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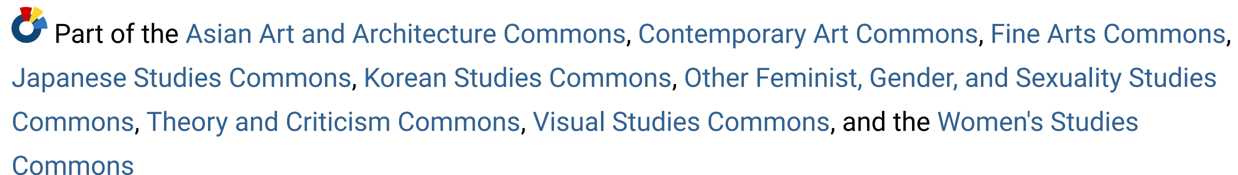
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SCHOOLGIRLS AND CYBORGS: THE DESTRUCTION OF FEMININE FORMS

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts
of Bard College

by

Ayanna Elisa Ann Perez

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2024

Dedication

To my parents, who have supported me throughout every endeavor with unconditional support and advice.

And my sisters who exist as the perfect monstrous feminines ~

Acknowledgments

I fully extend my gratitude to my advisor, Heeryoon Shin, for her guidance and support throughout this research project and the rest of the Bard College art history department for exposing me to the horrifically beautiful world of the arts.

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INTRODUCTION

In the mid-1990s, the average age of teenage girls involved in prostitution and pornographic commerce was seventeen and eighteen years old; in recent surveys, that average has dropped to twelve to fifteen years old.[1] Mariko Mori's *Love Hotel* (1994) (fig.1) was produced five years before teenage prostitution was declared illegal in Japan. The critical focus of this image is the transaction between the costumed artist and the invisible customer of her implied prostitution. Mori is centered in the photograph, dressed as a schoolgirl cyborg hybrid, combining two iconic motifs from Japanese popular culture. The schoolgirl in this image is subservient and inhuman, becoming a horror in itself as she walks the line between adolescent and sex symbol. Implications of her cyborg identity further escalate this horror, marking it as biological; the human body intersects with the unnatural and mechanical; Mori's face becomes a flesh mask for her metallic body. The photo no longer depicts a just school girl but instead crosses the boundary between human and machine, a monstrous image. Mori frames the picture in the context of a rapidly modernizing Japan and the identification of the nation with the cyborg identity. It is a visual commentary on the horror of what happens when these feminine roles are ultimately replaced with cyborg replicas, turning these girls into actual dolls for male desire. The satirical hyper-sexualized characterizations of these motifs are a critique of the extension of these caricatures of young girls, resulting in their exploitation, a point to the way that popular culture and the fine arts reflect societal critique and conflict.

My research centers around the concept of the monstrous feminine image and how it reflects broader societal critiques, such as the usage of "Othering" as a means of oppression and self-identification. Centering the motif of the Japanese Schoolgirl and hyper-sexualized cyborg, I

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[1] (Wallis 2008, para. 28)

aim to connect them in their relationship with East Asian popular culture and inherent commentary on the way women function in patriarchal societies. I employ the work of both "low" and "high" artists to build an institutional and cultural understanding of how caricatures function to define and critique broader societal commentaries in the context of East Asia, specifically Japan, in the 1990s.

The 1990s are labeled as *the* decade of globalization that transformed the cultural sphere of world powers, allowing for economic, technological, and cultural exchange between the East and West. The end of the Cold War during the latter half of 1991 indicated the opening of borders and the potential growth of developed and developing nations. Japan emerged as a world power because of its import and export of cultural products, unprecedented growth, and idolization of Western ideals of modernization. East Asian economies began to follow Japan's export-led industrialization and growth model, identifying a period of a new shared East Asian identity, a symbol of healing from Japan's history as a colonizer state in the region.

The United Nations approached this decade with a series of global reforms to increase women's rights, creating a precedent of developing and non-western national access to discrimination-free trade, ushering in a new world order for the turn of the century.[2] The World Trade Organization similarly established the "General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade" in 1994, which made markets more accessible to international competition outside of the Western Imperial powers. The intention of this agreement among world powers was to destroy barriers in trade and include non-westernized nations as a step towards building global relationships and exchange.[3]

[2] ""The UN Strategy for the Fourth Development Decade mandated paying special attention to the problems of women and ensuring that they move towards equality with men in all spheres of life…" "(Ocampo, Chowdhury, and Alarcón 2018, 149–59)

[3] (World 1994, 4–7)

An unprecedented period of change, this globalization is the ideal context for analyzing how cultural exchange fosters national iconography and self-perspective developments. East Asia is an example of how national anxieties and insecurities were manifested in popular culture to cope with the implications of global xenophobia and racism in the image of the East as the feminized "Other." Japan has a long history of trying to cope with its invalidation in the eyes of the West as a global power, which bleeds into Japan's large market of science-fiction anime and manga culture, demonstrating popular culture's reflections on broader societal issues and activism.

Japan has been in purgatory between Eastern and Western cultures for much of the twentieth century. This paradox births the archetypes of the Japanese modern girl versus the traditional Japanese woman, two roles forced onto women to define them as either a pure Japanese beauty or a demonized Westernized liberated woman. These histories of the continued feminization and othering of Japan are due to Western anxieties of the East destabilizing Western control. These applied anxieties will be explored with a close look at the implications of this association through the Cyborg as a symbol of techno-orientalism and feminism in the 20th century.

The modern girl caricature of 1920s Japan displays the Eastern perception of Western modernized culture. The archetype of the modern girl is characterized as a liberated, Western, demonic distortion of the traditional Japanese culture of submissive, kimono-adorning women. Modern girls are not only stylistically modernized by their short hair and 1920s Western flapper aesthetics, but they exist as the inverse of the idealized Japanese wife and mother. This archetype holds agency over not only her sexuality but also her independence through women's increasing presence and power in modernizing Japan. One factor that sparked societal distress and anxiety

for the future of Japanese traditional marriage and family culture is this removal from the expectation of East Asian women to exist only within the domestic space.

Japan's tumultuous relationship with Western powers began with the devastating nuclear attack on Hiroshima during World War II and Japan's subsequent surrender as the American Occupation of Japan (1945-1952) began. The U.S. clearly defined the intentions of the occupation as an effort to demilitarize, democratize, and economically "save" Japan. This narrative of the "white savior" is used as a justification for the Western need to ensure that Japan will not threaten the Western Global powers again through the emasculating of the nation.[4] During the occupation, the U.S. enacted heavy censorship laws, and any media deemed antagonistic or confrontational was prohibited. This censorship stifled Japanese artistic expression, leading to an explosion of media articulation of social anxieties once the occupation ended in 1952.[5] Japan experienced prosperous economic growth over the next decades in its production of technology and exports of popular culture media such as Japanese anime and manga, allowing it to rejoin the global powers. Along with censorship laws being lifted, the creatives of Japan broadened their expression of societal concerns as popular culture archetypes and commentaries slowly extended to the context of the world of fine art. The usage of caricature as a means of social commentary and satire in these works is an essential extension of popular culture in activism, which translates into the contemporary art world.

Caricature refers to artworks that distort and exaggerate specific characteristics of its subject to create a comment or message through that characterization.[6] Commonly, caricatures are used as an exaggeration to be satirical or critical of their subject. Historically, caricatures

[4] "Occupation-of-Japan-Primary-Resources.Pdf," accessed December 12, 2023, https://www.macarthurmemorial.org/DocumentCenter/View/1894/Occupation-of-Japan-Primary-Resources.

[5] Taylor, "Demon(Ized) Women," 201.

[6] (Chilvers 2009)

have been deeply rooted in racism and hostile humor, a confirmation of dominance over its subject as inferior. These reductive representations can contribute to dangerous and reductive representations of marginalized communities in negative contexts.[7] Throughout my research, I will use the terms "caricature," "motif," and "archetype" interchangeably to express the recurring nature of these characterizations within the art historical canon. Additionally, the usage of caricature as an opportunity for social activism and critical commentary in conversation with its potential to be both exploitative and empowering is a paradox I aim to delve into through the analysis of the Japanese school girls and hyper-feminized cyborg motifs.[8]

BARBARA CREED'S MONSTROUS FEMININE

Feminist theorist Barbara Creed coined the term monstrous-feminine in 1993 to describe the depictions of women as monsters in horror films that have been otherwise ignored in academia, as the portrayal of women as victims is favored over the female monsters of horror. Infantilization that every human society has stories and culture depicting the monstrous feminine, though it is unclear what it is about women that is so haunting.[9] The fear of the monstrous feminine is constructed by patriarchal and phallocentric ideology as the implication of women as both castrated and castrator evokes anxiety in men. The recognition of the monstrous feminine in her difference and Otherness from men unsettles the consciousness of patriarchal society. These associations reflect the repeated way that women are defined by their sexuality in every archetype, from their purity as virgins to the shame of the status of whore; Creed emphasizes the importance of gender in the horror of these feminine monsters. There is an affinity between the woman and the beast as both exist as the man's uncanny Other; the bodies

[7] (Bow 2019, 34)
[8] (Chilvers 2009)
[9] (Creed 1993, 1–7)

of these two subjects are representative of threatening forms of sexuality. The identification with the monstrous is an extension of the monstrous-feminine exclusion from the narrative of patriarchal society.

The horror genre appeals to depictions of emotions that are otherwise unacceptable for a woman in a traditional patriarchal society; the anger, gore, and abjection appeal to the release of internalized frustrations. By using the motifs of the Japanese schoolgirl and the hyper-gendered cyborg as parodies rooted in biological horror, a visual language for these representations is born. We can identify how these horrors communicate broader commentary on societal issues, specifically gender conflicts in post-globalized East Asia, through specific visual cues and themes. The usage of women and young girls as subjects of body horror immediately contextualizes the horror in a history of the fetishization of feminine pain, along with existing as a reflection of male anxieties surrounding women. When caricatures are set on a cycle of infantilization, the male gaze eventually grows bored with the one-dimensional depiction. What follows is the transformation of the feminine Other into a monstrous form, more threatening in its horror but always vulnerable to male control.[10]

HIGH AND LOW ART AS ARBITRARY DISTINCTIONS

The conception of the terms "high" and "low" are, in the Western contemporary context, a way of distinguishing between commercial mass-produced art and the fine art shown in art historical institutions.[11] Low art is associated with easily accessible works that are devalued for their lack of institutional validity and general "low culture" because of their removal from the elitism and fetishization of the insider information of the art world in Western countries. Low art

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[10] (Lan 2012, 85)

[11] Mark W. Macwilliams and Mark W. MacWilliams, *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime* (Armonk, UNITED KINGDOM: Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), 6, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bard/detail.action?docID=1900027.

appeals to a large audience by including popular cultures, a direct foil to the traditionally acceptable exclusion of those outside the context of the art businesses and culture. There is a distinction between high and low art as fine art and popular art, which implies natural art and non-art.[12] This correlates institutional validity with the definition of what constitutes artwork as a whole, a problematic centering of the Western institution as the decision maker for the value of specific media. By institutional validity, I refer to the artist's recognition through exhibition, critique, academia, and review by the major publications and museums that signify what art is today. This pedestal that the institution, and subsequently fine art, is placed on carries the potential for art themes, mediums, and trends outside the Western art historical canon to be overlooked or misrepresented. The low artists can exist in the gallery space or have publications relating to them, but that usually constitutes smaller academic journals and galleries that don't carry the same power as major institutions to define fine art. In the context of Japanese manga and anime, Western scholars have mainly classified these mediums as low art due to their association with popular entertainment that appeals to a mass audience instead of fulfilling a specific artist's preferences or vision.[13] The visual culture of manga has its own set of traditions, icons, and societal commentary, which allows the medium to be a sight of identification for artists as representations of broader social and political issues. Artists who use the iconic motifs of manga showcase the societal relevance of mass-produced art as a building block for public understanding of specific themes through stylized and cultural archetypes for modern caricatures. Although this characterization of these mediums is an over-simplification and conflating of commercial art as something artificial and inauthentic, the medium isn't a monolith as each artist, as with any other art form, appeals to their audience through their tastes and aesthetics. In

[12] (Cohen 1993, 151)
[13] (Lan 2012, 26)

this project, I am particularly concerned with how East Asian caricature and pop culture bled into the fine art world at the end of the twentieth century as a result of globalization and the way this phenomenon facilitates the inclusion of other "low" art genres, such as body genres, into the institutional gaze of the West.

I use the term "body horror" throughout this project to refer to depictions of transformed human forms that are not in line with reality: bodies changed or mutated. The term "body genre" was coined by Linda Williams as the extension of media into physical sensations and reactions due to the audience's self-identification in the bodies that they are consuming. Traditionally, the term "body horror" is used to describe imagery that appears excessively bloody and graphic, causing many to associate body horror as a visual medium with hybrid mutated forms or massacred teenage girls. However, expanding this definition to include uncanny depictions of the human body allows us to analyze the relationship between biological horror and the monstrous Other in visual culture. Discomfort originates from the distortion and mutation of the bodily form, images that, regardless of their familiar features, communicate the subject's separation from humanity through their separation from 'correct' bodies.

Body horror is an untraditional historical art term, as it is most commonly used to refer to cinematic depictions of the distorted human form. Though body horror isn't widely used in the art historical context, there is a long documented history of artworks that explore different levels of body horror.[14] In recent years, this term has gained considerable attention in online communities, as in the post-globalization era, there is an emphasis on the exchange of media and popular culture through technological developments. The natural human attraction to the

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[14] *Earthly Vanity and Divine Salvation* (c. 1485) by Hans Memling, *The Flaying of Marsyas* (c. 1570-1576) by Titian, *The Massacre of the Innocents* (1511-1512) by Peter Paul Rubens, *The Severed Heads* (c. 1810) by Théodore Géricault, *Saturn Devouring His Son (c. 1823) by Francisco de Goya*

unsettling and unknown has created an interest in supernatural and horror media as a representation of the developing morbid curiosity as a result of exposure on a global scale to new visual cultures.[15] Body horror encapsulates the human obsession with the grotesque; I argue for the term to be normalized for usage in art historical visual analysis to highlight its ability for satirical purposes as a form of contemporary activism through popular culture.

Biological horror is most often applied to the manipulation of the body and its functions; this is not limited to human bodies; instead, these mutations of form are used across the boundaries of species.[16] This metamorphosis adapts to its subject, with no uniform set of rules to the trope; these transformations can be horrific or glorious.[17] The terror of body horror stems from the human's instinctual fear of pain and damage to the body. The destruction of what is natural creates dread, especially since the mutilation is out of the subject's control, unavoidable, and painful. This type of content becomes comparable to pornography through the perverse pleasure or satisfaction that is gained from fetishized body horror specifically. What starts as a morbid curiosity can eventually lead to objectification and sexualization of the human body. Viewers become desensitized to these horrors and instead become active participants in the destruction of the human form.[18]

Generally, this is not an unfamiliar comparison to pornography as the film scholar Linda William, in her journal article, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess" (1991), theorizes that "...pornography is today more often deemed excessive for its violence than for its sex, while

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[15] Burak Türksever, "Online Horror: How Horrific Content on the World Wide Web Affects Adolescents," May 1, 2019, 2.

[16] Ronald Allan Lopez Cruz, "Mutations and Metamorphoses: Body Horror Is Biological Horror," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 40, no. 4 (October 2012): 161, https://doi.org/10.1080/01956051.2012.654521.

[17] Cruz, 163.

[18] Sue Tait, "Pornographies of Violence? Internet Spectatorship on Body Horror," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 25, no. 1 (March 2008): 94, https://doi.org/10.1080/15295030701851148.

horror films are excessive in their displacement of sex onto violence.”.[19] Williams in her writing declares how horror, pornography, and melodrama can all be compiled under the label of “Body Genres,” referring to the sensational aspects of the genres. The body’s reaction is the focus; the viewer is going through fear, pleasure, or emotional pain while consuming these three ‘low art' genres of media, as they manifest in physical reactions such as tears, screams, or moans.

These three states of body genre/reaction are identifiable in the way the bodies of women have embodied fear, pain, and pleasure in *pink film* and erotic Japanese media in the postwar period. The specific type of media reaction I want to address is how *pink film* showcases how Japanese women’s bodies became subjects of societal frustrations manifested into physical torture porn during the 1960s. *Pink films* can be loosely defined as low-budget “softcore” porn videos, commonly featuring fetishistic content without direct sexual imagery to work around censorship laws in Japan.[20] Popularized along with the Japanese *romanporuno* (translated to romantic-pornographic), pornography dominated Japan’s film industry from the 1960s to the 1980s. *Pink films* would frequently depict “violence, body torture, mutilation, rape and other brutalizations of the female.”[21] This form of body horror enacts punishment onto the image of the Japanese woman. Female victimization in media goes hand in hand with the creation of physical sensations in the body as a response, as we viscerally identify with the brutalized feminine. This expansion opens up the comparison of *pink film* as a form of erotic body horror to more modern Japanese horror manga’s usage of feminine body horror to depict broader societal issues among young Japanese women.

The imagery of feminine pain and horror appeals to the frustrated young man as the

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[19] (Williams 1991, 2)
[20] (Fernandez, n.d., 6)
[21] (Taylor 2012, 202)

visual punishment of the figures he blames for society's inevitable collapse. Though, as with many phenomena I cover in this thesis, diverse perspectives on the issue create multi-dimensional implications for both the empowering and oppressive nature of the media. While in some ways, the *pink film* is torture porn for the angry man as release, the pornography also appeals to empowerment in its deconstruction of gender power dynamics, as women profit off of the male consumer or audience for their attraction to her pain. *Pink film* pornography commonly showcases consensual torturous sex acts where women were not just active participants but also functioned as single participants displaying pleasure as the result of cruel actions. The gratification of the man is not emphasized; often, in these films, phallic items are used instead of depicting a man's genitals; author Ryan Taylor explains that this impotence is reflective of the insecurity that the entire genre is built on. The woman is brutalized to fulfill society's need to see women hurt to justify or comfort the inability to fulfill patriarchal roles.[22] The focus of the *pink film* isn't just the erotism; instead, the sexual elements of the movie fall into the background while the graphic violence is centered. Genitals are hidden while the torture and pained reactions are enlarged on the screen, consuming the viewer's experience.[23] The horror placed onto the body is where the *pink film*'s violence becomes comparable to horror movies and media. These overlapping themes of bodily reactions and relationships to bodies, generally amongst low art genres, tap into the monstrous association of the feminine body.

MANGA AND ANIME POPULAR CULTURE

Manga, an art form that has deep roots in art history, is a Japanese style of comics that has exploded in popularity since the end of the twentieth century, stemming from a long history of Japanese and East Asian visual culture. The usage in this project of a medium that Western art

[22] (Taylor 2012, 203–4)
[23] (Fernandez, n.d., 7)

historians have disregarded as a low art form due to its commercialization suggests that popular culture themes and mediums are in conversation in the post-1990s globalization of the social, economic, and cultural world.

