifer Dalton, “Look At Me: Self-Portrait Photography after Cindy Sherman,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 22, no. 3 (September 2000): 47.

³⁸⁰ Maurice Berger, “Picturing Whiteness: Nikki S. Lee’s *Yuppie Project*,” *Art Journal* 60, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 55–57. Also see Derek Murray, “One Planet Under a Groove: Hip Hop and Contemporary Art,” *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, no. 16–17 (Fall 2002): 60–65. Derek Murray, “Hip-Hop vs. High Art: Notes on Race as Spectacle,” *Art Journal* 63, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 4–19.

³⁸¹ Nikki S. Lee, “The Girl Stays in the Picture: My Life from the Inside Out,” *KoreAm*, March 2007, <http://iamkoream.com/the-girl-stays-in-the-picture/>. My emphasis.

³⁸² Nikki S. Lee, interviewed in Carly Berwick, “Extreme Makeover,” *Art News* 105 (March 2006): 113.

definitely an exaggeration, and it should also be pointed out that just because she did not intend to address issues of race does not mean that her works were not about race among other issues, for the viewers. But it is also important to note that the assumption that Lee was Korean American came from an ignorance of the variety of national and cultural backgrounds within the Asian diaspora in New York and also of the variety of art by Asian artists. This assumption clearly reveals the Western bias that treats artists of color as minoritized subjects whose art must be socio-politically conscious and critical. And Lee's over-reaction demonstrates that she is actually aware of the issues of race, ethnicity, nationality and culture and that she is playing with the viewers' perception/assumption of her identity.

The confusion with the artist's "real" identity may result in part from her Americanized name, Nikki. Her real name, given by her parents at her birth, is Seung-hee, but she says that she wanted to give herself an "American" name when she first arrived in the country to go to school. She asked a friend to send her some names to choose from. Only later did she discover that her friend stumbled across the name in *Vogue* magazine, and that Nikki Lee was named after the '90s supermodel Niki Taylor.³⁸³ Lee thus "began her life in the United States by giving herself another identity, taking her new name from someone who herself is constantly photographing in different costumes."³⁸⁴ Naming is an act to give identity, but Lee disregarded the seriousness of this ritual and picked the iconic American supermodel's name for her life in America—in a similar manner that she so easily adopted many different identities in her *Projects* series. The artist deconstructed not just her own identity but the concept of identity itself. She developed

³⁸³ Russell Ferguson, "Let's Be Nikki," in Ferguson and Vicario, *Nikki S. Lee*, 14.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

many personae both in and outside of her artwork. For her, “Nikki” (name) and “artist” (occupation) were merely among the many personae that transpired in New York.

The first lines in her first film, *a.k.a. Nikki S. Lee* (2006):

I have a strong persona people create ... because of my work [where I assume different identities]. . . . People are curious about my identity. Sometimes people are surprised when they see me. [And they say] “Oh Nikki, you are different from than I thought!” “I thought you were very hip that you are a hipster, you are young and going out, very social person!” So why don’t I make a film about Nikki Lee?³⁸⁵

In this film, *a.k.a. Nikki S. Lee*, the artist explored the “wonders” of the art world that she experienced as a newcomer.³⁸⁶ The set up for this film includes a fictional director (who does not appear in the film) who is making a documentary film about the artist Nikki S. Lee. The film begins with fiction: “When I started my film about her [Nikki S. Lee], she was making a documentary herself about creating Nikki S. Lee.”³⁸⁷ Thus within this quasi-autobiographical “fake documentary” film about the artist (as she calls it), Lee creates another autobiographical documentary film about herself.³⁸⁸ Following the text is a shot of Lee where she addresses the above-quoted lines as if interviewed. Here she articulates that the making of this film (and the film within the film) was motivated by the public’s interest in—and their misperception of—her real personality. She points out that this persona stems from her previous work, the sensational *Projects* series. The persona of the artist becomes a point of conflation and confusion between the artist and the artwork itself.

³⁸⁵ Nikki S. Lee, *A.k.a. Nikki S. Lee*, Drama, 2006.

³⁸⁶ I thank the Sikkema Jenkins & Co. gallery (530 West 22nd Street, New York) for my access to the film. I watched the film in the gallery on September 11, 2010.