Although the manga art style has been overlooked by art institutions and historians alike, it has a long history within its visual language and aesthetics. Traditional art history is based on European and Western colonial history. This project aims to make art history accessible and relevant to broader communities by expanding the studied art and mediums' geographic, cultural, and educational boundaries.

The term manga refers to a style of Japanese comics that encompasses many genres and subcultures. A hybrid media of the visual and verbal, this duality of the medium can also be seen in the Eastern and Western influences that shaped manga today. The line manga walks between high and low art showcases the medium not as one-dimensional but instead transcendent of both cultural and artistic barriers.[24]

The manga's earliest ancestry is *fushi*, or caricature, which refers to images that parody and criticize society or specific people/groups. The earliest caricature that is considered a prototype of modern manga is Bishop Toba's (1053-1140) "Choju Giga*" or* "Animal Scrolls," a print scroll made up of four volumes depicting caricatures of priests and the upper class as animals.[25] This ultimately developed and got popularized with *Jigoku-e* or "hell pictures" during the Tokugawa period (1603–1867), rather than comedic caricatures these images were used to teach Buddhist doctrines and ethics; instructional and exclusive for the elites of Japanese society. The accessibility of manga completely changed during the Hoei period (1704– 1711) with Toba-e images, the name referencing the practices of artist Bishop Toba; the pictures were comical

[24] (Macwilliams and MacWilliams 2008, 6)
[25] (Macwilliams and MacWilliams 2008, 26–35)

caricatures of everyday life. These originated in Kyoto but were published in Osaka, beginning a commercial publishing industry for woodblock prints in Japan. *Toba-e* and *Akahon*, picture books for adults with small amounts of text, became popular in woodblock printed and hand-drawn forms, expanding how these comics were created. However, the first actual manga comic didn't come until 1814 when Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) published his fifteen-volume manga between 1814 and 1878 using caricature to critique social conditions in Japan's Tempo period (1830-1844). Hokusai was the first artist to coin the term manga, and the Japanese government displayed his work at the 1867 World Exposition in Paris. Manga becomes recognized as a part of Japanese culture and slowly gains acceptance societally.

Manga continues to develop, with manga artists in the early 1900s working to popularize American-style comic strips in Japan. In the 1920s and 1930s, manga became prominent in mass media. In the postwar period, manga magazines were founded, and a boom of manga production in Japanese culture due to the societal conflict and change during WWII and the American Occupation of Japan.[26] Though this boom settled, manga continued developing and cementing itself as a faucet of Japanese media and culture for the next few decades. In the 1980s, manga reached extreme popularity globally and influenced fashion, visual arts, and cultural consumption. [27] Manga is easily made accessible through editing and translation, becoming a highly mobile medium; the medium has genres for every type of consumer. Though in this project, we will focus on shojo and horror manga and where they begin to overlap in popular media, manga is a "world of male entertainment"[28] still heavily filled with fetishizations and stereotypes. Nonetheless, it is a rich cultural entertainment and part of global art history.

[26] (Macwilliams and MacWilliams 2008, 26–35)
[27] Fernandez, "The Historical Origins of the New Japanese Extremity," 18–19.
[28] Wallis, "The Paradox of Mariko Mori's Women in Post-Bubble Japan," para. 34.

Shojo manga is accredited for its themes of girlhood and empowerment but is unable to escape the sexualized caricatures of children into sex symbols. The shojo manga contributes to a culture of sexualized adolescents and infantilization of women as sex objects, as the themes commonly reconfirm harmful depictions.[29] The bodies of Asian women are eroticized to the extent that the media they exist within get fetishized by men even when they're not necessarily fetishistic. The appeal of Japanese *kawaii* culture as a feminine term is distorted to turn characterizations of women from cute into adult infants with a lack of dimension outside of their sexualized child-like depiction. The shojo genre artistic style isn't monolithic but employs a series of visual cues defining the aesthetic as representative of young women. Art style features like the "shojo manga eyes" are oversized and appeal to these infant-like proportions of small faces with huge eyes that appeal to cute aesthetics similar to a puppy-like effect. Another significant aspect of shojo is the avoidance of depicting secondary sex characteristics to hold on to the youth of the female protagonist. At the same time, this may seem like a desexualization of the adolescent body. Still, it is unfortunately used as a sexualization and alignment with the prepubescent body, which appeals to the pedophilic gaze and consumption of girls' culture.

Japanimation, or anime, refers to the video counterparts of manga. The narratives and themes of manga are brought to life through animation, which appeals to the ability to live out personal fantasies and worlds through the consumption of this media. Anime, as one of the most popular media exports in Japan, has become a significant mass medium in both the domestic and global markets.[30] Due to the popularization of these mediums globally, we can see them spill into other commerce, such as video games, toys, and stationary. In the 80s and 90s, the popularity of anime grew as globalization allowed for the further exchange of the medium outside of East

[29] Wallis, para. 31.
[30] (Lan 2012, 28)

Asia.[31] The global impact and popularity of these "low art" mediums have led the icons to appear outside popular culture. As the visual language of these aesthetic mediums is applied to the fine arts as a cultural reference and point of parody, the lines between high and low art are blurred and ultimately made inconsequential.

Chapter Breakdown

In my effort to contextualize my proposal for the existence of a feminine language for body horror, I use the examples of the two motifs of the Japanese schoolgirl and hyper-feminized cyborg, both popularized in East Asian popular culture. The combination of these motifs and body horror appeals to broader theories of the monstrous feminine and the East Asian Other as alternative identities used by women to express their disconnect from patriarchal identifications. Centering this discussion in the 1990s, globalized East Asia identifies the significance of popular culture as a mode of cultural exchange and expression, contextualizing the social sphere in which it is created. I begin with contextualizing the Schoolgirl and Cyborg within East Asia and their relationships with Japan's militarized identities, subcultures of perversion, and idealization of Western modernity before visually analyzing contemporary horror manga that centers monstrous schoolgirls in its narratives.

In my first chapter, I contextualize this discussion in 1990s globalized East Asia identification and the significance of popular culture as a mode of cultural exchange and expression; I begin my research with the contextualizations of the Schoolgirl and Cyborg within East Asia and their relationships with Japan's militarized identities, subcultures of perversion, and idealization of Western modernity. This establishment of the popular culture motifs in conversation with global changes in the 1990s is a confirmation of the way in which popular

[31] (Lan 2012, 30)

culture is heavily influenced by the societies it exists within and, therefore, serves as a representation of the way citizens view and critique their communities.

I develop these representations of the schoolgirl motif in my next chapter through the usage of the work of two contemporary manga artists, Junji Ito and Shintaro Kago. Both artists utilize the conception of the monstrous schoolgirl as an approach to societal critique of the shojo manga aesthetic. Both artists are considered to be "low" due to the commercialization of manga as a medium, yet they act as influential depictions of the function of the monstrous schoolgirl within both Eastern and Western cultures. The exploration of East Asian standards of beauty is utilized to define the subversion of beautiful monsters as distinctly Western in their blurring of the boundaries between beauty and antagonism. This extends into the feminine visual language for body horror, and these depictions of the monstrous schoolgirl are both empowering through its appeal to feminine experiences yet continue to feed into exploitative cultures and stereotypes.

Following this, my third chapter moves into the world of fine art and its relationship to popular culture through the usage of cultural motifs to represent broader specific cultural moments. As in the work of contemporary artists Mariko Mori and Lee Bul, we see the usage of the gendered cyborg as a direct response to the motif as it exists in anime and manga as a self-identification of the East Asian with cyborg bodies. Both women critique the male gaze of patriarchal societies through their subversion of the feminine body to be made horrifying. These works act as a direct embodiment of the proposed feminine language for body horror as the artists use similar sets of visual aesthetics and cues to allude to not just a broader cultural moment but each artist's distinctive perspective on the feminine-monstrous through their implementation of different forms of biological horror. Donna Haraway's feminist theories on cyborgs are utilized in this chapter to draw a distinction between Eastern and Western feminism,

as both cultures are rooted in different histories with women and, therefore offer different approaches to the feminist method of depiction and relation.

This project concludes with the potential for further definition and analysis of these and other feminine caricatures as means of both positive and negative identifications. It also proposes the existence of a feminine language for the body that will develop and shift as new cultural moments happen. The importance of the discussion of these motifs as they implicate real women and girls in their misuse and exploitation of feminine aesthetics is also discussed.

CHAPTER I—THE SCHOOLGIRL AND CYBORG AS FEMINIST MOTIFS

The caricatures of the Japanese Schoolgirl and the Female Cyborg are employed as one of the primary lenses of my exploration of the cross-cultural exchanges between popular culture and fine art in the late twentieth century. The schoolgirl and cyborg motifs have been adopted into global contemporary art and popular visual culture as symbols of the cultural representations of East Asian women in visual media.[32][33] Though these caricatures are heavily associated with their origins in anime and manga as low art forms, they have become deeply tied to broader commentaries on depictions of East Asian women in media. Therefore, their cultural importance, confirmed by the fine artist's validation of the motifs and general popularity as relational representations, reflects how East Asian women view their role in traditional patriarchal systems. This chapter is split into two sections. The following section will build a historical and social context for how the infantilized and parodied Japanese schoolgirl reflects societal perspectives toward the fetishized group. The dehumanization at the heart of aggressive feminization and the intertwining of the Other as a reflection of outsider identities are ways in which the monstrous feminine is aligned with the feminized East. The potential to build characterizations of such

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[32] Daniel Chandler and Rod Munday, "A Dictionary of Media and Communication," in *A Dictionary of Media and Communication* (Oxford University Press, 2011), https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780199568758.001.0001/acref-9780199568758.

[33] The term visual culture is used here to refer to the relationship between specific visual practices and their consumption in visual media (visual art, photography, film, television, posters, etc.)

motifs as modes of empowerment through subversion of Japanese ideals of women allows us to explore new forms of feminist language rooted in popular culture.

The origins of the cyborg and its relevance to Japan, in addition to the gendered cyborg's relationship with feminist theories such as Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the late Twentieth-Century," published in 1985, culminating in these caricatures. Their function as visual languages in the fine arts setting can depict a clear connection between how East Asian women are portrayed in contemporary art today and in a specifically feminist context. By focusing on these visual culture movements and trends, this project draws a connection between visual culture and its ability to act as a tool for societal change, especially in the post-globalization context that allows caricatures in the digital age to cross borders and find,d new representations or self-explorations.

ORIGINS OF THE JAPANESE SCHOOL GIRL

The schoolgirl motif has been heavily ingrained into Japanese popular culture, appearing in anime, manga, and fashion trends. The oversaturated and easily accessible nature of this caricature has become highly controversial due to the symbol's real-life basis being young girls. The schoolgirl represents more than just literal students; the image of the schoolgirl is heavily connected to the actual exploitation of adolescent girls. The motif has been used in heavily sexualized fetish content, appropriating the aesthetics of underage girls to appeal to pedophilic taboos.

Pornography and *Pink films* are both aspects of the commercial sex market, which are infamous for their inclusion of not just the schoolgirl motif but the continued sexualization of children. These erotic images of teenage students are sold commonly in convenience stores and

at newsstands as the demand for borderline child pornography is fulfilled. This perversion targets a vulnerable group which is ultimately dehumanized by the extremity of these motifs as they become victims of fantasy rather than multifaceted individual people. This normalization of the eroticizing of the adolescent victimizes actual school girls who are being exposed to potential physical and sexual abuse as the boundaries between fantasy and reality become blurred.[34]

Representations of young women in Japanese media, shojo or *shōujo*, are a mode of representation that is empowering through young women relating to the adolescent protagonists. Media dealing with the Japanese schoolgirl archetypes tend to lean into Japanese “cute” or *kawaii* aesthetics, excessively emphasizing the youth of their schoolgirls to appeal to the mass culture trend. This genre can potentially appeal to the fetishistic gaze through the infantilization of its female leads; this transformation into caricature is where we see stereotypes of East Asian women manifest in their portrayal in popular media. The cute aesthetic is extremely popular in Japan and regional East Asia, as the term commonly applies to infants or young women as a descriptor. The pairing of infant and adolescent continues to associate the school girl with cute, immature behavior, she is docile and sweet, appealing to the fetishization of Asian women as submissive and agreeable. The body of the Asian woman is excessively exoticized as cute and petite, appropriating the form of the adolescent body.[35]

Schoolgirls are fetishized and paired with body horror themes as a form of erotic horror content that appears in Japanese manga and anime. These depictions, when separated from the male gaze and placed back into the perspective of the young woman, become empowering in the relationship between the audience and the school girl as they experience emotions that are not

[34] “Sexualized, Submissive Stereotypes of Asian Women Lead to Staggering Rates of Violence,” NNEDV, paras. 2–4, accessed April 29, 2024, https://nnedv.org/latest_update/stereotypes-asian-women/.

[35] Bow, “Racist Cute,” 93–101.

socially acceptable to express in a traditional patriarchal society. This is what I propose in my visual language for feminine body horror, when body horror media is dealing with women or feminine bodies there is an immediate new context placed onto that media. By using the term visual language I am alluding to a set of visual cues and markers that help viewers recognize potential feminist reflections. Due to the real-life fetishization of feminine pain, these body horror works sit in a fetishistic gaze, yet they also are identified with feminine pain and experience. To further explore this proposal. A focus is placed on the schoolgirl archetype as she was characterized by the popular culture in the 1990s, contextualizing the archetype not just in her origins but the different manifestations of this character in media. It is helpful to become aware of the contextual understanding of who the Japanese school girl is iconographically, and socially, and where she manifested.

The Japanese schoolgirl uniform is a piece of Japanese military history, initiated in 1920s Japan as a replacement for the traditional kimono girls' uniform.[36] The kimono is heavily associated with conventional Japanese women who appeal to submissive and feminine identifications. Yet due to the impractical kimonos for everyday wear, they were widely replaced by the sailor style suit in the 1930s.[37]. The sailor uniform originated from the Meiji period (1868–1912) as junior civilian versions of official military apparel. Japanese officials enacted this change to emphasize education and “citizen making”[38] in Japanese society. The girls’ uniforms, nicknamed “sailor suits,”(fig.2) were designed to be feminine equivalents of the Navy-inspired boys' uniforms. The early iterations of the sailor suit consisted of a looser fitting and

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[36] “...a long, loose piece of outer clothing with very wide sleeves, traditionally worn by the Japanese” “Kimono,” December 6, 2023, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/kimono.

[37] Sharon Kinsella, “Minstrelized Girls: Male Performers of Japan’s Lolita Complex,” *Japan Forum* 18, no. 1 (March 1, 2006): 218, https://doi.org/10.1080/09555800500498319.

[38] Citizen making is referencing the practice of instilling nationalist values and teaching children how to be productive members of society.

conservative combination of a long pleated skirt and a long-sleeved blouse, adorned with a large bow in the front and a small nautical anchor on the center of the chest. Additionally, the beret worn is a distinct part of military uniforms in the West. This military-style uniform was intended to create an idealized image of Japan as a global power that appeals to the gaze of foreign powers.[39] This invisible gaze can be seen as an extension of modern Japan's complicated and idealized relationship with the West throughout the late 19th and 20th centuries. The mimicking and adoption of Western aesthetics is reflected in the Japanese hyper-militarized aesthetics in the early twentieth century. The sailor suit uniform was used during World War II,[40] a period of extreme change in Japanese society. The American Occupation of Japan (1945-1952) following the war leads to an odd sort of idolization of American culture. In postwar Japan (1945-1989), the perfect citizen archetype was turned into a societal fetish. The extension of military uniforms into children's school uniforms represents this phenomenon. Images of healthy, neat school children in their uniforms began to take over advertising and television screens in the early postwar period. Propaganda that corresponds with postwar America's extremely moral and wholesome aesthetic.[41]

These connections between Eastern and Western popular media are a theme that will be further explored throughout this project, especially in the context of how caricatures translate based on the society they are placed within. In American culture, these caricatures of school children as good citizens is propaganda for military idealization yet in a Japanese context these

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[39] Kinsella, "Minstrelized Girls," 216–17.

[40] "World War II, conflict that involved virtually every part of the world during the years 1939–45…The 40,000,000–50,000,000 deaths incurred in World War II make it the bloodiest conflict, as well as the largest war, in history." "World War II | Facts, Summary, History, Dates, Combatants, & Causes | Britannica," December 10, 2023, https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-II.

[41] Sharon Kinsella, "What's Behind the Fetishism of Japanese School Uniforms?," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body, & Culture* 6, no. 2 (June 6, 2002): 219, https://doi.org/10.2752/136270402778869046.

aesthetics become about the West as ideal. This idolization of the West resulted in Japanese citizens who were more so aligned with traditional Japanese cultural identities rebelling against these images, eroticizing the icons as a form of parody and critique. When placed in the hands of different creatives, the motif shifts as it is recontextualized in its environment and intentions. This is shown in the context of the schoolgirl in the different characterizations found in popular culture; we see the sexy schoolgirl, the magical schoolgirl, and the monstrous and cyborg schoolgirls are all examples of the unique ways the motif is recontextualized to provide its audience with commentary under the umbrella of the original caricature's characterizations.

The sexy Japanese schoolgirl especially is heavily depicted in the post-war pornography culture. The sailor suit schoolgirl appeared everywhere, from photo magazines to illustrations,[42] her shy and innocent persona playing an essential role in her appeal. Pornographic novels and manga featuring seductive and timid school girls became a staple in erotica in the post-war period and would not disappear anytime soon. Pornography and the erotic act as a release both in its literal sexual gratification and al the deeper frustrations and anxieties in society. The placement of caricatures in the erotic is another form of rebellion and critique, especially in conservative societies where sexuality isn't discussed freely. The erotic reflects the societal perspective of its subject, as shown in the centering of women in the erotic. The feminine body is objectified inherently in a patriarchal society; even in her pain or horror, the woman exists as a sexual symbol for the male gaze. This application reflects how women are viewed amongst male consumers of the erotic content, along with a reflection of the fear of women manifested in the domination of the female form.

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[42] Kinsella, 219.

How has the fetishization of the schoolgirl bled into Japanese visual culture, and how has this embracing of taboo through caricature become normalized? Even if the media itself isn't made as pornography, the caricature still appears and is apparent through visual and behavioral cues. Signifiers of the schoolgirl caricature will be explored further in chapter two. Still, to begin to define a list of visual cues of Japanese schoolgirl caricature, we can look at the familiar aesthetics of adolescent girls. The depiction of the school girl in short skirts, pigtails, and cute aesthetics is generally utilized to highlight the youth and purity of the archetype. Japanese *kawaii* or cute aesthetics express the endearing innocence of cuteness as it pertains to applicable aesthetics or behavior. The term encompasses youth aesthetics and innocence as a form of expression of identity and endearment, yet in the context of the caricature it appeals more so to a pedophilic gaze of the sexualized child.[43]

The appeal of the motif is that it implies that its viewer is in a state of power over the schoolgirl; the child-like behavior and characterizations all emphasize how the schoolgirl caricature holds no agency or power; she is entirely at the mercy of the consumer.