³⁸⁷ Lee, *A.k.a. Nikki S. Lee*.

³⁸⁸ Lee, cited in Jane Harris, “When in Rome,” *Art Text*, no. 77 (Summer 2002): 44.

Since the film follows the life of Lee as a young art star, it features the art world microcosm—media interviews, artist’s talks, openings, collectors, critics, dealers, the Venice Biennale and the Armory Show. The art world celebrity apparently has a fabulous life: she arrives in Venice on a water taxi, has a casual lunch with her Italian collectors, goes shopping in the afternoon and in the evening parties at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection with the movie star Jeremy Irons. In Paris, she attends a Chanel fashion show and the next day she is picked up by *New York Times* fashion editor to work on an interview and fashion photo shoot. Thus the film is more a documentary of the art world than a documentary about the artist. Flirting between truth and fiction, the film never reveals Lee’s “true” personality.³⁸⁹ The film reveals the underlying structures of the contemporary art world instead.

In *a.k.a. Nikki S. Lee*, the artist questions the practice of labeling as important because it gives meaning, defines the identity, and affects the value of that which is being defined. Consider, for example, the following dialogue in the film between Lee and Tonkonow, the aforementioned art dealer who discovered her. They are sitting in Lee’s apartment and watching a video clip of Lee spontaneously dancing with old men in a park in Mexico City.

Tonkonow: So you were just hanging out in the park with all these old men?

Lee: That’s the way I worked for the project. [She acted as if she was having fun].

...

Tonkonow: You are a conceptual artist. You are.

Lee: Yeah, I think so.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁹ The film also portrays the protagonist’s second side: we see Lee lingering in her modest Manhattan apartment filled with books (though this is actually a set, not her real apartment) and eating a simple Korean soybean soup alone in an empty Korean restaurant in Frankfurt before the opening of her solo show. For more on the book-filled apartment scene, see RoseLee Goldberg, *Nikki S. Lee: Parts* (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2005), 47.

³⁹⁰ Lee, *A.k.a. Nikki S. Lee*.

In this quite awkwardly humorous scene (although we do not know whether or not this scene has been scripted), Tonkonow defines Lee as a conceptual artist and Lee readily accepts it, as if she would have no problem in wearing the title. Lee further reveals her interest in identity-formation when she says, “I have a role as a director for my documentary. I have a role as an actor for my documentary. I have a role as an artist for my documentary. Do I have to have all boundaries? Do I have to break all boundaries? Do I have a strong concept of performance? Or do I have to lose all of them?”³⁹¹ This is a particularly serious and intriguing issue for Lee, who claimed she never expected to become an artist but then became a star overnight. Lee features the flattering of art-world associates who exclaim, “She is a major artist!” and “Kissed by a star!” Lee carefully edited in all the accolades as if observing the life of someone else.

The film suggests that Lee herself is fascinated—and confused—by her high-profile position in the art world. Without it, in fact, the film would never have been conceived or produced. It thus has its own value as a subject of artwork in contemporary times, and Lee’s film reveals the role of an artist as performance. A penultimate scene of the film was shot at the Armory Show, one of the most important international art fairs, which has been held annually in New York since 1994. There, the camera follows Lee in a long, unedited shot as she walks through the huge exhibition hall. She does not look aside, disinterested in the work of other artists, but walks straight to the booth exhibiting her work. She briefly talks with assistant dealers, and then exists in another long shot. This final scene highlights the business aspect of the art world. Making an appearance at such events is part of the job of being an artist. The job of an artist is presented here as an occupation that requires a lot of extra-art activities—a true portrait of the contemporary art world. And the fact that Lee conceived of and directed this film

³⁹¹ Ibid.

indicates that she is conscious and introspective of where she is, how she is viewed, and how she is using it all to move forward in the career.