The sexy schoolgirl isn't confined to porn as she has crawled from the depths of fetish hell and bled into movies, comics, and toys. There is a clear value placed upon underage bodies; the appeal of the taboo encourages many to pursue the schoolgirl fetish[44]. This caricature of the young Japanese woman is born out of the specific visual imagery of school uniforms from middle and high schools. The sexy schoolgirl imagery can be found on the covers of pornographic magazines (Fig.3), which are sold alongside used uniforms in sex shops, appealing

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[43] Bow, "Racist Cute," 93–101.

[44] Chizuko UENO, "Self-Determination on Sexuality? Commercialization of Sex among Teenage Girls in Japan 1," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 4, no. 2 (January 1, 2003): 322, https://doi.org/10.1080/1464937032000113060.

to the fetishistic value of the innocent juvenile.[45] Schoolgirls are portrayed by adult models who harness their eroticism in their teasing of the audience; they are playing up their coy and playful nature to hold on to the purity of the adolescent girl. In a 1998 cover for the pornographic magazine *Pixie 17* (fig.3), we see a model sporting an extremely short skirt, an aesthetic commonly used in manga for the schoolgirl heroines of the Shojo genre. Although the model is otherwise covered in an iteration of a school uniform, she is exposed by a premeditated breeze. This is an act out of a scenario where the young girl is unaware of her exposure; otherwise, smiling shyly at the audience, she doesn't acknowledge the exposure of her rear. This allows the fetishistic gaze to consume the schoolgirl's innocence without her being implicated in that sexualization. Appealing to an idealization of the purity of the virgin school girl and the eroticism of consuming her without consent, a more taboo interaction that removes any agency the school girl might have in her sexuality or role as a consumable product of the male gaze.

Though I am covering this caricature in an East Asian and specifically Japanese context, these are not in any way unfamiliar to the West, with the prevalence of "Sexy/Seductive schoolgirl" costumes being rampant in pop culture and media[46]. We can tap into what it is about these costumes that attract so much attention, along with what broader cultural notions the popularization of this fetish may imply. This brings us to an actual life application of this fetish and its relationship with teenage girls in *Enjo Kosai* dating.

As with most nations, Japan has a long, complex history of prostitution, explicitly involving underage girls. Most of this history can be connected to brothels and how culture views the bodies of women as commerce. Chizuko Ueno breaks down the way brothel owners

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[45] Ueno, Chizuko. 2003. "Self-determination on sexuality? Commercialization of sex among teenage girls in Japan 1." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 4, no. 2 (August): 322,

[46] Fenneuff, Julita. 2022. "It's Time To Expel The Schoolgirl Trope." Spring 2022 Issue ed. THE CURRENT. Magazine. https://thecurrentmsu.com/2022/03/18/expel-the-schoolgirl-trope/.

treat their prostitutes and the values placed around a girl's age. During pre-modern times in Japan, premenstrual girls were recruited into brothels as young as fourteen years old and reached their prime at sixteen years old[47] The brothels were ruthless. These girls, if they were lucky enough to survive the extreme working conditions and malnourishment of their youth, were then, by the age of twenty, transferred to lower-ranking brothels to continue the exploitation.[48] The bodies of these girls were seen as disposable; there was never a short supply of new girls to profit off of and objectify. The term "Enjo Kosai" spawned in the 1970s, and it references these paid relationships between young girls and much older men.[49] In these pre-modern examples of young girls being monetized and controlled by men, we can begin to understand why exactly "Enjo Kosai" had a rebirth in the 90s. The term in more modern times refers to young women profiting from paid dating or prostitution from older, wealthier men. The monetization of girls' bodies is still apparent; it has just flipped, with young girls seeming to have their agency. Rather than the men who controlled the brothels having complete control over the profits, the money is now going to the young girls for their wants and needs. "Enjo Kosai" at the end of the day, still contributes to the sexualization and exploitation of young girls, though it can be an empowering process for many girls who partake. This contrast between empowerment and exploitation will show up in many of the themes covered in this project in an attempt to gain a better understanding of the role of visual media in activism and subcultures. As caricatures are based on stereotypical imagining of communities, those associations become attached to the real person or community represented. Caricature can lead to the development of personal identity through

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[47] Ueno, Chizuko. 2003. "Self-determination on sexuality? Commercialization of sex among teenage girls in Japan 1." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 4, no. 2 (August): 318. 10.1080/1464937032000113060.

[48] Ueno, Chizuko. 2003. "Self-determination on sexuality? Commercialization of sex among teenage girls in Japan 1." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 4, no. 2 (August): 318.

[49] "enjo kosai" – WordSense Online Dictionary URL: https://www.wordsense.eu/enjo_kosai/

the representation, in addition to the social identities that are internalized by the audience and therefore forced onto the subject

Ueno writes about a conversation they had with a young girl in a self-help meeting for girls with a history of prostitution and childhood sexual abuse in the fall of 2000. The head psychologist noted this meeting, as documentation of the meeting was anonymous, but one of the girls was quoted during a conversation on Enjo Kosai, “As far as I take money from those middle-aged men, I feel confident my body does not belong to them.” [50] This statement points to precisely what might attract a young girl to participate in paid dating or prostitution past just the financial benefits: the ability to confirm ownership over your own body that might’ve been taken advantage of in another context is empowering.

This culture of underage prostitution has birthed an entire subculture of young women who have embraced this lifestyle and chosen to depict it through their style and fashion, known as Kogal style. This style subculture imitates the Japanese schoolgirl uniform of the past with the addition of short skirts, loose socks, and designer accessories. This rebellion against traditional styles and the anti-fashion origins of the sailor suit is a way for girls to reclaim a part of their societal identity. This “look” shows their connection to Enjo ko-sai dating and an independent money-making lifestyle. However, these styles based on children harm their inspiration, and actual Japanese schoolgirls deal with the repercussions. They are continuously sexualized and harassed in public because of the sexual connotations attaching themselves to their outfits. [51] The title kogal comes from the term Joshi-kōsei, translating into “School girl.” the cult following for the schoolgirl crosses boundaries between the physical and digital worlds with both media and

[50] Ueno, Chizuko. 2003. “Self-determination on sexuality? Commercialization of sex among teenage girls in Japan 1.” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 4, no. 2 (August): 321.

[51] Julita Fenneuff, “It’s Time To Expel The Schoolgirl Trope,” *The Current* (blog), March 19, 2022, para. 28, https://thecurrentmsu.com/2022/03/18/expel-the-schoolgirl-trope/.

real life reflecting the fetishization of these girls—the connections between visual media and real-life showcase why art history is so meaningful as a discipline. The value of expanding the discipline becomes apparent in the context of this paper; the only way to solve societal issues is to understand where they stem from.

Let's take a quick deviation to the 1980s to explore how the schoolgirl became the main subject of the Lolita complex erotica and pornography. The Lolita complex, also known as Lolicon in Japan, refers to older men fantasizing about pre-adolescent girls in sexual contexts. This "fantasy" also infiltrated popular media. We find the origin of the term in Vladimir Nabokov's novel "Lolita" from 1955, the story of a stepfather referred to as having an inappropriate and abusive relationship with his twelve-year-old stepdaughter.[52] The Lolita complex indeed refers to a normalized depiction of pedophilic media in visual culture. Female characters that are adaptations of the Japanese schoolgirl are heavily associated with this phenomenon, idolized by teenage girls for their relatability and sexualized by older men for their attractiveness. This fetishization in media made for young girls is a distortion of shojo media in its appeal to young girls as a space for embracing their identities. The male gaze infiltrates the space, perverting otherwise innocent imagery and characterizations of young girls.

The unfortunate reality is there is no hiding from the male gaze in a patriarchal society. Its point of view will always infiltrate and impact the depictions of women's spaces and media. The male gaze is defined by how hegemonic masculinity views women through the lens of an object or subject to be consumed rather than as a person or identity that is multidimensional.[53] These shoujo heroines are created for young girls and women to enjoy but are fetishized and

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[52] Shari L. Savage, "Just Looking: Tantalization, Lolicon, and Virtual Girls," *Visual Culture & Gender* 10 (October 1, 2015): 37, http://vcg.emitto.net/index.php/vcg/article/view/92.

[53] Chandler and Munday, "A Dictionary of Media and Communication."

objectified by men with pedophilic intentions. Shojo is the Japanese word for "young girl" and describes media targeting young girls and women for consumption. Teenage girls lose their media role models due to the sexualization and distortion that they are victims of. In some examples, this genre features regular school girls falling in love and going through their daily lives, while in others, the main heroines are supernatural and powerful. These narratives commonly include superhumans and cyborgs, though all of these feminine archetypes deploy constructions of what appropriate or correct femininity is.[54]

The existence of shojo as a genre in Japan signifies that the lolita has become less of a person and more of a symbol. This obsession with youth and innocence creates a nationwide fetish for the idea of the perfect submissive lolita, no longer a person but instead something more in line with an idol.

In Japan, Azuma Hideo has been coined the "Father of Lolicon."[55] Hideo's erotic fantasy manga "Hizashi" is known as the "bible" for Lolita and lolicon media.[56] *Hizashi* is a series of short manga featuring adolescent school girls in erotic and surrealist situations, featuring themes of science fiction and body horror. We see characters that are drawn, like children engaged in sexual deviance; stories include bodies being fused, shrunken, zoophilia, rape, and pedophilia. The manga is a horrific series featuring pedophilic lolicon images and distorted depictions of the human form. The taboo and grotesque imagery is capable of creating discomfort to an unsettling extent for readers. The cover (fig.4) of the book is inconspicuous, as the simplistic imagery of a *Loli* school girl with a flower in no way alludes to the graphic content of the series. The subject

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[54] Rina Kita, "Mariko Mori: The Extraterrestrial-Cyborg Heroine as a Glitch in the Matrix," *Emergence Journal* viii (2022): para. 3, https://emergencejournal.english.ucsb.edu/index.php/archive/https-emergencejournal-english-ucsb-edu-p1433/.

[55] Casey Brienza, "Disappearance Diary," Anime News Network, December 11, 2023, https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/review/disappearance-diary.

[56] Kinsella, "Minstrelized Girls," 224–25.

is gently posed on the ground–docile, emotionless, and vulnerable to the audience's gaze. This visual characterization of the manga is misleading. Yet, it is seemingly trying to appeal to both the aesthetics of traditional Japanese beauty and the hyper-sexualized monstrous child-woman of lolicon pornography.

The lolicon subculture rejects sexual maturity in pursuit of fulfilling perversions and taboos that are traditionally socially unacceptable through art. Though lolicon media deals with imagined bodies, these depictions have implications for their real-life counterparts. In reality, these young girls are still sexualized immensely by male Lolicon fans, a normalization of Lolicon media generally is built through the abundance of media and the accessibility of it in the growing development of the internet towards the end of the twentieth-century. Images of real "Loli-girls", or young women dressed in clothing fitting the kawaii aesthetics of Japan are posted on fetish websites without consent, offering real-life counterparts to the large amount of lolicon pornography littered in Japanese media.

Over time these magazines became less acceptable and the Japanese legislature created laws to limit these types of publications, leading to an even greater demand for anime and manga depicting lolicon erotica. The Lolicon imagery shows up heavily in pornographic anime and manga that implies, through the use of visual cues, underage characters in sexual and violent situations.[57] The media has been heavily criticized by many for its proximity to child pornography. Though because of the disconnect from reality created through the normalization of lolicon culture and erotic shojo the genre is still defended globally.[58] With so much access to these depictions through so many forms of media, the demand grew; magazines in the 1980s included reader-submitted images of nonconsensual moments of exposed young girls. In Japan,

[57] Galbraith, 2011, p. 83 as cited by Savage, "Just Looking," 29.
[58] Savage, 38–40.

there is a large market of pedophilic manga cartoons featuring preteen girls with the faces of children and the bodies of women and vise-versa, most often created by male cartoonists for male readers.[59] This transformation of the adolescent's body is to blur the line between fantasy and reality further, the characters are both woman and child while at the same time not being either, turning into creatures that are more adjacent to sex dolls than actual human beings.

In current widespread culture concerns over the more significant implications of sexualized schoolgirls are rampant, though still a minority compared to the media, costumes, and fantasies that keep the caricature alive. Critic Julita Fenneuff explores the widespread culture and consequences of the schoolgirl trope; Fennueff points out in her article that even just searching the term ‘schoolgirl uniform’ brings up a variety of images of both little girls in their uniforms and adult women in more revealing iterations of the same clothing.[60] There is a widespread fetish culture rooted in pedophilia that feeds on imagery related to young girls, and unfortunately, adult women are contributing to this. What may seem empowering, women reclaiming their sexuality has both intentional and unintentional dark undertones. The “sexy schoolgirl” is a culmination of both Eastern and Western modernization. However, the Japanese schoolgirl is a large target for sexualization and infantilization that is charged with ethnic stereotypes and racism. This phenomenon ultimately impacts young Asian girls the most, contributing to long-held stereotypes of Asian women being extremely submissive and docile.[61] These traits create the image that these schoolgirls need corruption, that they are waiting to be liberated from their current roles in society so that they may become sex objects for male desire. This is a form of

[59] Michael Darling, “Plumbing the Depths of Superflatness,” *Art Journal* 60, no. 3 (September 1, 2001): 81, https://doi.org/10.1080/00043249.2001.10792079.

[60] Julita Fenneuff, “It’s Time To Expel The Schoolgirl Trope.”

[61] Shruti Mukkamala and Karen L. Suyemoto, “Asian American Women’s Experiences of Discrimination - Spotlight | APA,” https://www.apa.org, 2018, https://www.apa.org/pubs/highlights/spotlight/issue-119.

dehumanization through the process of flattening multidimensional real people into exaggerated and simplistic representations that when applied to already marginalized communities further societal prejudice and oppression. In the case of the Asian exoticized and infantilized woman, these projections lead to increased rates of violence against women who do not fit these archetypes. The sexual objectification and dehumanization of real subjects have statistically been shown to lead to higher rates of physical and sexual violence against these women, as 41 to 61 percent of Asian women are reporting such crimes. Caricatures based on Asian girls and women lead to perceptions of infantilization rather than identifying them as people with their own identities and agency.[62]

The Ero Guro art movement originating in the 1920s is a precursor to the development of lolicon culture, offering early depictions of school girls in sexual and horrific scenes. *Ero-guro-nansensu* is the Japanese term encompassing the American words for *erotic grotesque nonsense*, a mass culture movement originating from the Taishō (1912-1926) and early Shōwa periods (1926-1989) in Japan.[63] The popularization of shunga preceded this artistic movement; morbidly erotic hand scrolls, wood prints, and drawings during the Edo period of Japan (1603-1868). These images were usually comical renderings of sex scenes that range from the traditional married couple to the grotesque and monstrous side of pornography.[64] The image *The Dream of The Fisherman's Wife* (1814)(fig.5) is one such example that encapsulates the absurdity and

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[62] "Sexualized, Submissive Stereotypes of Asian Women Lead to Staggering Rates of Violence," paras. 2–4.

[63] Lisa Lackney, "Ero-Guro-Nansensu: Modernity and Its Discontents in Taishō and Early Shōwa Japan" (Graduate school of Vanderbilt University, 2020), 1, https://drive.google.com/file/u/0/d/1Zcpl5gU_FjKW5R_ym2wahXNVzh_qkaxr/view?usp=drive_web&pli=1&usp=embed_facebook.

[64] Camille Bertherat, "Ero Guro And Macabre Eroticism: Eros, Thanatos and the Hybrid Body," 9–11, accessed April 30, 2024, https://www.academia.edu/34881786/Ero_Guro_And_Macabre_Eroticism_Eros_Thanatos_and_the_hybrid_body.

perversion at the heart of both *shunga* and the later *ero-guro-nansensu* movement. This intention of embracing the bizarre and nonsensical as a means of coping with extreme social reform is one such way that popular culture reflects the social and cultural environment it is birthed from. *The Dream of The Fisherman's Wife* is a claim of fantasy for the imagined wife, as she dreams of a zoophilic encounter with octopus-like creatures. The artwork's title is humorous in its employment of the husband's animal prey to corrupt the traditional Japanese wife. The image is bizarre as the woman is ravished by these grotesque sea creatures, completely unashamed in the horrific scene. Monstrous octopi take on the image of the phallus as they wrap their tentacles around their "prey" holding her in place as they perform oral sex on the woman. The entire scene is absurd but appeals to a morbid curiosity relating to odd and visually horrifying sex acts. This exploration of the taboo is shared with the sentiments of the *ero-guro-nansensu* movement which centered on horrific scenes of sexual deviance as a response to cultural anxieties. This artistic movement was involved in multiple forms of media from literature to cinema, to artworks, all to respond to and cope with the anxiety caused by the rapid modernization of Japan in the first half of the twentieth century. Industrialization and urbanization transformed Japanese society in the 1910s and 1920s. This created economic growth and led to a new feminine culture for the women of Japan.

Gender played an essential role in the hesitance towards modernity and anxieties regarding increasing Western influence in mass culture. Despite Japan's influence in the post-WWI Peace of Paris Meeting and its role in the League of Nations, the country struggled to secure its global position as a world power. Never being recognized as equal to Western powers caused an insecurity in the people of Japan due to the nation not being able to align themselves with the colonial experiences of other Asian countries either. With increasing censorship in

Japan due to the government's interest in limiting politically dangerous movements, creatives were limited in the kind of content deemed appropriate for works of art especially when it was so subjective based on which bureaucrats were reviewing the media. This difficult period is where we see ero-guro-nansensu first appear in print; what seemed like a new trendy phrase for the 1930s was charged with a long history of a practice of engaging with modern societal issues.

Each part of the phrase ero-guro-nansensu is relevant to the term's value. The word “Ero” summarized new and distorted eroticism in literature and culture. “Ero” is very focused on the objectification of women in pursuit of male desire instead of women and their desires, artistic nudes and exotic dancers all with the intent to appeal to male audiences are heavily included in *ero-guro-nansensu* magazines. "Guro" stands for grotesque, originating with Western detective stories translated for Japanese audiences, eventually leading to Japanese authors creating their versions of these stories. “Guro” applies the mysterious and weird aspects of the world; these themes were featured heavily in detective stories. The stories most often centered around discovering an unexplained corpse or the protagonist becoming the main suspect in a crime. This genre allowed authors to explore deviance often combined with “ero” themes to depict sexually deviant crimes, so erotic descriptions of suspects and victims were prevalent. Criminal psychology is explored all while bypassing censorship laws through the usage of a “happy ending” with the crime and criminal being caught or killed by the end of the stories. This genre becomes a space for readers to explore their anxieties and perversions. Lastly, “nansensu” meaning nonsense summarizes subversive political messages and contemporary ideas that might not be socially acceptable but are communicated through the media. Embracing the ridiculous and taboo allows the genre to break boundaries and reveal the extremes of modern life in

Japanese society. Though Ero-guro-nansensu is shocking to many, the extremity of the movement ultimately reflects the culture it stems from.

The movement was in direct opposition to censorship in Japan, though never directly interacting with this through public criticism the existence of the media represented this opposition. The nonsense has also been said to reference how redactions in a text can make it meaningless becoming nonsense through censorship. Eventually, the ero-guro-nansensu movement faded out in early twentieth-century Japanese media. Due to stricter censorship laws being set with the increased militarization of Japan and the Japanese Romantics gaining popularity for their anti-modernist beliefs.[65] The Romantics believed that the solutions to anxieties caused by modernization were returning to traditional Japanese purity and finding identity in the non-Westernized Japanese village.[66] This marks a shift in the way Japan was perceived by citizens, rather than unease from not feeling established by Western standards this return to a more authentic Japanese identity creates an alignment with Asia. Japan is now seen as a power of the East, leading the rest of Asia in overcoming Western powers.[67] A short-lived period of prosperity fades in the 1930s, as nationalistic aesthetics prevail, creatives succumb to censorship, and ero-guro-nansensu leaves mass culture until ultimately having a revival in postwar Japan.

Japanese literary critics have historically dismissed ero-guro-nansensu writing as unworthy of study; we see these "low art" titles attached to taboo media even in writing. What

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[65] Lisa Lackney, "Ero-Guro-Nansensu: Modernity and Its Discontents in Taishō and Early Shōwa Japan" (Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate school of Vanderbilt University, 2020), 1–13.

[66] Kevin Michael Doak, "Prologue: Nationalism, Romanticism, and the Problem of Modernity," in *Dreams of Difference*, 1st ed., The Japan Romantic School and the Crisis of Modernity (University of California Press, 1994), xviii, https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.5973005.4.

[67] Lisa Lackney, "Ero-Guro-Nansensu: Modernity and Its Discontents in Taishō and Early Shōwa Japan," 280–89.

causes discomfort or feels inappropriate is often excluded from academic disciplines, this is one of the issues this project works to address. Though it might be uncomfortable in more modern times the movement has had a revival of sorts. Ero-guro-nansensu has gained the attention of scholars due to research groups like the Metamorphosis Research Group, which specializes in the study of ero-guro-nansensu in mass culture and presenting the under-researched movement to new audiences.[68] With erotic images of schoolgirls showing up in pornography and general culture, we see the complex ero-guro images of the 1930s make a comeback in the 1960s and 1970s with extreme images of schoolgirls being raped by relatives, schoolteachers, and monsters. The focus is placed on deviant school girls, with the men of Japan being decentralized in these works. This reflects once again the focus on young women in postwar Japan and leads us to the switch in the 1980s from Shonen (young boys) culture to Shojo (young girls) culture.[69] Here is where we can find monstrous depictions of the schoolgirl as a threatening Other, as the infantilized caricature is given the implication of an agency that has already been revoked. In Figure 6, the cover of a manga is adorned with a monstrous schoolgirl, as she holds a gun casually. She still carries the schoolgirl aesthetics in her uniform, and the shojo art style she is drawn in; But the gun acts as a phallic addition to offset her identity as Other. This schoolgirl is capable of hurting someone, but she won't as she is still a caricature without an agency that can be stopped by the patriarchy.. The monstrous schoolgirl continues the fetishization of the caricature with the added interest of the potential of the schoolgirl to fight back. The act of infantilizing gives the viewer dominance over the depiction, creating a hierarchy of control. These same themes can be found in ero guro imagery of the 1990s (fig.7) (fig.8), as monstrous depictions of schoolgirls with faux agency partake in perverse and violent behaviors. The

[68] Lisa Lackney, 15–16.

[69] Kinsella, "What's Behind the Fetishism of Japanese School Uniforms?," 221–24.

modern girl aesthetics are used for the implication of the Western woman being monstrous, as traditional Japanese women are excluded from these depictions other than as victims. Within Japanese pop culture, the schoolgirl takes on a variety of different roles, both in victimhood and in her monstrosity. The deviant schoolgirl offers an example of a sexually liberated Japanese girl, empowering in the representation of taboo themes. Yet it is oppressive in its hyper-sexualizing of young girls for the pleasure of the male gaze.

ORIGIN OF FEMINIZED CYBORG

The origins of the cyborg in Japanese media can be traced back to the introduction of science fiction to Japan in 1913 with the translation of H.G Wells' novel, *Time Machine.* Yet we don't see the specific usage of the word robot for the first time in Japan until 1923 when Czech writer Karel Čapek's play *Rossum's Universal Robots* (1921) was translated and staged in Tokyo in 1923.[70] The Japanese translations of this new genre birthed the war propaganda sci-fi novels of the 1930s. Japan's defeat in WWII shifted how the country was viewed globally, rather than gaining validity as a global military power the nation was instead characterized as a land of technological and organic hybrids. The novels of the 1950s until the early 1960s depict Japanese citizens as machines, dehumanizing the citizens and misaligning them with emotionless robots.[71]

This new conflation of humans and machines is further developed with the creation of the term cyborg by Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline in their 1960 article on the possible future of technological augmentation of organic beings. The pair proposed the term as referring

[70] Lan, "Technofetishism of Posthuman Bodies: Representations of Cyborgs, Ghosts, and Monsters in Contemporary Japanese Science Fiction Film and Animation," 32.

[71] Kumiko Sato, "How Information Technology Has (Not) Changed Feminism and Japanism: Cyberpunk in the Japanese Context," *Comparative Literature Studies* 41, no. 3 (2004): 347–48, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40247417.

to a machine that unconsciously self-sustains and regulates. This trail of thought led the pair to consider the possible technological enhancement of the human body as a means of scientific advancement. This cyborg image was of interest to the “science fiction imagination” and quickly became a cultural symbol that was well established in the 1960s science fiction wave where modified human-machine hybrids appeared in popular culture.[72] Following this intertwining of popular culture and technological theory, 1980s Japan goes through a period in which Japanese film and animation becomes filled with cyborgs that cross boundaries between genres such as fantasy, horror, and romance.[73] Cyborg imagery is reimagined in different iterations: android, mutant, monster, partial human; yet these depictions all consider this concept of the overlapping of organic and inorganic bodies.[74] The significant influence that cyborgs as a distinctive feature, or motif, had on both anime and manga can be connected to the broader Japanese perspective on robots as helpful, friendly, and a symbol of limitless possibilities. A direct contrast to the Western perspective on such advanced technology as a threat to the current distribution of labor and power; as cyborgs represent a being more powerful than man and the patriarchy due to the potential of its development.[75] The trope or figure of the cyborg is representative of the cultural anxieties regarding contemporary technology; not only utopian or dystopian but a literal

[72] Amelia Precup, “'All Cyborgs Are Asian' The Ethnic Implications of the Cyborg-Topian Future in Karen Tei Yamashita's 'Anime Wong',” 253, accessed April 9, 2024, https://www.academia.edu/35887843/All_Cyborgs_are_Asian_The_Ethnic_Implications_of_the_Cyborg_topian_Future_in_Karen_Tei_Yamashitas_Anime_Wong; Sato, “How Information Technology Has (Not) Changed Feminism and Japanism,” 347–48.

[73] Lan, “Technofetishism of Posthuman Bodies: Representations of Cyborgs, Ghosts, and Monsters in Contemporary Japanese Science Fiction Film and Animation,” 33–42.

[74] Alison Michelle Knowles, “The Cyborg-Other : Japan’s Animated Images of Sex, Gender, and Race” (University of British Columbia, 2000), 28–29, https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0090342.

[75] Sharalyn Orbaugh, “Sex and the Single Cyborg: Japanese Popular Culture Experiments in Subjectivity,” in *Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams*, ed. Christopher Bolton, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, and Takayuki Tatsumi, NED-New edition, Japanese Science Fiction from Origins to Anime (University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 437, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.cttttc8f.12.

reflection of the current transformations the global world is trying to understand and cope with.[76] Cyborgs imagined in the media act as representations of our own relationships and dependence on technology, whether it be positive or negative. We therefore are level with the cyborg as we are the same type of postmodern “monster” or mutation; where the line between human and technological extensions is distorted and blurred.[77]

In order to elaborate on Japan’s unique history and exchange with Eastern and Western cultures, it is beneficial to note that the internalization of notions of techno-orientalism has influenced Japan’s relationship with technology and modernization. The concept of techno-orientalism encompasses the Western perspective of Japan as made up of emotionless, cold cyborgs that will be fit for future survival due to their separation from humanity. As the West struggled to cope with Japan’s economic and technological growth in the 1980s, Western anxieties and racism were embodied in this portrayal, creating reactions which not only discredit Japanese progress but also depicted it as monstrous.[78]

To define Japan’s unique experience as an Asian nation with Western ideals of modernization, it is necessary to cover how Japan changed economically and socially in the postwar period (1945-1989). Beginning with prewar Japan, following the end of World War I Japan was allied with both the U.S. and Great Britain. There was an expectation that Japan would establish itself as a global power comparable to its peers, yet this was quickly lost when Japan’s proposed racial equality clause was rejected by the League of Nations in 1919. This

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[76] Carl Silvio, “Refiguring the Radical Cyborg in Mamoru Oshii’s ‘Ghost in the Shell,’” *Science Fiction Studies* 26, no. 1 (1999): 55, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4240752; Jennifer Gonzalez, “14. ‘Envisioning Cyborg Bodies: Notes from Current Research,’” in *14. ‘Envisioning Cyborg Bodies: Notes from Current Research’* (Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 267, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474473668-019.

[77] Knowles, “The Cyborg-Other,” 36.

[78] Precup, “'All Cyborgs Are Asian' The Ethnic Implications of the Cyborg-Topian Future in Karen Tei Yamashita's 'Anime Wong',” 247.

made it clear that regardless of the power Japan has established itself as a nation would continuously not be validated by its Western counterparts. Japan, as the only East Asian nation that was able to avoid colonization by the West, took on the role of colonizer to both protect itself and to increase its global validity. Japan annexed Korea in 1910 and did not retreat until 1945 due to the end of WWII, and the American occupation of Japan beginning in 1945. Japan invaded not just Korea but multiple East Asian countries in an effort to challenge Western powers for "economic and military dominance in Asia." Japan took an extremely aggressive position towards its Eastern counterparts, these issues are still unsettled today and continue to impact Japan's relations with Korea, China, and the rest of East Asia.[79]

During the U.S. occupation of Japan (1945-1952), the reliance on American support and forced isolation of Japan shifted the cultural values of the nation. The initial reluctant acceptance of American control turned into a worshiping and effort to imitate American culture and modernization leading into the 1980s and 1990s.[80] The 1985 Plaza Accord was an agreement amongst Western global powers to strengthen the Japanese Yen as a method of balancing trade between Japan and industrialized nations. Japan went through one of the fastest economic booms in recent history, known as the bubble economy. Japanese corporations were vastly successful in both their production and export of commercial goods; technology especially reached new levels of economic success.[81]

This economic boom can only be recognized with the acknowledgment of the shifting labor divisions as a result of the 1947 Equal Rights Amendment. This amendment established by the U.S. during the occupation, allotted women more social rights and the ability to occupy space

[79] "Key Points | Asia for Educators | Columbia University," accessed April 29, 2024, http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/main_pop/kpct/kp_1900-1950.htm.
[80] Wallis, "The Paradox of Mariko Mori's Women in Post-Bubble Japan," para. 7.
[81] Wallis, para. 8.

in the labor force. By 1991 almost half of the Japanese workforce constituted Japanese women, and eroded the pre-war tradition of gender divisions in Japan.[82]

Though the bubble economy ultimately popped in the 1990s due to a period of political instability and recession, this modernized and diversified workforce led Japan to become the world leader in industrial robot use and production in the 1980s.[83] As the 1980s was coming to an end, Japan was gaining global attention for its growth into becoming the second most powerful economy in the world; only behind the U.S with the potential to surpass its idolization of Western modernization.[84] This new placement of Japan as a global power allows Japan to break through into American mass culture, creating a new international audience for Japanese pop culture media and goods.[85]

Attributed to Western racism and negative characterizations of Japan, the aesthetics of techno-orientalism penetrate Japan's internal perception of self. Rather than this global success allowing Japan to establish itself as an equal to its Western counterparts, it further alienated not just Japan but East Asia as a whole as Other. [86] The perception of Asian people as non-human and machine-like are methods of justifying hatred and discrimination against these communities utilizing techno-orientalism as a means for the West to avoid validation of Eastern successes. Techno-orientalism is deeply intertwined with the notion of the yellow peril, which deals with

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[82] Lan, "Technofetishism of Posthuman Bodies: Representations of Cyborgs, Ghosts, and Monsters in Contemporary Japanese Science Fiction Film and Animation," 55; Mire Koikari, "Introduction: Recasting Women in the U.S. Occupation of Japan," in *Pedagogy of Democracy*, Feminism and the Cold War in the U.S. Occupation of Japan (Temple University Press, 2008), 8, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt14bs8qz.5.

[83] Wallis, "The Paradox of Mariko Mori's Women in Post-Bubble Japan," para. 9; Lan, "Technofetishism of Posthuman Bodies: Representations of Cyborgs, Ghosts, and Monsters in Contemporary Japanese Science Fiction Film and Animation," 35.

[84] SooJin Lee, "Mariko Mori and the Globalization of Japanese 'Cute' Culture: Art and Pop Culture in the 1990s," n.d., 142–43.

[85] Lee, 137–38.

[86] Precup, "'All Cyborgs Are Asian' The Ethnic Implications of the Cyborg-Topian Future in Karen Tei Yamashita's 'Anime Wong'," 247.

racist Western anxieties regarding the threat of the East eventually outnumbering and overthrowing the Western powers.[87] Japan and broader East Asia's position as the "West's Other" is an example of feminization and "emasculation" of the East, as the West attempts to discredit Eastern success through the characterizations of the nation as "subordinate".[88] Though femininity doesn't necessarily mean to be subordinate, due to the patriarchal nature of the nations making this insinuation, the association with womanhood becomes a way to imply a lesser status of the East as docile and underdeveloped.

Frankenstein syndrome theorized by Sharalyn Obaugh, and inspired by Mary Shelley's 1818 novel, refers to the tendency of developing nations that are classified as "monstrous" to change their internal perception based on the categorization from already developed countries. An example of this is seen in how Japan absorbed the Western discourses of the racial and cultural inferiority of Asian nations, and as a result, worked to replicate Western modernity through developments such as medicine, technology, and industrialization. Though Japan was successful in these endeavors, the Western nations refused to validate this success, once again relegating Japan to the anomalous Other. The "curse of monstrosity" is inescapable as it becomes internalized, living in the shadow of the othering. These assigned complexes of monsterhood eventually led to the usage of the monstrous body and subjectivities in Japanese media, creating a visceral relation and understanding between the Asian Other and the monstrous Other.[89] This conflation between these two anomalies from a Western perspective allows Japan to identify with and understand from a sympathetic and interior perspective the monstrosity. This is further reflected in the different relationships the West and the Japanese hold with cyborgs as a cultural

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[87] Precup, 247–51.

[88] Dolores Martinez, "Bodies of Future Memories: The Japanese Body in Science Fiction Anime," *Contemporary Japan* 27, no. 1 (March 1, 2015): 74, https://doi.org/10.1515/cj-2015-0005.

[89] "Sex and the Single Cyborg," 438.

symbol. The West views the cyborg as a representation of potential loss of power, a threat to patriarchal power dynamics, though from a Japanese perspective cyborgs are seen as valuable tools that hold potential for future development. This internalization and relation of technology by the Japanese is a tangible example of how Japan views the monstrous, cyborg, and hybrid as a form of identification because of the West's ostracization of the two groups.[90]

Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the late Twentieth-Century" published in 1985, is one of the leading academic works addressing the cyborg as a cultural symbol and its usage as a feminist symbol. Though Haraway began her career studying science, graduating in 1972 from Yale University with a phD in Biology, the scholar went on to create one of the most venerated feminist theories regarding the cyborg.[91] The essay calls for the feminist identification with technology as a form of social and personal progress. Haraway defines the cyborg as a hybrid of machine and organism, existing both in fiction and within social realities.[92] In the context of the late twentieth-century, Haraway claims that we are all cyborgs; due to the increasing technological presence in our personal lives.[93] Defined as the offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, the cyborg is oppositional, perverse, ironic, and intimate. These origins hold no power in the cyborg's existence, as there is an innate unfaithfulness to the inessential "father" as the monstrous cyborg holds no connection to or need for validation from its origin.[94] This is a threat which garners

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[90] Orbaugh, 437–40.

[91] "Home | Cy-Candy: Female Bodies and Cyborg Theory," sec. The Gendered Cyborg, paragraph 1, accessed April 8, 2024, https://edspace.american.edu/cy-candy/homepage/.

[92] "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," 5, accessed April 8, 2024, https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/fictionnownarrativemediaandtheoryinthe21stcentury/manifestly_haraway_----_a_cyborg_manifesto_science_technology_and_socialist-feminism_in_the_....pdf.

[93] "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," 7.

[94] Donna Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, 9–10, accessed April 29, 2024, https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/donna-haraway-a-cyborg-manifesto.

male anxiety; the fear of technological beings taking over the patriarchal systems currently in place and decentering male power. Aligning this threat with the comparable male anxiety garnered from the fear of women gaining societal, political, and economic power, draws the connection of the cyborg and woman as feminist powers. Haraway calls for the cyborg as a model for the postmodern self that feminists must base their own identity practices on, utilizing technology as a tool for reinventing our construction of our personal selves.[95]

The proposed 'cyborg feminist' argues that there are no unities of womanhood, as the concept of "being" female is a social construct rather than an actual binding of the existences of women amongst one another.[96] Rather than relating and defending one another because of the shared title of woman, we as cyborgs can relate to on another level, our shared experience of ownership over a body not through our gender. As gender, class, and race are constructed by patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism the only way to escape is to reject these notions of identification altogether. The gender-less postmodern cyborg offers a way out of the perspective of victimhood women exist within in the context of patriarchal societies.[97] Haraway brings up the notion of feminization within the context of the systematic oppression of women meaning to be vulnerable, exploited, and reduced to sex; there is no existence of the woman outside of being products of desire and labor for the patriarchy.[98] Women are not subjects, they become tangible representations of sexual appropriation, meaning that the image and identification of womanhood are deeply tied to oppression and victimhood.[99] Haraway pushes against this narrative due to its erasure of the existence of women outside of sex and therefore suggests that to progress within

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[95] "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," 33.
[96] "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," 16.
[97] "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," 21.
[98] Donna Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, 38–39.
[99] "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," 25.

feminism, women must step away from these identifications with the state of being a woman and instead embrace their status as outsider, as monstrous Other in the eyes of the patriarchy. In Western culture, the monster defines where community ends and the notion of outsider begins, if feminists identify with that cyborg monster then they are given access in Haraway's terms to a different set of political limitations and opportunities outside of what history has considered as tangible for feminism's progression.[100] Haraway expands the theory to encompass women of color as a cyborg identity, due to their existence within outsider identities in the Western context. Though if women of color are already considered as the monstrous Other how would this identification shift their realities? In this application of these identifications, the only potential for change would be for the white woman to gain access to an understanding that most women of color already have, as they have no choice but to identify as Other. This attempt from Haraway to expand outside of her own perspective as a white woman is limited in its success due to the shallow nature of the ways in which she attempts to synthesize global feminism in a Western context.[101] Conflating the experiences of women of color as Other in the West, without considering the specific political and social histories that other nations consist of, outside of the ideals of white women in the West, limits how applicable this theory is from a global perspective.