Lee's film shares striking similarities with the notorious British graffiti artist Banksy's *Exit Through the Gift Shop* (2010), a "documentary" film ostensibly about the Los Angeles-based French street artist Mr. Brainwash. Banksy made the film, but in the film, another artist makes a film about Banksy. *Exit Through the Gift Shop* traces how Thierry Guetta, a vintage clothing store owner with an amateur obsession with filming, has reinvented himself as a famous street artist after being exposed to renowned graffiti artists including Banksy. The film suggests that Mr. Brainwash is actually a con artist with no artistic skills, no aesthetic sense, and no ethical sense. But with a shallow and crooked understanding of Pop art and its historical and aesthetic legacy, he makes "art" through his hired designers and by appropriating famous images from culture and history, many of which are copyrighted. And his debut show in Los Angeles gains a remarkable commercial *and* critical success in the art market overhyped about street art. Billed as "the world's first street art disaster movie," *Exit Through the Gift Shop* thus exposes absurdities about the art market, its obsession with fame, its proximity to the celebrity industry, and the commodification and institutionalization of street art—an art form originally meant for presentation on the street, anonymity of the artist, and market elusiveness.³⁹²

Similar to Lee's, Banksy's film complicates the idea about the "artist" while problematizing the genre of documentary. "It's full of fascinating reversals" of roles and perspectives "that knit together ideas about the authenticity of the artist, the exploitation of that authenticity by the art world, the manipulation of that exploitation by the artist, etc."³⁹³ The

³⁹² "Banksy Film to Debut at Sundance," *BBC*, January 21, 2010, sec. Arts & Culture, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/arts_and_culture/8471145.stm.

³⁹³ Hannah Higgins, in a personal note to me written in September 2013.

complication has transpired debates on whether the story about Mr. Brainwash is a fact or a fiction (even partially) and whether Mr. Brainwash is actually working *for* Banksy. Because Banksy is notorious for his transgressions, for example vandalizing public building walls and breaking into art museums to hang his paintings, it has been speculated that Banksy might be the real artist behind Mr. Brainwash directing all of his productions. Unlike Lee, Banksy is “absent” in his film: when he appears in the film, he is wearing a mask and his voice is altered. Ever since he emerged on the art scene in the early 2000s, he has used the pseudonym and kept his identity hidden from the public, all the while his fame grew rapidly. His anonymity is a big, important part of his persona as an artist, and now as an artist whose scale of popularity is comparable to a brand and an institution, his persona looms larger in the media than any other big-name artists’ because it’s faceless.³⁹⁴

5.2 The Artist Is Present?

As of this writing in July 2013, among loudest art world news bites is the hip-hop musician and entrepreneur Jay-Z (Shawn Corey Carter, b. 1969)’s recent music video filming at the Pace Gallery, one of New York’s blue chip art galleries. He invited art-world people to the gallery and rapped his new, art-inspired song “Picasso Baby” *at* the guests, interacting with them, for six hours straight. It was a direct reference to the legendary performance artist Marina Abramović’s much talked-about live performance *The Artist Is Present* at the Museum of Modern Art in 2010. During her MoMA retrospective *Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present*, held for over two months from March 14 to May 31, Abramović sat in the museum’s atrium

³⁹⁴ For ethics and the face, see writings by Emmanuel Lévinas. Also see Diane Perpich, *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

during business days (for total of 736 hours), inviting anyone willing to wait in line to sit across from and make eye contact with her.

Abramović's MoMA retrospective was the first large-scale performance exhibition organized by a major art institution, and was in fact billed as MoMA's first performance retrospective show. Particularly, the artist's *The Artist Is Present* live performance, conceived of for the occasion, received much media coverage and public attention, which elevated it further to become a milestone event in art history and particularly in the history of performance art. A lot of dramatic stories and spectacular scenes transpired from the performance: for example, some sitters burst into tears as they were faced with Abramović (as captured in video and published as a CD accompanying the exhibition catalog), Hollywood celebrities volunteered to sit, and her dramatic reunion with her former partner in art and life, Ulay (Uwe Laysiepen, b. 1943), who showed up as the performance's last participant. Abramović and Ulay's relationship and collaborations between 1976 and 1988 resulted in some of the most iconic examples of "performance art" in art history such as *Imponderabilia* (1977). In this performance at the Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna in Bologna, the two artists stood naked on either side of a doorway facing each other, thus forcing the museum visitors to wiggle through the narrow space between the two naked bodies.