Regarding specifically the Eastern Asian application of these theories, there is an apparent disconnect as East Asia is not "post-gender". On the contrary, East Asian and specifically Japanese popular culture media is filled with hyper-gendered subjects, this is an extension of the internalization of the East as a feminized Other due to Western xenophobia and

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[100] "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," 64–65.

[101] Knowles, "The Cyborg-Other," 41.

racism.[102] Therefore this identification with the cyborg as a means of escaping the identification of womanhood is disrupted due to the hyper-gendered depictions of cyborgs in Japanese pop culture which subsequently bleeds into the rest of East Asian media due to Japan's position as a global power and model for Eastern modernization. The East Asian community is deeply intertwined in their aesthetics and culture, as the regional shared identity creates a feeling of the regional area as a feminist consciousness. This shared experience of the "we" of East Asia as a shared identity disrupts Haraways claims about the myth of a shared feminine identity, as Haraway's centering of the experiences of white women fails to recognize that in different cultural contexts, women do have specific shared experiences in their existences as fetishized symbols within a tradition patriarchal society. Pop culture is a cultural product that is widespread across boundaries of national identity in East Asia, therefore in this context, there are multiple shared identities because of the sharing of aesthetics and critique through international exchange.[103] The female body in Japan exists as a hyper-symbolic figure that signifies tradition, reproduction, perversion, and so on. This creates a level of societal validity in depictions of feminine bodies as commentary on the broader roles of East Asian women.[104] The combination of the female form with technology recontextualizes the body in a postmodernist consumorist context, embodying a new set of connotations of the future of how the woman's body is fantasized.[105] As we turn the the sexualized female cyborg in the 1990s we are exposed to the way the symbol of the cyborg manifests as a subservient protector of their male master, the

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[102] Orbaugh, "Sex and the Single Cyborg," 187.

[103] Hiro Katsumata, "Japanese Popular Culture in East Asia: A New Insight into Regional Community Building," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 12, no. 1 (2012): 135–36, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26155944.

[104] Martinez, "Bodies of Future Memories," 74.

[105] Martinez, 72.

powerful form is reduced to her sexual appeal over her physical abilities.[106] These usages of the motif can be read as both empowering in the ability of young women to be the protector and strong but objectified through the usage of feminine aesthetics to insinuate a monstrous kind of sexuality for male visual consumption.[107] The cyborg is not born female; rather she is created to be consumed visually as an attractive servant for the patriarchal society; her cyborg abilities aren't manufactured for her preferences or needs but rather the potential ways she can be useful to the male creator.[108] This extension of the mechanized feminized Japan depicted in the techno-orientalist perspective connects the Japanese experiences as the Eastern Other to the Western perspective and to the East Asian woman's experiences being depicted as the monstrous feminine Other from the Eastern male gaze. In the same way Western powers used these depictions to discredit the East, to further confirm the East's subservience to Western power; we see these dynamics mimicked in the context of Eastern gender conflict. The Eastern man craves depictions of the East Asian woman as subordinated in order to comfort his own anxieties as Eastern feminism develops and decenters the patriarchal powers of traditional culture.[109] This visual language is depicted in the development of cyborg popular culture in the 1990s, as the mechanical body is made horrifying through the intersections of the organic and mechanical (fig.34), another extension of body horror invoked through both biological and inorganic imagery. Female cyborgs are hyper-gendered to appeal to the male gaze in their faux sexuality, but also mechanized to confirm the control of men over feminine bodies.

[106] Sato, "How Information Technology Has (Not) Changed Feminism and Japanism," 349.

[107] Christopher A Bolton, "From Wooden Cyborgs to Celluloid Souls: Mechanical Bodies in Anime and Japanese Puppet Theater," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 10, no. 3 (2002): 730, https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/4/article/37038.

[108] Orbaugh, "Sex and the Single Cyborg," 440–45.

[109] Lan, "Technofetishism of Posthuman Bodies: Representations of Cyborgs, Ghosts, and Monsters in Contemporary Japanese Science Fiction Film and Animation," 67.

These themes of the female cyborg's objectification and monstrosity in her physical body is further explored through the artwork of East Asian contemporaries Mariko Mori and Lee Bul, two fine artists that incorporate popular media's caricature and themes in their work as a means of commentary on East Asia's treatment and depictions of women.

Chapter Two: The Monstrous School Girl In Shoujo Manga,

The motif of the Japanese schoolgirl has had a long history tied with Japanese popular culture. These representations of young female students have developed into extreme caricatures. These caricatures have been sexualized and destroyed throughout popular media. Through the processes of infantilization, eroticism, and the rebirth of the ero guro nansensu movement, we can identify in contemporary horror mangas the ways in which the school girl is used as a vessel for connecting with real-life young women. The association is made through the usage of feminine body horror as its own visual language. This visual language addresses how biological horror that is specifically dealing with women, can communicate deeper psychological and emotional messages. Messages that specifically pertain to shared experiences of women that are traditionally unable to be expressed freely in misogynistic social spheres.

Here I draw a distinction between sexualization's direct relationship with sex acts, and eroticism as the process of assigning allure to nonsexual imagery such as a school uniform for

the sake of a fetish or taboo. Two examples of this sexualization and destruction appear in Junji Ito's Tomie (1987) and Shintaro Kago's short manga "The Town of Japan's Best Beauties," the first chapter of his collection of manga shorts, Super Dimensional Love Gun (2017). These two artists write and draw school girls as outsiders of femininity, only being able to access the male perspective. Additionally, both of these stories focus on supernatural school girls who are immortal classic beauties. The usage of irony is vital to both stories, attempting to appeal to a feminine language for body horror which centers on representations of the experiences and emotions faced by women in contemporary society. Through contrasting and comparing these "low artists," I aim to gain a greater understanding of how the schoolgirl motif has developed since the 1990s, while also analyzing how the motif sits in a purgatory state between aligning itself with the *femme fatale* genre of cinema and the modern girl archetype in post-war Japan. Centered around the shoujo horror manga Tomie (1987) and "The Town of Japan's Best Beauties" (2017), this chapter will attempt to examine the function of the school girl in manga along with the ways in which she is used as a subversion of classic shojo media.

TOMIE (1987)

Tomie (1987) was originally published in weekly segments in the shojo magazine titled Monthly Halloween from 1987 through 2000.[110] This comic has been recognized as iconic for its subversion of preconceived notions of gender roles and sexuality as well as for its usage of the schoolgirl motif as a monstrous being. Additionally, as explored later in this chapter, Ito's style of semi-realism in his mangas is distinctly different from many of the most popular mangas of the 1990s.

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[110] Ritwick Bhattacharjee and Saikat Ghosh, *Horror Fiction in the Global South: Cultures, Narratives and Representations* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 129.

Junji Ito, born in 1963, began his interest in manga and art as a child. The artist has stated that he was inspired heavily by the work of manga artist Hideshi Hino, and American writer H.P Lovecraft. He did not just dive into horror media, but began to create horror manga himself, although his career as a manga artist didn't start until 1987 after his short two years as a dental hygienist.[111] While Ito has stated that he never intended to feature body horror so much in his work, he has directly addressed his usage of biological horror through transformation: "I believe the human mind is the scariest part of oneself…when the body manifests those fears, the body becomes the scariest part…So I drew a lot of transformations."[112] The manipulation of the body is where Ito is able to tap into his viewers' fear and discomfort.

This is solidified in his longest-running series *Tomie*, beginning in 1987 and still developing today through the additions of short stories, and multiple anime and film adaptations.[113] The series utilizes both gore and transformative horror to distort and destroy its main protagonist. The story includes a total of twenty chapters, with the character of Tomie and her circumstances continuously transforming. In this chapter, I examine chapters one through four in the first published volume of the manga. These four chapters are essential in understanding Tomie as a character and her origins. In addition, their publication date of the 1990s offers a time capsule of the Japanese School girl and her aesthetics during that period. A vital part of my analysis of *Tomie* is analyzing the female lead within the context of the *femme fatale*, and the ways in which she exists in a multifaceted depiction of self that walk the line between the *femme fatale* and the Japanese modern girl archetypes.

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[111] *A Talk with Junji Ito | Creator Interview | VIZ*, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7qCN8qN31A.

[112] Ibid.

[113] For some examples see "Tomie" (1998), directed by Ataru Oikawa, "Tomie: Another Face" (1999), directed by Toshirô Inomata, "Tomie: Replay" (2000), directed by Tomijiro Mitsuishi, More of these films can be found through Junji Ito's writing credits on https://www.imdb.com/

Tomie as a character both plays into and subverts the *femme fatale* archetype. The *femme fatale* is a caricature of a woman who is both hyper-sexualized and demonized through her destruction of the men around her. This character is fueled by wants of revenge and power using her ability to attract in order to get what she wants by any means including, obsession, sex, and even murder.[114] The *femme fatale* shows up in American film noir, a genre of film that centers around "...anomalies, darkness, instabilities, ugliness, sordidness, and violence,"[115] in the post-World War II period. This genre is created as a reaction to the increasing presence and power of women in the workforce in addition to the societal anxieties around the threats of economic equality. This economic anxiety is transformed into sexual anxiety, an act of derogation towards women to belittle them in order to distract them from their agency. In film noir, powerful and sexually liberated women are depicted as antagonistic figures looking to use men as tools to advance their own goals. According to author, Yoko Ima-Izumi, the *femme fatale* film can be defined by three necessary elements, listed as eroticism, death, and conflict between genders. The *femme fatale* is driven in her goals by an initial conflict with the other gender causing her to seek retribution, and her power is in her eroticism through seduction and destruction within those intimate relationships. The stories usually end in death either for the *femme fatale* herself, her prey, or an outsider in the conflict.[116]

The emergence of this caricature was significant not just in American film, but also in Japanese cinema and modernization. Japanese society in their process of modernization of media studied these films, in addition to American and European films from the 1920s, leading to the

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[114] Lucas Tromly, "'Lady Tiger in a Tea Gown': Decadence, Kitsch, and Faulkner's 'Femme Fatale,'" *The Mississippi Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (2009): 458, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26476715.

[115] Sam Rohdie, "Film Noir," in *Film Modernism* (Manchester University Press, 2015), 2, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt18dzrf5.22.

[116] Yoko Ima-Izumi, "A Land Where Femmes Fatales Fear to Tread: Eroticism and Japanese Cinema," *Japan Review*, no. 10 (1998): 124, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25791021.

Westernized modern girl caricature as mentioned earlier in this chapter. The modern girls were heavily based on Western actresses, wearing Western fashion and cutting their long hair to short bobs against Japanese beauty standards.[117] Though this new type of female caricature was developed, the modern girl never developed into a full-fledged *femme fatale*. As stated by Ima-Izumi, the modern girl was a sort of failed *femme fatale*, as her eroticism never escalated to the point of danger due to Japanese conservative values. Japanese society was threatened by even the most minor levels of eroticism in the style of the modern girls; therefore the thought of a sexually liberated and dangerous woman was too threatening for Japanese sensibilities. These two types of women, one Western and the other Japanese were placed in contrast, with the Western caricature creating both envy and hatred in its Eastern counterpart. Connecting back to the supernatural and its role in this caricature, Ima-Izumi claims that the perfect Japanese *femme fatale* is a ghost due to its disconnect from real-life women. A female Japanese ghost can be as erotic and vengeful as it needs to be because it isn't a human woman; therefore it doesn't implicate real-life Japanese women in its antagonism. The woman's ghost is already dead therefore she has already been punished for her sins, unable to enjoy or revel in her revenge fully.

Ito's *Tomie* disrupts these notions of the Western *femme fatale* while additionally subverting the concept of the Japanese female ghost and modern girl. The character exists in a vacuum outside of the division of Eastern and Western aesthetics due to her characterization as a parody of the classic shojo heroines of the 1990s.

Tomie follows our main character Tomie Kawakami, an adolescent girl who meets a tragic fate on a school trip that forever transforms her. The first panel of the manga is a jarring

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[117] Ima-Izumi, 126–27.

juxtaposition between text and image. Readers are faced with a framed portrait of a young girl with text that narrates that she is deceased and her corpse was found cut into pieces (fig.9). The girl, identified as Tomie by our narrator, Reiko, a young school girl who appears to be the only friend of Tomie, has long straight black hair, and a classically beautiful face with a distinct beauty mark underneath her right eye. We can assume the girl is an adolescent by the stylistic choices on Ito's part. The girl has a rounded youthful face with doll-like features, yet no precise makeup can be distinguished. Her short thick lashes and soft smile make her look innocent; her school uniform and headband clearly indicate her being a middle school or high school student, though her age is never explicitly mentioned. Similarly to the previously covered lolicon media, when no age is specified for a character, it allows the author to push the level of gore or eroticism without having to keep in mind an underage character's depiction. Instead, viewers are invited to project whatever age they want onto the character, allowing for fantasy without repercussions, a removal from moral concerns. Ito's signature scratchy simplified semi-realism creates an image that denies its viewers all information at first glance. This combination with the greyscale coloring of the comic, typical for printed manga of this period, allows Ito to control what information his audience is given access to outside of the story's narrative.

This first panel is a perfect example of this obscuring of environmental information to disallow readers from gaining the full picture at first glance. We see a portrait of Tomie, but its location cannot be clearly identified. Her surroundings are drawn as striped blocking that seems abstract but represents the picture frame the illustrated photograph is held within. In the next panel, the viewer witnesses Tomie's funeral with the framed photo surrounded by grieving attendees. The limitation of color and zoomed-in framing makes the audience focus primarily on

Tomie's face before witnessing the aftermath of the destruction of the character, an immediate confrontation with death within the manga.[118]

The panel is an immediate dive into the vital theme of death for the *femme fatale* archetype. The fact that it is the death of our main protagonist and alleged *femme fatale* evokes the Japanese conventions in horror media of ensuring evil women are punished for their crimes against humankind. We have already taken our first steps with Junji Ito into the morbid, dark, and shocking nature of the Japanese *femme fatale*.

The next day at school, the teacher, Mr Takagi, warns students of Tomie's unknown killer before telling the students they have to accept the death of their classmate. The announcement continues until Tomie enters the classroom alive and healthy, apologizing for her tardiness, and shocking her classmates and teacher. Reiko explains that Tomie's reappearance sparked rumors throughout the school, and students started to call Tomie "the zombie school girl," as she came back from the "dead."[119]

Tomie's potential monsterhood and her beauty contradict one another as they struggle to coexist in the manga due to the dissociation between beauty and monstrosity, an irony in her characterizations.

In the following panels, two male students discuss Tomie's reappearance, complimenting her beauty before one boy states "I don't care if she's undead. I still wanna go out with her." [120] During this statement, the boy strikes a pose mimicking a zombie, while his face shifts from Ito's classic simplified faces to a more unsettling one (fig.10). The student's eyes become surrounded by dark shading, his features overly emphasized to create an almost malicious expression. He is

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[118] Junji Itō, Naomi Kokubo, and Eric Erbes, *Tomie*, Complete deluxe edition (San Francisco, CA: Viz Media, LLC, 2016), 4.

[119] Itō, Kokubo, and Erbes, *Tomie*.

[120] Itō, Kokubo, and Erbes.

smiling, but it is not lighthearted; it makes him look more like a creature rather than a human. This panel shows Ito's ability to utilize the visual simplicity of his characters to make scenes of more extreme expression more impactful through slight changes. While Ito himself has only exaggerated the shading of the face and its expression, because the reader has already become adjusted to Ito's limited shading of faces, this change is jarring and becomes uncanny. This is the first indication of the ways in which Tomie is constantly objectified by the men she is surrounded by, as the patriarchy views young women as their bodies before people, there is no empathy or concern for the young girl.

This is the beginning emphasis on the gender conflict at the center of Tomie's story, as the character is constantly mocked, hurt, and objectified by the men around her. These conflicts only continue to escalate until the schoolgirl's ultimate death, but they also allude to Tomie's eventual monstrosity as the manga's narrative develops. The irony in this scene is the connection made between Tomie and the classic horror monsters. She blends between beauty and monstrosity seamlessly, both in the male gaze and within the narrative.

The significance of the circumstances of Tomie's death is related to the broader treatment of young women in misogynistic societies, as Tomie is victimized repeatedly. First by her sexualization and shaming by her peers then the ways in which the men around her feel ownership over her as if they are owed something from her.

Mr Tagaki is shown to be watching Tomie closely before he pulls her aside to confront her. The man questions the girl about who she really is and whether she is an imposter. To the reader's surprise, Tomie jumps to embrace the teacher confessing her love for him and asking whether they will finally be together once she graduates. Takagi has gone insane. Later on, Reiko

runs into Yamamoto, Tomie’s boyfriend, as they share their fear of the girl, agreeing to go to the police to turn themselves in.

Ito offers us a proper flashback of the events leading up to Tomie's death. The day Tomie died the class took a group trip to Inari-yama, a small mountain said to be close to their campus. Once the class is dismissed the students decide to play a game of ball, a clear indicator of their adolescent age, Mr Takagi walks over to a small cliff to smoke. Tomie follows him before cuddling up to the teacher expressing her maturity as Yamamoto watches angrily behind her. Tomie threatens to expose her inappropriate relationship with Takagi, telling him she’s pregnant with his child. Yamamoto slaps Tomie in a fit of rage, pushing her around before she loses her balance and ends up falling off the cliff. She is unable to be saved before she lands at the bottom of the cliff in the middle of her class ball game.

Tomie’s death demonstrates the last element of the *femme fatale*, eroticism, because of her perceived attractiveness by the men around her. Yamamoto views her as someone he owns or has an entitlement to because of their relationship, therefore her being unfaithful is the ultimate crime, garnering violence. Similarly, Takagi, already an authority figure, sexualizes Tomie and uses her for his pleasure. The teacher is in no way in love with Tomie at this point; this is only further shown by his actions following her death. These two relationships quite literally define Tomie as so beautiful that it hurts, but her beauty ends up injuring only her. She is sexualized to death as neither man respects her as a human, their objectification of her taken to the extreme of murder.

The cruelty of Tomies death is further developed by Ito as a societal critique of the way women are treated and dehumanized. Tomie is victimized and yet she is still blamed for her involvement, the justification of the violence against her feels exaggerated but is applicable to

the ways patriarchal society consumes the pain of women without accountability. Mr. Takagi instructs the boys to strip to their underwear and use their tools from their wood shop class to dismember the girl. The group begins to cut into Tomie, but she suddenly wakes up in a panic. Takagi quickly reacts by using a pair of scissors to repeatedly stab the young girl before she finally dies, before explaining the dissection of Tomie to his students as if it were any other biology class. This irony and morbidity created through the usage of school supplies for murder is an essential way that Ito invokes elements of nansensu, a vital aspect of ero guro nansensu media. The story is both dark and ridiculous, allowing Ito to be didactic in his critique of schoolgirl media while also parodying both shojo and horror manga genres. Yamamoto clutches the decapitated head of Tomie in shock, as Takagi explains to the students that they must all take a piece to hide, apologizing for the eventful trip. As the flashback ends, Tomie's victimhood is clearly defined at this point in the manga. She is the victim of not just murder but betrayal from her classmates, along with an inappropriate relationship with an authority figure; all of these injustices culminate in Tomie's ultimate death.

Tomie's tragic death justifies her need for revenge within the larger plot of the manga. The girl has shifted from being a victim of some unknown man to the victim of her peers and teacher. Tomie's resurrection signifies her supernatural status and defines her potential for justice, though that justice will be proven to be impossible in her current state.

The confrontation between the class and Reiko escalates until Tomie arrives at the scene. The girl is seemingly confused and still not completely aware of why everyone is so terrified of her. The class runs away, leaving Reiko and Yamamoto with Tomie. Reiko also quickly runs from the scene, unable to face her own betrayal and fear towards Tomie. We jump forward in the

manga to Reiko living in a new town, and stumbling upon a cave by the sea with a mutant Tomie growing out of the water (fig.11).

This image is in extreme contrast to the first panel of *Tomie* offered by Ito, in addition to being the first biological horror in the manga that doesn't include gore or direct pain for Tomie. This mutated version of Tomie is overwhelming to look at, though the monochromatic coloring of the manga softens the image creating a visual neatness. Rather than a busy color palette making the scene challenging to read, the monochromatic palette allows readers to appreciate Ito's usage of shading and blank space to create horrifying scenes that are legible in their subject matter. The figure is not just massive in comparison to the small Reiko peeking out in the lower right corner of the image, but also to the entire panel, as she takes up almost half of the space. Her still beautiful, yet haunting face makes the monster still recognizable as Tomie. The disproportionately large head is the most solidified part of the creature, and the girl's body is reduced to a distorted suggestion of a bodily form. Even in this monstrous form, Tomie is still beautiful: her beauty marks and long eyelashes stay visible through her long sleek hair, now turned curly and choppy, something that will be revisited at the beginning of chapter two of *Tomie.*

This subversion of Japanese beauty standards points to the alignment of Tomie as a human and even more so as a monster. The traditional Japanese beauty is defined by her natural and bright beauty which signifies her as good and pure, the beauty has classic Japanese features that signify her as the ideal.

Long black hair, pale skin, and dark lashes are some of the ways the Japanese beauty is depicted, her alignment with natural femininity is vital. Tomie obviously subscribes to these aesthetic ideals and that does not change in her transformation into a monster, rather she is more beautiful. The key aspect of this subversion is that when Tomie is reincarnated and her beauty changes she slowly subscribes to Western beauty aesthetics with textured hair and heavier makeup. Rather than appealing to the modern girl's 1920s aesthetics, Tomie is depicted as slowly moving away from the beautiful and pure Japanese school girl as a beauty ideal into a more so western and mature monstrous beauty. Japanese traditional associations of beauty with the good and ugly with the bad is completely subverted by *Tomie* as the monster is made more attractive to the Japanese society she exists within.[121]

As Tomie moves further away from the beauty standards and imagery attached to the Japanese schoolgirl, she moves further into her grotesque monstrous self. This directly ties back to the Japanese rejection of beautiful female monsters due to the fear of dangerously liberated women. Tomie cannot both fit Japanese beauty standards and be monstrous; she must either westernize herself or be virtuous.

In this panel (fig.11), Tomie grows out of the sea, leaving her covered in seaweed and creating tear-like streaks coming down her face. However, the creature's face is not pained or upset; instead, she is pretty peaceful and not even fully aware of where she is or what she is. Her tear streaks remind readers that underneath this distortion is a young girl who did not ask to be a monster. Tomie's victimhood is highlighted in this panel and the audience is faced with the spirit/monster/demon created as a result of the violence and hatred inflicted on one girl.

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[121] Miya Elise Mizuta, "美人 Bijin/Beauty," *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 25 (2013): 43–55, https://www.jstor.org/stable/43945381.

An exciting aspect of this image is that unlike her face Tomie's body is wholly de-sexualized; the figure has no breasts or genitalia. The oversized head is attached to broad shoulders that dissipate into a suggestion of a torso. Ito chose to cover the body with hatching, adding definition and making the skin of the monster look textured and grotesque. This scene is fear-inducing not because of it being gory or bloody, but because we are witnessing a "wrong" human form: the body and its depiction completely ignores any resemblance to human bodies. Seeing such a violation of natural laws that we understand in regards to our own bodies sends a response to our brain of discomfort and horror. We know that Tomie is no longer human and therefore she becomes threatening or anxiety-inducing. Throughout the first chapter of the manga, Tomie is not drawn especially sexually; however, she is sexualized through the comments and attraction of her peers towards her. But this forced sexuality of the character is what leads to her death and condemns her to monsterhood. Here, the audience is witnessing Tomie being freed from that weight, no longer a sexual being or victim. Instead, she is a horrifying monster in control, having escaped the oppressiveness of beauty standards.

The surroundings enhance this vision of the monster; the cave is suffocating as Tomie grows into it from the shore emphasizing her growth and largeness. The lower body of the creature, which can be seen through the clear water, is attached by what looks like tree roots to the bottom of the sea. Ito frequently uses cross-hatching and black space in the background to define the cave setting which leaves Tomie highlighted against the dark background. The only other immense bright spot is on the right side of the panel where Reiko is placed. This creates a feeling of Tomie falling into the darkness and thus her monsterhood, while Reiko is able to represent the human that is left behind on Tomie's path. The only text placed on the panel states "Someday… the new Tomie will return!" It is unclear if this is Reiko's own thought or if this is

Ito leaving readers with one final statement implying that Tomie's story is just beginning rather than ending.

In the following chapters of *Tomie*, Tomie's visuals shift and the blend of gore horror and biological horror becomes more prominent compared to the rather tame first chapter of the series. Chapter 2, titled "Photograph," follows another schoolgirl narrator, Tsukiko Izumisawa. Tomie takes on a more antagonistic and aggressive role as the story centers around her conflicts with Tsukiko as a member of the public morality committee. Along with this personality change, we see a distinct visual change in Tomie's appearance, as seen in (fig.12). In this panel of Tomie, though it is unclear how much time has passed since the happening of the first chapter, she looks distinctly older, as her face is much slimmer than her chubbier cheeks. Along with her makeup getting much heavier, her eyelashes are thicker and the area around her eyes is darkened creating the effect of eyeliner. The character's lips are slightly more defined making them look thicker; Tomie's hair is also much curlier and her thick bangs are wispier creating a mature look. Though Tomie's monster status stops her from aging along with the undefined ages of characters generally, here we see a much more womanly and seductive Tomie.

However, the schoolgirl aesthetic still survives. Tomie wears a different uniform, as she has changed schools. The new sailor suit-style uniform and headband conform even further to the Eastern schoolgirl aesthetic compared to her previous uniform with a blazer. While the sailor suit is distinctly a militarized Japanese aesthetic, the schoolgirl blazer style is more so western and detached from the aesthetics of the navy-inspired sailor suit uniform. The text on this panel explains that Tomie's powers allow her to have complete control over the men around her, teasing that they would even kill for her. Tomie's passive role in the last chapter is reversed here: the reader witnesses that with her new role, Tomie is aware of her power and manipulates those

around her with it. Tomie is not warm or kind to any of the men she controls; rather she is cold and crass towards them. She sees them not fondly or romantically but as annoyances, she can use as tools.

Tomie weaponizes those powers not just to drive men insane, but to attack Isukiko through her male puppets. The conflict between the two girls escalates through the progression of the chapter, as our narrator agitates and insults Tomie’s looks. One of the highlights of this conflict is the moment when Isukiko calls Tomie a monster; which triggers her and causes her to meltdown and grow a second monstrous ugly head.[122] This is one of the most extreme displays of emotion from Tomie in this chapter. She is panicked and almost scared, begging her hypnotized men to cut off the “tumor” and burn it. The reaction makes it clear that though Tomie is more in tune with her abilities, she still isn’t in complete control of her monstrous self. The confrontation leads to a painful set of panels as the two students under Tomie’s control decapitate Tomie instead of just removing the tumor, as she screams for them to stop. The violence evokes the forced decapitation of Tomie from the previous chapter, except in this circumstance, she instigates it before changing her mind. The two hypnotized students are impulsive and aggressive, comparable to the scenes of Tomie's original death. This is another aspect of irony in the manga, as Tomie is given powers and made immortal as retribution for her death, yet is punished through her repeated deaths at the end of her reincarnation’s lives; an endless cycle of death and the reliving of trauma. We see the men throughout the manga use their panic as a means and justification to destroy Tomie. This punishment of Tomie repeatedly is once again connected to this need in Japanese sensibilities to limit the power and life of a

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[122] Itō, Kokubo, and Erbes 2016, 81

dangerous woman. Tomie can have powers, she can have control, but there has to be a defined limit or else she becomes a Westernized *femme fatale*.

The two male students covered in blood and Tomie's decapitated body wearing her sailor suit are situated in the comic adjacent to one another. In the individual panel of the male students, one of them has no pupils, making them monstrous in their own right. Again, we see Tomie as perpetrator and victim in her own game. In this scene specifically (fig.13) the visual focus on Tomie's decapitated body calls back to classic *ero guro* aesthetics, which utilize the pain of women for sexual satisfaction. We see Tomie's small feet with rolled socks, a long pleated skirt, and a loose sailor shirt, all referencing classic schoolgirl aesthetics. While she is not explicitly sexualized, there is still an eroticism through the focus on her young limp form. This scene shows the more bloody form of body horror as Ito aims to enact fear through the horror of Tomie's pain and decapitation. Oddly enough, the bloodied violence with a victim and perpetrator is more straightforward to comprehend than the more distorted bodily horrors of *Tomie*.

Junji Ito is very specific in the ways he utilizes conventional manga styles as ways to elevate his work. Ito's strategic usage of different speech bubble styles, unique to manga as an art form, further conveys the differences in tone and emotion. Speech bubbles with wavy edges convey uncertainty or confusion, while spiky speech bubbles highlight exclamations and panic. As the two students come to the realization of what they did, both styles of speech bubbles are utilized. Another example of Ito's specificity in his placement of manga motifs such as text or shading, is his work with the panels and their focus. These choices of how closely the viewer sees horrific scenes, or if they have to use their imaginations to fill in what is not shown explicitly, are vital to his ability to emphasize or hide shocking visuals based on the creation of

tension for his viewer.. The monochromatic scenes make the gore still astonishing, but less sickening because the blood splattered across the room is just in black. The visual color cues for gore are removed, making the scene unsettling but less connected to actual human forms. Ito's hand drawing of the scene can lead us to imagine the process of drawing the blood and splatters, the artist committing his own violent act on the page through the stabbing motion to get long thick streaks of ink.

Chapter four reveals that Tomie and her teacher have been experimenting with her powers and mutations. This continued relationship is already haunting enough, but what is even more haunting is the product of the experimentation(fig.14). Ito splits this reveal into three panels: the first two are cropped tightly on the phallic, worm-like appendage of the creature as it stretches and tightens itself in movement. The series of panels build up suspense as readers prepare for the horror ahead of them, a tactic Ito uses repeatedly for suspense in *Tomie*. Even with the more gory scenes, the viewers are only given bits and pieces of action before bearing witness to the result of the violence. The final panel reveals our monster, sitting in the center of a dark hallway.[123] The beast is overwhelmingly large and complex, with clones of Tomie combined to create something unrecognizable. The darkness behind the monster swallows it slightly, making it difficult to distinguish where one part begins and another ends. We can recognize multiple heads of Tomie protruding from one enormous central head on top of the figure (fig.14). While these duplications are horrifying, we still find the beauty in Tomie's face as she exists as both a monster and a beautiful girl. The use of duplication is vital to the creation of discomfort at the sight of the beast, as it taps into the human brain's understanding of proper human forms. The repetition of faces and body parts invokes a natural fear of something that is

[123] Itō, Kokubo, and Erbes, *Tomie*, 188.

clearly inhuman and potentially dangerous to the viewers. As we move our gaze down to the lower body of the creature, the faces become more abstract, morphing into random facial features attached to one another. They seem to carry different expressions: while some appear calm and non expressive, others appear to be in shock or pain with widened eyes and open mouths. All of the skin is textured and speckled in contrast with Tomie's naturally clear and smooth skin, and makes the creature appear sickly and further inhuman. In addition to the duplication of facial features, we can see multiple long braids with bows at the end jutting out of the creature's center. Unattached to anything in particular, they seem to be growing out of the black abyss. Heavily associated with the school girl aesthetic, these braids are childlike, their adolescence emphasized by the sweetness of the bows. Since she is not depicted with braids in previous renderings, it can be assumed that Ito is further highlighting the characteristics of Tomie that appeal to the schoolgirl and adolescent aesthetic in an effort to build that characterization of Tomie's identity within her monstrous form. The audiences are reminded that they are not just looking at a monster, but the remnants of a little girl; Tomie exists in a purgatory state between her monster hood and her humanity. Even further she exists between *femme fatale* and young girl, both infantilized and sexualized.

As Tomie is fused into a mess of different pieces we lose her face slowly, finding only parts of her true self in the mess of faces. The long nails (fig.14) are seen again in this iteration of monstrous Tomie; they're hyper-feminine and threatening, pointing to Tomie's dangerous and seductive nature. The limbs attached to the creature show a more sexualized undertone of the horror. Tomie's arms lay limp in front of her without any life, but her legs, placed behind the creature, are spread wide open. The vulnerable and exposing position of the spread legs has an erotic sentiment. Although the torso and genitals of the monster are hidden and replaced by

disfigured faces, it is still sexualized through the implications of what could be between its legs. The gap between the legs is filled with not just disfigured faces and braids reminiscent of public hair, but also a phallic worm-like appendage that appears to grow out of the creature and curls tightly around its body and neck. The worm-like appendage feels like a visual synopsis of Tomie's relationship with men as a monster; her powers of control over men allow her to move freely throughout the world, yet this power also grips Tomie, disallowing her from moving forward or escaping her victimization by the men around her. Even as what is supposed to be a horrifying monstrous version of herself, Tomie is unable to escape the sexuality forced onto her. This panel does not depict any gore or excessively bloody aspects. Instead, Ito utilizes visual tools such as scale, repetition, splitting, and introducing foreign objects to horrify his viewers through the unrecognizable. The creature is not making a scary face or hurting something; the fear stems from our and the character's inability to comprehend what we are seeing and how it is possible for this monster to exist.

Tomie subverts the *femme fatale* archetype without falling into the modern girl aesthetic. Tomie could be seen as a *femme fatale* because of the references to gender conflict and death in the original murder of Tomie due to male jealousy and the grooming she faced. However, the eroticism of *Tomie* becomes less straightforward because Tomie's eroticism is never hers to have ownership over. Instead, Tomie as a character is stuck in the purgatory of not being expressively erotic but being a symbol of male desire; a line is drawn between Tomie as a human and her monstrous side. Mortal Tomie is just a generic schoolgirl, who has crushes and naivety, but once the monster begins to take over, she cannot control the way men obsess over her. Her looks are all that matters and all the girl can do is use it to her advantage to not necessarily take revenge on the perpetrators of her pain, but rather spread her misery to anyone she can reach. Tomie is not

on a path of destruction for the sake of some relieving end goal or gaining power. Instead, she cannot escape her grief, and the sense of helplessness bleeds into every interaction she has.

Though her characterizations change throughout the series to progressively less human and more monstrous, it is essential to keep in mind that in the first chapter, she is presented as a young victim. Tomie constantly has sexuality pushed onto her by the world around her, even in her most monstrous forms. There is no escape from the male gaze she is encapsulated in. This is significantly amplified as the traditionally female shojo audience is reading this story through the work of a male author, who regardless of his intentions is unable to escape his own perspective of the world through his masculinity and limited understanding of the feminine experience. Even the powers Tomie possesses revolve around her being able to manipulate the attraction the men around her feel towards her, yet she does not have to be seductive. Tomie is unattainable, both in the sense of the taboo of her being a student and the stand-offish way she treats the men under her control, and that is what is so appealing to the men surrounding her. Yet, it is also her unattainability that leads to the girl's death.

While Tomie is not our classic *femme fatale* woman, she also is not a Japanese modern girl. The most apparent distinction here is that Tomie does not subscribe to Western beauty standards or the iconic flapper-inspired mogal style. Instead, Tomie appears as a classic Japanese beauty, though her image strays away from that ideal as the chapters progress. As described earlier through the comparisons of (fig.9) and (fig.12), even the jump from the first chapter to the second one highlights Tomie's appearance being aged up and made to be more womanly. As Tomie repeatedly relives the cycle of abuse through her clones and iterations, each new generation of Tomie transforms slowly to appear even more beautiful. Hiromi Tsuchita Dolías offers us some insight into how Tomie is subversive for her genre. One specific example is

Tomie's subversion through beauty: "Traditionally in Japanese culture, women who are wronged by men go through a symbolic transformation— beauty into ugliness and cultured into wild."[124] Though Tomie is wronged by men, that trauma only causes the character to become more alluring. She exists between the beautiful and the unsightly in her own space. The monstrous Tomie is horrifying but that "ugliness' stems from the usage of distortion, taking the beautiful human Tomie's face and manipulating it until it is difficult to look at. Regardless of how extreme Ito pushes this distortion and horror, Tomie always comes back beautiful and perfect to those around her. She is able to both subscribe to and subvert East Asian beauty standards, existing both in her stunning forms and in a complete disregard for beauty.