After the retrospective, Abramović was a different artist—a public figure. Since the early 1970s Abramović has been a seminal figure in performance art, but during and after the MoMA exhibition she was celebrated as the "Grandmother of Performance Art" (as Abramović describes herself³⁹⁵) and became the icon of "performance art." Among a series of celebrations of the

³⁹⁵ "'The Life and Death of Marina Abramovic' Opera Arrives At Armory In December," *Huffington Post*, February 19, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/02/19/the-life-and-death-of-marina-abramovic-armory-show_n_2717804.html. The author is anonymous.

artist following the retrospective is a creation of an opera about her *and* starring her: *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović*, created by Robert Wilson, is an “anti-theatrical theater, which chronicles Abramović’s life from her childhood struggles in former Yugoslavia to present day.”³⁹⁶ This suggests that Abramović has become an artwork, with its own life and own identity.

There is always a risk of grandiosity or degeneration when original art or original artists scale up, especially under the promotion of upscale art institutions. As art historian Carrie Lambert-Beatty has lucidly pointed out, the MoMA retrospective rendered Abramović as “both martyr and superstar,” particularly with her live presentation of *The Artist Is Present*, which turned into a “quasi-religious rite”:

Batteries of lights shine down on the artist from the four corners of a stagelike square around her table. A guard polices the queue of acolytes waiting their turn to be in her presence, allowing one person at a time into the sanctum sanctorum. I am perfectly willing to believe that gazing into Abramović’s eyes is a moving experience. But the cultural forms evoked by this scene are either grandiose (the pope) or absurd (shopping-mall Santa). . . . How did Abramović’s lovely, egalitarian idea of making eye contact—of simply being present together with her viewers—go so wrong? Practical and safety considerations surely had much to do with the presentation. But it’s revealing that the museum’s wall text, press releases, and website all stress what would seem to be a technical detail: that Abramović will be in place when the museum opens and won’t move until the last visitor has left. Why? Why would it matter if we saw her walk into the room and sit down at the table? All it could possibly do is make her seem like an ordinary human—but of course that conclusion is what the entire exhibition is organized to resist.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁶ Ibid. The opera premiered at the Manchester International Festival in 2011, and has since been restaged to fit the Park Avenue Armory’s “expansive 55,000-square-foot Wade Thompson Drill Hall” in New York, scheduled for December 2013.

³⁹⁷ Carrie Lambert-Beatty, “Against Performance Art,” *Artforum* 48 (May 2010): 212.

Neither the museum nor the artist herself seemed to mind the mystification. After the retrospective, she enjoyed the new fame in all its glory, using her celebrity and mass media to aggrandize values of her name and to promote her work.

The reason why Jay-Z's new music video filming attracted much attention from the art world was not so much because the song was about art or the video paid homage to Abramović, but because Abramović actually showed up to participate in Jay-Z's performance; she had not made public appearances like this since the MoMA performance. As she announced in the *Marina's Message to Facebook* video posted on Vimeo last April, she had been in Brazil "to learn about energy from shamans" and been also busy "creating my own institute for performing arts," namely Marina Abramović Institute (MAI), scheduled to open in 2015 in Hudson, New York.³⁹⁸ Her remark about retreat with shamans is "in typical Marina fashion," as *Hyperallergic's* Alicia Eler points out.³⁹⁹ Criticizing Abramović's recent self-branding, the critic says, "Perhaps next time when Marina's brand throws down with another rapper, let's hope it's someone attempting to transcend and create rather than maintain the status quo." Eler also adds an anecdote about how her email to Abramović has been replied to by one of her "people" who explained that the artist was not available because she was "on a retreat, living in total isolation in a hut by the river with no food, just water."⁴⁰⁰ In this information and the language as well, we can sense the Abramović brand's effort to attach more aura and mystique to the artist's persona.

³⁹⁸ Milica Zec, *Marina's Message to Facebook*, 2013, <http://vimeo.com/64745220>.

³⁹⁹ Alicia Eler, "The Artist Is Not Present But the Brand Sure Is," *Hyperallergic*, July 17, 2013, <http://hyperallergic.com/75766/the-artist-is-not-present-but-the-brand-sure-is/>.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

It is self-evident that the *Marina's Message to Facebook* video has been made solely to promote her new Institute. In the video, the artist appears like any other public figure promoting a political party or an organization fundraising in a TV commercial, especially when she says, "My Facebook people! ... You are my first public, you are the ones who trust me ... I'm expecting you to be part of the Institute. Please go to the website [mai-hudson.org] to see how we can collaborate together. And now, we have new Facebook just for the Institute. Please go there. Be part of it. I love you."⁴⁰¹ And then she sends a kiss off to the video viewers.

The above-quoted art critic Eler is just one of the recently increasingly skeptical observers of Abramović's move toward public culture and self-mystification. The criticism is fair and we need it. Not only has she fallen a victim to her own fame, but apparently she has seemed also to be ignoring that mechanism. While she could have escaped the stardom and disappear from the public eye, Abramović seems to be developing more self-conscious ways of interacting across the spectrum of the creative industry, even though this means the loss of the "the here and now" authenticity that had been fundamental to her early work in the '70s.⁴⁰² This is demonstrated in the finished Jay-Z video. Entitled *Picasso Baby: A Performance Art Film* and billed as a documentary, the video depicts what Jay-Z in narration refers to as a merging of "art and culture," or moments of interaction between the rapper and his guests, from art world, music, fashion, film and television, as he raps at each of them (in the similar manner that Abramović gazed into the eyes of each of her performance participants at MoMA).⁴⁰³

⁴⁰¹ Zec, *Marina's Message to Facebook*.

⁴⁰² Kristine Stiles, "Survey: Cloud with Its Shadow," in *Marina Abramović* (London: Phaidon, 2008), 34. Stiles notes that Abramović often spoke this phrase in interviews and also at the end of *The House with the Ocean View* (2002). I thank Prof. Hannah Higgins for this observation about Abramović's changed manner.

⁴⁰³ JAY Z "Picasso Baby: A Performance Art Film," 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMG2oNqBy-Y&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

Amid (and despite) the intended festive mood, Abramović stands out in the video because of her self-satisfied engagement with the rapper. She has a presence that does not blend into the scene or the crowd; she has developed an insoluble, strong, charismatic persona and identity. She has indeed become something of an artwork herself—like any other superstar who exists as an image and non-person.⁴⁰⁴ However, the unbreakable artist-persona of Abramović, in turn, is a reminder for us that “art” is still an independent sphere from the so-called “culture” including the pop music and entertainment businesses. In the video, Jay-Z describes rap as an act of putting “your fears, your vulnerabilities, your insecurities all on music” and explains, “I just let it happen, just get into the moment. You know, whatever happens happens,” and these statements resonate more with avant-garde artists linked to Body Art, particularly Abramović, than with hip-hop musicians usually associated with swag or “gangster” masculinity, thus demonstrating the former’s influence on the latter.

With the news of Jay-Z and Abramović performing together spread through social media, cynical opinions prevailed especially among those who seem to believe and prefer that “art” should remain separated from entertainment or commercialism—pure, difficult, and exclusive. Consider the following Twitter responses, for example: “\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$” (Azeen Ghorayshi); “culture is over” (Stephanie Theodore); “it is the Vine of Jay-Z & Marina Abramović, R.I.P. US ALL” (Lindsay Zoladz); “Performance art has died today. Bye” (magdasawon).⁴⁰⁵ What is interesting about these comments is that they reverberate the language and ideology promoted by

⁴⁰⁴ See Richard Dyer, “Stars as Images,” in Marshall, *The Celebrity Culture Reader*, 153–176.

⁴⁰⁵ Quoted in Jillian Steinhauer, “Jay-Z Raps at Marina Abramović, or the Day Performance Art Died,” *Hyperallergic*, July 10, 2013, <http://hyperallergic.com/75293/jay-z-raps-at-marina-abramovic-or-the-day-performance-art-died/>. In these quoted statements, there are race and class issues, which need to be explored in further analyses.

critical theorists. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, in their co-authored book of 1944, famously phrased the “culture industry,” a concept that critiques popular culture as a danger to humanity and particularly to high art.⁴⁰⁶