Tomie does not just act as a subversion of the *femme fatale* but also as a subversion of the typical manga schoolgirl of the 1990s. Shojo comics are targeted towards young girls and women, and horror specifically is used as an outlet for the many emotions that women feel but are unable to express publicly. The key features of the 1990s schoolgirl caricature are found on the covers of two famous Japanese schoolgirl mangas, Sailor Moon (Fig.15) by Naoko Takeuchi, published in 1992, and Fruits Basket (Fig.16) by Natsuki Takaya, published in 1999. These mangas are iconic for their depictions of cute girls that are viewed as role models for their audience of young girls, depicting two of the main characterizaitons of shojo protagonists as the magical heroine and the romantic schoolgirl. Both series have reached global success as they infiltrated Western pop culture in the period of globalization in the 1990s.

The two images share similar visual cues for the heroines; tiny and rounded faces with pointy chins create a doll-like effect. Along with the oversized eyes, tiny noses and mouths add to the babydoll aesthetic of these faux young girls. As a result, these school girls are excessively

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[124] Hiromi Tsuchiya Dollase, "'Shōjo' Spirits in Horror Manga," *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal*, no. 38 (2010): 60, https://www.jstor.org/stable/42772010.

cutesy in their appearance, almost reaching the *loli* status. Their bodies are fragile, especially in comparison to the large scale of their heads. The disproportionate head and body become a bit uncanny, invoking the same feelings of discomfort that biological horror might create for audiences. Sartorially, we see different variations of the sailor suit that the Japanese schoolgirl is known for. In these cases especially, the sailor suit becomes a mini skirt and form-fitting top, rather than the looser extended skirt version many real-life school girls wore in the 1990s. Along with the sailor suit, we would commonly see the schoolgirl caricature wearing loafers, and knee-high or thigh-high socks. The hair of the school girls stays remarkably consistent between depictions and is one of the most noticeable features for identification. The ubiquitous hair bangs are a feature that always stands out. The bangs can be paired with a variety of styles, including pigtails, braids, short pixie cuts, and just long straight hair. These styles can seem childish, especially when paired with the bangs, furthering this association with young girls and adolescents.

We can find both similarities and differences between these conventional depictions of the schoolgirl in *Tomie*. At first glance, the character is a typical caricature of the school girl, yet tries to appeal to its reader's ability to connect with her pain in the visual horror of her circumstances. Tomie does fit the schoolgirl caricature iconography through the sailor suit and bangs with long black hair, This is further exemplified by Tomie's status in her story as a very young-looking yet beautiful girl creating an ideal within Tomie's appearance.

The usage of semi-realism in Ito's style makes Tomie more human compared to the overexaggerated lolicon-adjacent character designs we have seen above. We see Tomie in a more realistic depiction of the sailor suit, and though she is sexualized through her circumstances, she is rarely sexualized in the early chapters by her uniform. Rather than being directly sexualized by

Ito, she is more so eroticized for the taboo of the young school girl. Tomie also has a proportionate body and face in her human form; as we see the most clear distortions of Tomie in her monstrous form. The two sides play against each other to highlight their distinctions. It seems like a purposeful choice on Ito's part to keep Tomie very human-looking in order to highlight the extremeness of her transformation into a monstrous schoolgirl.

Tomie's portrayal as a real girl allows her to be seen as more relatable rather than being more adjacent to a doll. This connection will help us start to define a language for feminine body horror directed at school girls in shojo horror manga. Tomie is a sympathetic monster for her readers, as she is depicted as antagonistic but only as a result of her own victimhood.

Hiromi Tsuchita Dolías explains the communicative power of the shoujo horror manga: "These mangas, by borrowing supernatural images, express the strong negative feelings - abhorrence, anger, fear- of both their authors and their readers. These feelings are the sources of horror. Shõjo horror manga are a means, or a good excuse, for girls to expose their dark and negative inner feelings pertaining to girlhood- hatred toward mothers, fear of isolation, desire for power and freedom, and subversive fantasy- things that are normally considered taboo or shameful."[125]

As young women especially in conservative cultures are shamed for expressing excess emotion, many look for an outlet for those negative emotions. Shojo horror manga offers its viewers young women in grotesque or horrifying situations, allowing the girls to fantasize about monstrous versions of themselves that are allowed to be extreme. Tomie especially is an example of the usage of body horror to express emotions in relation to abuse, sexuality, anger, isolation,

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[125] Dollase, 74.

and vengeance. She is the epitome of feminine rage, constantly expressed through her interactions with men, though she is also consistently punished in each evolution or clone of herself. Tomie is allowed to express herself, but she must always pay the price or else it would be potentially too empowering: if the young girl wins at the end unscathed, it would go against Japanese depictions of women in the *femme fatale* genre. The monstrous form of Tomie forces the character to constantly relive her trauma under the guise of her getting revenge against men for the pain she endured. At the same time, it offers its readers depictions of a young girl's empowerment over men, controlling their actions and gaining validation during it. This faux empowerment may point to the limits of Junji Ito as a male author, who does not fully comprehend what real empowerment is for young women, and just how much of a victim Tomie is. Although Tomie is the monster of her own story, she exists as the victim at the heart of the manga, creating the ability for viewers to sympathize and recognize themselves in her destructive path.

While Junji Ito's *Tomie* is heavily based on the shoko of the 90s for its critique, and reached early success in its production. The work of manga artist, Shintaro Kago, has been overlooked broadly but offers a contemporary example of the rebirth of the schoolgirl imagery in the erotic grotesque aesthetics. Though both artists employ body horror in their work as points of critique, Junji Ito's less sexualized body horror has been accepted more widely and validated by the manga industry's consumers. Kago on the other hand leans into the erotic with his mango and illustration work, a less marketable art style that makes it difficult for the low artist to gain widespread acceptance.

The choice to feature Shintaro Kago is in an effort to build an understanding of the development and consistency of the Japanese schoolgirl archetype in Japanese art and media.

Kago's more contemporary usages of the schoolgirl motif and her monstrous transformations can be found in his manga and illustration works. The artist employs irony and satire in his projects to critique the shoujo schoolgirl archetypes found in popular culture, as he works to point out the misogyny and ridiculousness rooted in the eroticizing of adolescent women. Kago offers an excellent parallel to Junji Ito as two male artists who deal with writing and illustrating young women; the work from both authors can be argued as examples of the male gaze or can be defended as empowering depictions of the feminine monster. Both artists walk the thin line between works that can be deemed feminist and works that exploit these oversimplified and sexual depictions of adolescent school girls.

THE TOWN OF JAPAN'S BEST BEAUTIES (CIRCA. 2017)

Shintaro Kago, born in Tokyo in 1969, is a self-described kisou mangaka in Japanese or "bizarre manga artist" and a mysterious figure in the world of manga and contemporary ero guro culture.[126]

We will be looking at contemporary works from the artist that heavily references 90s Japanese culture and manga. Because of the artist's lack of interviews outside of Japan and general private lifestyle, I will use translated interviews and magazine articles to gain a general understanding of his work and mindset. Kago's work has been described as a mix of "horror, science-fiction, and psychedelic erotica," which invokes both awe and discomfort within his audiences.[127] This feeling of uneasiness is further amplified by the artist's choice to feature "sweet young girls" as the subjects of both his illustrative and manga work.[128] These subjects,

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[126] "Shintaro Kago Solo Exhibition 2024," Nucleus Portland, accessed March 24, 2024, https://nucleusportland.com/collections/shintaro-kago-solo-exhibition-2024.

[127] Thisanka Siripala, "The Wonderfully Weird World of Shintaro Kago, Manga Outsider," Huck, February 25, 2019, https://www.huckmag.com/article/manga-artist-interview-shintaro-kago.

[128] TOMOKAZU KOSUGA, "Vice Magazine - SHINTARO KAGO TURNS SHIT INTO GOLD - PART 1 - The Vice Interview," Vice Magazine, July 25, 2008,

reminiscent of classic ero guro school girl artworks, are mutilated and transformed through sex, violence, and the introduction of foreign objects. Kago utilizes such tools to shock and surprise his viewers.

The artist debuted in 1988 in the magazine Comic Box. However, he began his stylistic journey much earlier when, at the age of twelve, he let go of his dreams of being a filmmaker due to his interest in illustrative works. In high school, Kago joined the manga club, where, in contrast to his peer's wholesome works, the artist quickly let his dark humor take the forefront of his work.[129] Kago never pursued a traditional art school education, and has stated that he never really shared his work with his family due to the extreme and provocative nature of it, this self-censorship is reflected in the broader societal censorship of horror and grotesque works in Japan.

The artist does freelance work and commissions for the most part but has worked with multiple galleries in Japan and the U.S. in recent years. In the U.S. the artist has done various shows with the gallery Nucleus located in Alhambra, California, including his first American solo exhibition in Alhambra, California in 2021. The exhibition included his manga and magazine illustrations in addition to his work on various album covers. A content warning attached to the exhibition alerted the visitors of Kago's usage of extreme body horror. His works have been described by the gallery as having satirical overtones in addition to carrying themes of the grotesque, bizarre, and experimental, shocking his viewers in addition to offering them something new.[130] In Japan, Kago was a part of the "City and Infrastructure" exhibition with Billiken Gallery in Minato, Tokyo, in 2021.[131] Though Kago's work is controversial and covers

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https://web.archive.org/web/20080725082059/http://www.viceland.com/int/v15n2/htdocs/shintaro_kago_shit_gold.php.

[129] Thisanka Siripala, "The Wonderfully Weird World of Shintaro Kago, Manga Outsider."

[130] "Shintaro Kago Solo Exhibition 2024."

[131] "Shintaro Kago 'City and Infrastructure' （Billiken Gallery）," Tokyo Art Beat, accessed March 30, 2024, https://www.tokyoartbeat.com/en/events/-/2021%2F3295.

imagery that would clearly take on the label of low art, he has found a collection of galleries and publishers that are open to showcasing and introducing his work to new audiences. One such publisher is Hollow Press, an international and underground company that seeks to highlight the work of artists who are traditionally rejected from mainstream manga publishing.[132]

This relationship to censorship has limited Kago's work. However, the artist has persevered building an underground following that has grown with the introduction of the internet, providing Kago with an uncensored platform to seek commissions and exhibit his works without worrying about publishing censorship. While Kago himself has stated in an interview with Huck Magazine that he initially looked for a minority audience in Japan due to the presumption that his work wouldn't appeal to foreign sensibilities, the internet has in fact allowed exchange and translation, expanding his audience globally. [133] In an interview with SHDW gallery, Kago has stated that the most critical aspect of his work is an effort to explore "diverse and new expression."[134] This work on the artist's part to offer viewers artworks that are likely to be unlike anything they're seen before attracts people from all over the world seeking new and unique experiences. As much as Kago's work carries heavy themes of violence and sex, it is also work that is crafted beautifully, relevant, and offers critiques of both political and social issues.

One such work is "The Town of Japan's Best Beauties", the first chapter of Shintaro Kago's collection of short stories spanning his career, Super Dimensional Love Gun (2017).[135] The short manga details the imaginary town of "May Den Town " in Japan, which holds the

[132] "Hollow Press Comics - Artists Bio," www.hollow-press.net, accessed March 25, 2024, https://hollow-press.net/pages/hollow-press-comics-artists-bio.
[133] Thisanka Siripala, "The Wonderfully Weird World of Shintaro Kago, Manga Outsider."
[134] "VHILS," accessed March 24, 2024, https://drp.io/articles/livewithshintarokago.
[135] Shintaro Kago, *Super-Dimensional Love Gun* (Portland: DENPA LLC, 2019).

"good girl farm." This farm creates "perfect girls" who are raised and bred like cattle, as seen in (fig.17). The panels are jarring and immediately notify readers of the world they're getting a view into. Kago's sketch-like style softens the impact but does not erase the horror of young school girls being dehumanized. Though the title is more ambiguous about who these perfect girls are, it is made clear immediately through the usage of the sailor suit that Kago is poking fun at the Japanese schoolgirl caricature and her idolization in Japanese society. As seen in figure 17, the young girls are force fed a disgustingly sweet concoction, made to be even more nauseating by Kago's extremely detailed rendering compared to the simplicity of his characters otherwise. The girls are crouched on all fours, their faces covered by the remnants of their meal. The entire scene is animal-like and this is only further emphasized by Kago's usage of hatching to imply dirt and grime. These panels are followed by scenes of the girls being walked on leashes to maintain their weight and girls being ultimately thrown into a machine that crushes them if they're unable to be the proper weight. Similarly to Junji Ito, Kago's black and white color palette makes the scenes of gore more distant from reality due to the complete desaturation of any blood or dead bodies. The bizarre scenes that are gross yet are obviously an exaggeration for the purpose of critique.

A striking contrast to *Tomie* is the brightness of Kago's work. While Ito's work is filled with flat black sections for shading, which creates a more ominous feel to his work, Kago limits where he uses large sections of black to emphasize specific elements. This specificity creates a final product that feels brighter, which creates an atmosphere that is more lighthearted, reflecting the more obvious satire in Kago's manga.

These panels are Kago's way of mocking beauty standards in Japan through body horror and the schoolgirl caricature, along with a general critique of industrialization and male control

over the bodies of women. Further along in the story we see scenes that are oddly reminiscent of themes we have seen in *Tomie*. We follow one of the perfect girls who shares visual similarities with Tomie's character design; the long straight black hair and bangs especially recall Tomie's style in the first chapter of her story (fig.9). These panels show the perfect girl's effects on the men in her school, similar to Tomie's ability to control men with her beauty. We see a comedic scene of the boys in school rushing for the perfect girl's attention before throwing themselves off of the roof as punishment for thinking they had a chance. Once again, differently textured speech bubbles display emotion, but in this case, we only see the bubbles used with human characters while our perfect girl is silent. The only gaze into the mind of the ideal girl we are offered is the unidentified narrator whose speech bubbles are always rectangles or squares. The less personality added to this text through line variation and shape characterizes our narrator as less human and more so disconnected from those in the story. Kago's usage of sound effect text and sparkles further mocksand amplifies the perfection of our factory-made school girls. In fig.18, We see a close-up of our perfect girl surrounded by sparkles and text that reads "nya" repeatedly, a cutesy, kitten-like sound to emphasize her being not just beautiful but the epitome of Japanese cuteness aesthetics. Kago further underscores these characterizations of perfection with his usage of action lines to create a halo effect around the perfect girl, communicating both movement and the almost godly presence of the girl. Kago is explicitly using visual elements to convey to readers that this girl subverts reality because she is unreal. Her power lies in not just her attractiveness, but also her being designed to appeal to beauty standards without fault, which allows her to escape any actual threat in the story. She will always exist because she is not real but just a concept, held in a physical form that can quickly and easily be replaced through the factory.

The critique of the fetishistic nature of the schoolgirl archetype can be found in both Ito and Kago's work, another point of comparison is found in the ways their monstrous school girls are victimized yet end up protecting themselves. Immediately following these panels, we see a man, described as a "pedo teacher" in Kago's words, trying to attack the perfect girl, before she tears the man apart in her "hymen defense mode." This is the most gore-focused scene in the manga with a graphic panel of the pedophile's head being ripped apart. His image is painfully detailed as we see the teacher's unhinged jaw and tongue flying off of his body. I need to emphasize further that though these panels are disturbing, Kago's simplistic style creates a separation from the human as his characters become more physically doll-like. The gore is abstracted, becoming a mess of lines and hatching that imply the horror rather than truly define it. Unless the reader is looking very closely, they will not notice the extent of what is being shown. The horror of the man's head being torn apart contrasts with the peaceful expression on the perfect girl's face. She looks utterly detached from the gore as she does not fear as she is not genuinely mortal.

This scene may remind us of Tomie's own deadly run-in with her "pedo teacher" as Kago aims to point out the severe lack of protection from pedophiles working in schools. For Tomie, she is groomed into an inappropriate relationship with her school teacher, with false ideals of love and marriage. The perfect girl on the other hand is never truly human; she expresses shock and satisfaction but never connects with anyone around her in a genuine way. The parallel plot points? Draw a clear distinction between Tomie's connection to humanity and reality and the perfect girl's disconnection from reality as a satirical caricature of fetishized school girls. To go even further we can compare the non-violence of Tomie's actions to the perfect girl's brutal violence towards anything threatening to her. These characters are created with highly different

intentions and therefore are characterized differently to achieve the correct message for the audience, yet we can connect the fact that both of these stories share the horrors of pedophilia though through a male gaze. The violence in both of these manga is fetishistic: Tomie has pain inflicted on her by men because of her beauty, and the perfect girl uses violence to protect her virginity. The panel shown in (fig.19) ends with the phrase "As without a hymen, one cannot be a beauty," a satirical phrase to mock the Japanese obsession with virginity and innocence. The perfect girl protects herself to protect her hymen as if her virginity matters more than her own safety to maintain her perfection. Her adolescence and innocence as a school girl is vital to her beauty, and if that were to be compromised she would no longer be a perfect girl, turned into something used and no longer valuable. Even within Kago's critique of Japanese society's treatment of women, he does not go beyond these belief systems for the sake of mocking their thought processes. Although Kago never explicitly states it to be a parody, the multidimensional interpretation of the manga allows readers to walk away either disgusted or humored by the undefined intentions of the panels shown.

Kago criticizes the misogynistic and pedophilic views of Japanese society through horrifying visuals and dark humor. Though these intentions are feminist in nature, Kago also depends heavily on the body horror used on young girls in fetishistic visuals. These panels, while horrific to some, are also erotic to others: the author walks a thin line between exploitation and empowerment.

Comparing the work of Shintaro Kago and Junji Ito clearly shows how the mutilated Japanese schoolgirl characterization and imagery have both developed in the 21st century while also staying true to its '90s ancestry. We continue to see these themes of body horror used to represent feminine experiences and emotions, though it is still a motif used very commonly by

men also to express their perspectives on women and their experiences. Kago offers us an example of how the schoolgirl archetype has been so exaggerated and regurgitated in popular media that it has become its own satire of itself through its exaggerated existence. While Ito uses *Tomie* as a commentary on Japanese society, the character Tomie is very connected to reality in the first chapters. She is still a motif yet she is still rooted in real people. In contrast, Kago's Perfect Girl deconstructs that very caricature through a purposeful usage of the exaggeration of schoolgirl motifs in popular manga combined with the bizarre nature of the body horror

An impactful satirical critique of the obsession with young school girls in Japanese society, Kago additionally mocks beauty standards that are rooted in misogyny and pedophilia. The artist works with body horror as a means of symbolism which further builds on the common language of feminine body horror and its influence on common motifs found in popular culture.