Notably, however, the “Picasso Baby” music video shoot was a blatant manifestation of the conflation of contemporary art, music, and entertainment. It was an event that clarified the obsolescence of the critical theory and of modernist theories of art that still define “art” narrowly as opposed to (popular) culture and disseminates a myth (or a false hope) that art and artists should be clear from money, marketing, or fickle trending. In fact, while the video filming took place at the Pace Gallery, the promotion of the event was taken care of by Salon 94, a New York gallery that represents artists such as Laurie Simmons. And the invitees were itself a mix of high-profile personae from industries of art, music, television, film, and fashion, including RoseLee Goldberg (art historian and founder of Performa, an organization dedicated to live performance art) and Jerry Saltz (*New York* magazine art critic and judge on Bravo TV art reality show *Work of Art*).⁴⁰⁷

Aren’t we having romantic ideas about art and artists, especially about performance art (that it has to be real and avant-garde)? Where do they come from and why do we stick to them? What if “art” has always been an idea—our wish? What if the artist is never present in the

⁴⁰⁶ See Horkheimer, Adorno, and Cumming, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

⁴⁰⁷ See *Vogue*’s list and interview with some of these invitees. Mark Guiducci and Thessaly La Force, “Six Degrees of Jay-Z: Meet the Artists Who Showed Up for the,” *Vogue.com*, July 12, 2013, http://www.vogue.com/culture/article/six-degrees-of-jay-z-meet-the-artists-who-showed-up-for-the-picasso-baby-showdown/?mbid=JayZ_20130712_9727624. Some other notable names are record executive Lyor Cohen, rapper Fab Five Freddy, conceptual artist Lawrence Weiner, actress and producer Lena Dunham (daughter of Laurie Simmons), comedy filmmaker Judd Apatow, fashion designer Cynthia Rowley, and art historian Diana Picasso (granddaughter of Pablo Picasso).

artwork or even in the public appearances but only his/her personae? So many people were touched by Abramović's *The Artist Is Present* performance at MoMA but were then turned off by her non-art performances like collaborating with Jay-Z or Hollywood actor James Franco (about whose life she is currently making a film) and founding and promoting for her own institute. But they seem to often forget that being an artist is much more than just creating art, that it is an occupation (artists make a living through this job) requiring extra-art activities. In the same vein, being an artist may be one of many social roles (personae) that they perform.

During *The Artist Is Present* presentation at MoMA, it can be said that Abramović was performing her artist-persona that she had been developing for the past several decades as a performance artist for whom to create live art and personal connectivity is an important part of the work. She was indeed “present” throughout the seven-hundred-hour run of the show, but she participated in the event as “art star.” And there she performed her artist-persona in all its glory—the legendary performance artist whose eye contact can make people cry.

5.3 What Remains: Persona

I began this dissertation by tracing the new phenomenon in the 1950s and 1960s of art stars such as Jackson Pollock and Andy Warhol, which was explained as a consequence of the growth of the art market combined with the explosion of mass media. And in the subsequent three chapters, I examined the cases of Yayoi Kusama, Yoko Ono, and Mariko Mori—the three most famous (or notorious) Japanese artists in twentieth-century art history who have often represented “Japan” and “Asia” in the mainstream Western art and culture spheres. By exploring the dynamic relations among the production, representation, and reception of their art and non-art performances in the West—expressed through Kusama's self-stylization as a geisha in the

mid-1960s, Ono's "dragon lady" persona since the late-1960s, and Mori's appropriation of J-pop aesthetics characters such as Sailor Moon in the 1990s—I argued that it has been their media images and their identities as Japanese women that have determined the reception of their artworks while the artists have also strategically played with the Western audience's cultural, racial, and gendered prejudices and orientalist fantasies about Japan and East Asian women.

In so doing, I used the term *personae* to refer broadly to the artist's public image and the public life of her work, as they are closely related. As stated in the Introduction, I conceptualize an artist's persona as a performative category and method in visual culture studies that blurs not only the conventional art-historical separations of fine arts, media arts, and performing arts, but also the traditional boundaries between self and persona, between subject and object, between artist and the art, between producer and audience, between presentation and representation, between art and politics, and between art and commerce.

Witnessing the unprecedented progression of technology coupled with that of capitalism in the mid-1930s, the Frankfurt School thinker Walter Benjamin perceived that a "work of art in the mechanical reproduction" loses its "aura"—its original uniqueness that cannot be reproduced.⁴⁰⁸ But what he did not see coming was the evolution of art into an enterprise and along with it, the phenomenon of artist as celebrity.

The contemporary art world has developed a new aura of the new age, that is, artist's public image, created in the media. Artists appear on magazine covers, newspaper photographs, and television shows, affecting the ways that their artworks are received. In the age of mass media in post-industrial societies, artists' public images have an exhibition value that may be

⁴⁰⁸ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1986).

greater than the exhibition values of the artworks. Persona has become a driving force in the contemporary art system.

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TEACHING HISTORY:

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- Survey Modern to Contemporary Art and Architecture (AH 1002) – Spring 2012, Spring 2013, Spring 2014
- History of Korean Art (AH 2460) – Fall 2013
- Body, Identity, & Art (AH 3623) – Spring 2012, Fall 2012, Fall 2013
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Lecturer, Graham School of General Studies, The University of Chicago, Chicago, IL

- Introduction to Art History – Sept. 2012
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- Contemporary Asian Art and Visual Culture: Japan, Korea, and China (AH/ASST 278) – Summer 2011
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Co-Curator, *Future Imperfect: Utopia on Film* film screening and discussion series, Sullivan Galleries, Chicago, IL – September 23 to November 5, 2013

Graduate Assistant, Visual Resources Library, College of Architecture and the Arts, University of Illinois at Chicago, IL – August 2006 to May 2009

Research Assistant, Robert Bruegmann, Professor of Art History, Architecture and Urban Planning, University of Illinois at Chicago, IL – August 2005 to May 2006

Curatorial Assistant, Roding Gallery (now Plateau), Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea – Spring 2004

Docent, Art Sonje Center, Seoul, Korea – April to August 2004

Intern, Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), Seoul, Korea – Summer 2003, Summer 2000, Summer 1996, Summer 1995

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS:

East Asian Androgyny: New Femininities Circulating in Mass Culture, coauthored with Maud Lavin and Fang-Tze Hsu (manuscript under review of Duke University Press).

Book review of Christine R. Yano's *Pink Globalization: Hello Kitty's Trek across the Pacific* (Duke University Press, 2013), *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific* no. 36 (March 2014).

"Twohundredfiftysixcolors," in *Afterimage: The Journal of Media Arts and Cultural Criticism* 42, no. 4 (January/February 2014).

"News from Nowhere," in *Afterimage: The Journal of Media Arts and Cultural Criticism* 41, no. 3 (November/December 2013).

"More Than a Horse Dance: Meaning of Gangnam Style," *F Newsmagazine* (February 2013).

"Seriously Dotty," *Art in America* (January 2012): 45–47.

"Researching Your Greystone," co-authored with Tasneem Chowdhury, *The Chicago Greystone in Historic North Lawndale*, eds. Roberta M. Feldman and Jim Wheaton (Chicago: City Design Center at the University of Illinois at Chicago, 2006), 103–113.

SELECTED CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS:

"Transnational Cultural Criticism: Global Discourses on Korean Popular Culture"

Transnational Collaborative Criticism colloquium, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA – March 21–22, 2014

“When Art Meets Fashion” – February 14, 2014

À La Mode: Contemporary Art and Fashion System panel, CAA Annual Conference

“K-Pop Cuteness: Performance and Translation of the *Kawaii* Sentiments”

3rd Inter-Asia Popular Music Studies Conference, Taipei, Taiwan – July 13–15, 2012

“K-Pop Visual Culture: Masculinities and Femininities of the Idols”

Gender & Sexuality: Performance & Representation in Asia conference, co-organized by the School of Art Design and Media, The Wee Kim Wee School of Communications and Information, Nanyang Technological University, and the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, Singapore – January 18, 2012

“Being Inter-national: Identity In/Of the Work of Nikki S. Lee” – April 2, 2011

Art History Graduate Student Symposium, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA

“Dragon Lady, Geisha Girl, and Sailor Moon: Japanese Artists in the West” – November 12, 2010

History of Art Graduate Students Symposium, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY

“As Dotty As She Can Be: Persona Art of Yayoi Kusama” – April 17, 2010

The 5th Annual Graduate Students Conference, Brown University, Boston, MA

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP:

College Art Association – since 2006