Kago's illustration work, which continues his usage of the schoolgirl motif and her relationship with biological horror, offers a meeting of body horror and aestheticized beautiful images. *Skeleton Kiss 3* (circa. 2021) (fig.20), which is currently being sold as giclée prints of Kago's original illustration, is an example of horrific imagery that is made to be beautiful through the artist's ability to appeal to the more profound implications of the symbolism. The work appears to be a mix of watercolors, colored pencils, and an inking pen.[136] The work sets us inside a classroom with female students sitting at desks. They all face away from the viewer, making them anonymous duplicates of the stereotypical schoolgirl character, only distinguishable through their hairstyle differences. The two girls at the center of the work, closest to the viewer, are sitting casually as their skeletons explode out of their bodies into an erotic embrace and kiss. This is a highly gore-heavy artwork, as Kago chooses to depict every bit of

[136] The work has little to no information about it online with its ambiguous online listings being the only real digital record of the art piece.

blood, organ, and flesh flying out of the two girls. The usage of color in this illustration, in comparison to Kago's manga, helps to emphasize further how, in these types of biological horror works, using colors we associate with human bodies rather than monochromatic palettes immediately makes the scene more shocking to the viewer and define a clear line between reality and fiction. Shintaro Kago's illustrations demonstrate the artist's stylized semi-realism and understanding of color to create intricate scenes that shock and awe the viewer. Despite the scene's ambiguity, we can gather the possible messages of the extreme gore in its subject matter and its implication of deeper emotions. Kago places a sapphic kiss at the center of the work, which both fetishizes its subjects and implies their extreme passion towards one another. The two school girls are connected through the extension of the gore, which implies not just their desire for one another but their need for connection. The kiss could also refer to the homophobia in Japanese society as a result of the conservative values still upheld socially. The two young girls must sit generally disconnected from each other due to fear of repercussions, but internally, they are filled with yearning for one another. Kago can manifest these complicated emotions through grotesque horror and erotism, furthering his connections with contemporary ero guro visual culture. The long history between torture porn and school girls and its innate fetishization makes it challenging to comprehend the relationship between the schoolgirl motif and gore fully. Or to recognize the utilization of horror to connect to young women in an understanding of their non-socially acceptable emotions and behaviors. Within the context of the male gaze, it is difficult to imagine these usages of the motif as anything other than exploitative. Yet, it is vital to consume these representations of young girls with the concept of satire as a function of societal critique and commentary. This media is in no way one-dimensional and is another example of

these battles between empowerment and exploitation in popular culture and its depiction of feminine motifs in East Asian popular culture and media.

Chapter Three: The Cyborg as Gendered Other

Mariko Mori and Lee Bul are two East Asian artists who cover the motif of the hyper-gendered cyborg in their feminist artworks. Combining fine art and popular culture allows the artist to build an East Asian context of their work through visual identifiers such as the cyborg as a Japanese association. To analyze Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth-Century" as a Western feminist theory and its inability to apply to global contexts, I chose to contrast the difference between Eastern and Western approaches to femininity and feminism. Both artists are concerned with the role of the East Asian woman in technological futures and how the feminine body is treated in visual media. But can take different depictions of the same motif to communicate broader feminist ideals, recontextualizing the gendered cyborg.

MADE IN JAPAN (1994)

Mariko Mori, born in Tokyo in 1967, is a globally renowned contemporary artist known for her photography and multimedia works. Born into a wealthy family,[137] Mori attended a traditional and highly structured all-girls high school with strict skirt length and hairstyle regulations. Between 1986 and 1988, the young artist studied at Bunka Fashion School in Yoyogi, Tokyo. During this time, she worked part-time as a fashion model in Tokyo, she ended up doing spreads for street fashion magazines such as BAKF(1988) and Cutie Magazine (1988).[138] In interviews, Mori stated that she initially considered modeling to be a way of

[137] Rachel Schreiber, "Cyborgs, Avatars, Laa-Laa and Po: The Work of Mariko Mori," *Afterimage* 26, no. 5 (April 1999): 1, https://www.proquest.com/docview/212126976/abstract/215E24BCF1584DD4PQ/1.

[138] Allison Holland, "From Gothic Lolita to Radiant Shaman: The Development of Mariko Mori's Ethereal Personae," *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal*, no. 40 (2011): 4, https://www.jstor.org/stable/42772304.

expressing personal creativity, yet she ultimately realized that modeling did not allow her to express herself. Rather, she became just a doll for those dressing her. This would later manifest in Mori's methods of becoming the producer, director, and star of her later works.[139] After this time modeling, Mori moved to London in 1988 to do a foundational year at Byam Shaw School of Art before studying art history and practice at the Chelsea College of Art and Design in London from 1989 to 1992, where she graduated with her bachelor's in fine arts. That would be the same year she moved to New York City to do an independent study program at the Whitney Museum of American art in New York City until 1993.[140] Throughout the mid-late '90s, Mori would go back and forth between living in Tokyo and New York,[141] where she still today maintains studios in both cities.[142]

During this period of travel, Mori would have her debut show in the American Fine Arts gallery in 1995, where she would debut her unofficial series, named after her second show at Deitch Projects, in April 1996;[143] "Made in Japan." This series will be the focus of this section, as it was created in Japan in 1994, after Mori was abroad for five years, as her reaction to the country after being distant for so long.[144] These works are a series of large photographs that depict Mori dressed in self-made futuristic clothing based on cyborg versions of modern Japanese women, heavily referencing archetypes found in anime and manga. This series would allow Mori to rise to international fame, becoming the poster child for globalized Japan at the

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[139] Los Angeles County Museum of Art, "Contemporary Projects: Mariko Mori" (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1998), 2.

[140] Lee, "Mariko Mori and the Globalization of Japanese 'Cute' Culture: Art and Pop Culture in the 1990s," 134–35.

[141] Holland, "From Gothic Lolita to Radiant Shaman," 9.

[142] Los Angeles County Museum of Art, "Contemporary Projects: Mariko Mori."

[143] Lee, "Mariko Mori and the Globalization of Japanese 'Cute' Culture: Art and Pop Culture in the 1990s," 143.

[144] Wallis, "The Paradox of Mariko Mori's Women in Post-Bubble Japan," para. 1.

end of the 20th century."[145] This success led the artist to have four separate solo exhibitions in 1998 at institutions such as the Los Angeles County museum of art and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. Additionally, she garnered multiple reviews and articles in major magazines such as Artforum and Vogue, but the artist would reach her most significant popularity amongst online communities where fans would create websites dedicated to her exhibitions.[146][147]

The 'Made in Japan series' consists of various images produced by Mariko Mori that show off different settings in Japan with the artist posing. in playful costumes that depict her as a cyborg woman hybrid.[148] Mori uses the cyborg body to identify the broken aspects of Japanese society that the subservient sexualized cyborg is born out of, a provocative approach to theories of technology as a tool for feminism expressed in Donna Haraway's writings.[149] Mori models and presents herself as different societal archetypes of Japanese women, critiquing the ways in which women are viewed in Japan within the context of the rapid technological, economic, and cultural changes as a result of the bubble economy. Mori also critiques the concept of Japan as an extraordinarily modernized and technologically advanced nation, showing an alternate version of Japan where women are replaced with cyborgs. The series showcases the result of a society that is stuck between its social and cultural traditions and the rapid effort to modernize and keep up with the Western global powers.[150] These costumed cyborg avatars become intangible through them being representations of not real women but rather the caricatures of what women in Japan

[145] Lee, "Mariko Mori and the Globalization of Japanese 'Cute' Culture: Art and Pop Culture in the 1990s," 133.
[146] Schreiber, "Cyborgs, Avatars, Laa-Laa and Po," 1.
[147] Holland, "From Gothic Lolita to Radiant Shaman," 12.
[148] Los Angeles County Museum of Art, "Contemporary Projects: Mariko Mori."
[149] Rina Kita, "Mariko Mori: The Extraterrestrial-Cyborg Heroine as a Glitch in the Matrix," 4.
[150] Wallis, "The Paradox of Mariko Mori's Women in Post-Bubble Japan," paras. 2–10.

may be and serve to those around them. These stereotyped appropriate roles for modern Japanese women are not just addressing the misogyny embedded in their existence but additionally, Mori is examining the ways that technology may allow us to change and relearn identity.[151] Mori is able to repeatedly reinvent herself through her self-portraits, dressing up and pasting herself into different modernized Japanese locations such as a "love hotel", or an urban center. This repetition of Mori as a cyborg creates the feeling across the series of images that we are seeing one cyborg model that is reproduced repeatedly for different consumers. The cyborg is dressed and assigned a role she must fill in the high-tech yet sexist Japan, acting as a metaphor for the real young Japanese women trapped within the same society.[152]

Mori has stated her perspective on there being power in feminine passiveness[153], avoiding an "aggressive" statement Mori lets the subtext of her images do the talking. In this case the image sets the viewer inside of a love hotel, a term referring to hotels used for prostitution as a temporary private space. Mariko Mori's *Love Hotel* (1994) (fig.1) was produced while teenage prostitution was legal in Japan, as the official ban would not be placed until 1999.[154] As covered earlier, the culture of Enjo Kosai dating has survived into modern times, creating another layer of relevance to Mori's work. As young Japanese women are turning to appealing to the fetishistic gaze of grown men in order to gain financial independence, the monstrous schoolgirl is becoming embedded into society in a new way. Mori comments on the horror of what happens when these feminine roles are ultimately replaced with cyborg replicants that turn these women into actual dolls for male desire. Mori is centered in this image as she kneels on a circular hotel

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[151] Schreiber, "Cyborgs, Avatars, Laa-Laa and Po," 2.

[152] Lee, "Mariko Mori and the Globalization of Japanese 'Cute' Culture: Art and Pop Culture in the 1990s," 147.

[153] 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 (March 22, 2008): para. 16.

[154] Wallis, "The Paradox of Mariko Mori's Women in Post-Bubble Japan," para. 28.

bed, staring at the viewer as if inviting them to come to her. The hotel room mimics Western aesthetics, forcing the scene into a blending of the technologically advanced East and the classical and historical West. The bedsheets are floral and pink, which is reminiscent of a cheap motel and the room of an adolescent girl. The entire room is filled with soft pastels, which contrasts with its darker elements such as Mori's sailor suit and the men's jacket hung up. Both of these elements point to the critical focus of this image, which is the transaction between the school girl and the invisible customer of her services.

Dressed in her cyborg garb, a skin-tight silver bodysuit with pointed ears, and silver Mary Janes,[155] and additionally wears a classic sailor suit uniform with a much shorter skirt than we would typically see in an academic setting. The costume choice calls back once again to the sexualized school uniforms used commonly in anime, manga, and pornography.[156] But it is not just the costume that invokes pop culture aesthetics, but the innocent and cute naivety Mori wears visually in this character. The distinctive cute aesthetic of classic schoolgirl protagonists in shojo media exists not just in their visual appearance but also in their unrealistic optimism and sweetness in their personalities.[157] Jonathan Wallis explains the implications of this naivete as a suggestion of a "technological fantasy" that constructs identities of sex objects that are vulnerable and innocent; and created specifically for men. Mori creates cyborgs that fall into this fantasy, as they are sex objects disguised as representations of real women. In the case of *Love Hotel,* we see this quite literally as we are let in on the moments before an eventual sexual

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[155] Mary Jane shoes are distinct for their round toed base with a thick black strap crossing over the top of the foot, heavily associated with young girls and specifically their school uniforms.

[156] Some examples are *Unbreakable Machine doll* (2009) by Reiji Kaitō, *Karakori Odetter* (2005) by Julietta Suzuki, and *Doctor Slump* (1980) by Akria Toriyama

[157] Lee, "Mariko Mori and the Globalization of Japanese 'Cute' Culture: Art and Pop Culture in the 1990s," 138.

encounter, but in other works such as *Play With Me* (1994) and *Tea Ceremony III* (1994) we are more so seeing such depictions of women as "eye candy". The usage of the expression "eye candy" refers to the superficial ways in which these cyborgs are deemed attractive without them being real women with agency or sexuality. They instead stand waiting for interaction with a man, almost as if without that validation and interaction the cyborgs are nonfunctional acting only as visually pleasing and silent women. This type of characterization of Japanese women, especially young girls, manifests in virtual pornography and fetish content that build up stereotypes of Japanese women as subservient, naive, and happy to please their masters or husbands. These characterizations bleed into the tangible world creating real-world infantilization of young Japanese girls as sex objects, dehumanizing them not just in media but through the treatment and harassment they face due to these harmful stereotypes.[158] We see Mori in this image wearing fresh young makeup, with round cheeks, and a shy smile; all contributing to how extremely young she appears in this context. The schoolgirl Mori plays is subservient, and inhuman, and becomes a horror in itself; as she walks the line between adolescent and sex symbol. The implications of her cyborg identity further escalate this horror, as we see the human body intersect with the unnatural and mechanical. This is its form of biological horror, due to this distortion of the organic body through the addition of the metal and the inorganic. Mori's face becomes a flesh mask for her metallic body. The photo is no longer depicting just a school girl but instead crosses the boundary between human and machine; a monstrous image. As Mori faces the audience, she stares at us, disrupting the boundary between fiction and reality. This confrontation forces itself over the division between viewer and subject. As we are adjusted to

[158] Wallis, "The Paradox of Mariko Mori's Women in Post-Bubble Japan," para. 33.

consuming the subjects and stories of manga and anime, Mori forces us to feel discomfort in her recognition of the audience as a third-party gaze.

The artist addresses the audience of her work and their role in these societal issues in her other photographs from the series. *Play with Me* (1994) (fig.21) is one such example as Mori addresses both the audience and the subjects of the image with the title. The cyborg Mori plays stands facing the viewer once again, though she looks away coyly as she tilts her head in a display of either innocence or curiosity, the title both invites the viewer and the men in the image to play with cyborg Mori who is dressed as an armored anime heroine. The title is reminiscent of the way children speak or interact with those around them,[159] further emphasizing this concept of Mori's cyborg being some sort of toy for the men around her. This title can also be interpreted as Mariko Mori as an artist inviting viewers to participate in her world of pretend, suspending their disbelief and accepting her cyborg bodies as an alternate modernized Japanese reality. This cyborg stands in front of an electronics and video game store, acting as an advertisement for her own identity as a mass-produced product. She exists to be used, she is purchasable, and disposable whenever her owner is done with her. These themes of commerce, sex, and technology are all intertwined in Mori's work, as we see this repetition of her cyborgs being for sale; either as a purchasable act of service, a product to own, or employee of a conglomerate.[160]

There is an apparent visual style change in this photo as compared to the previous *Love Hotel* image. Compared to *Love Hotel*'s silver bodysuit and alien-like retro pointed ears, *Play with Me* is more so focused on emphasizing the cyborg as a colorful toy version of an anime heroine. Mori is dressed in what appears to be a black latex bodysuit that is layered with silver

[159] Schreiber, "Cyborgs, Avatars, Laa-Laa and Po," 3.

[160] Jieun Rhee, "From Goddess to Cyborg: Mariko Mori and Lee Bul," January 1, 2011, 6, https://www.academia.edu/79964152/From_Goddess_to_Cyborg_Mariko_Mori_and_Lee_Bul.

armor that emphasizes her breasts and waist. This armor is accompanied by a short silver skirt and long gloves, these feminine additions to her style play into anime's overly gendered cyborgs. This type of costuming to depict cyborgs within cute video-game aesthetics can be observed in Japanese advertisements from the late twentieth-century, as shown in figure 22, there is a joint visual alignment of feminized cyborgs in popular media that appeals to aesthetics that are found in robots and cyborg animes from the same time period. Mori's most prominent connection to these anime aesthetics in this costume is the bright blue wig she wears, styled in two long pigtails and bangs. This hairstyling is distinctly associated with the schoolgirl protagonist in shoujo mangas, the stereotypical heroine and idol in anime and manga. This contrasts with Mori's very obviously womanly form, as she submits to this submissive archetype of the young Japanese girl; she is ultimately allowing herself to give up her agency as a woman and become a fetishized plaything for Japanese society. This performance of the fantasy cyborg in the real world is shared throughout the entire series, as Mori uses these fantasies to critique the circumstances and systems that allow their existence. This critique challenges the men in these images, but this isn't isolated as the audience is also a part of the critique due to their gaze. In the words of author Soojin Lee, Mori is asking her audience "'Would you still fantasize me if I were real?".[161] When these caricatures are taken outside of media into the real world they confront those who consume them; rather than just a drawing or character these exaggerations of femininity are manifested in real people that the audience must face. Mariko Mori makes the decision to embody her warrior heroine in the young women, conflating these identities as those that are fetishized by popular culture.[162] Jonathan Wallis explains the world built by Mori as a world of male entertainment,

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[161] Lee, "Mariko Mori and the Globalization of Japanese 'Cute' Culture: Art and Pop Culture in the 1990s," 147.

[162] Rhee, "From Goddess to Cyborg," 6.

shojo media rather than appealing as a role model for young girls instead becomes a sex object that is intertwined with the technological fantasies that replace reality for male consumers.[163]

Tea Ceremony III (1994) is another example of Mori's cyborg photography, though in this image Mori leans into the role of a traditional female office employee. Mori is able to transform what is a seemingly socially respectable and rewarding position, in comparison to her previous iterations taking on roles such as prostitute or literal action figure, in the effort to showcase the ways in which that respectability makes no difference in the context of a misogynistic society. The female office worker is turned into a cyborg waitress, standing in metropolitan Japan, offering tea to the businessmen who pass her. She is subservient to the men around her, regardless of their shared work environment. Mori adorns the same metallic bodysuit seen in *Love Hotel*, although her school uniform is replaced with a form-fitting blue dress and white blouse. Mori's cyborg self is stiff and mechanical in her posing, which is in conversation with the methods utilized by the artist of digital manipulation to insert her image into a specific scene. This paradox of unclear connection to her surroundings establishes Mori as a kind of glitch within the image.[164] She is not supposed to be there, and this is depicted through the men around her never acknowledging her existence. The motion blur of the men constantly walking, while Mori is entirely stagnant and is therefore the most explicit subject of the photo emphasizes her Otherness. Mori smiles blankly, staring past the viewer, her arm reaching out offering tea not to a specific person or subject but is frozen in the action of that offer. The phrase ceremony implies some sort of sacred ritual or repetition of events, the choice on Mori's part to title this work *Tea Ceremony III* assigns this task as the cyborg's primary function. Her stiff smile doesn't reflect satisfaction or joy in this task but as Mori has stated, "The women appear to be happy

[163] Wallis, "The Paradox of Mariko Mori's Women in Post-Bubble Japan," para. 34.
[164] Wallis, para. 3.

because they're cyborgs, not real women…"[165] As she as a cyborg is without development outside of human intervention, while humans are constantly developing on their own, this leaves Mori as a cyborg frozen in time. Unable to achieve her role as a caregiver even in the small-scale ceremony of the exchange of tea, Mori becomes stagnant, unable to advance further. Mori's cyborg does exist in space, rather the issue is raised with the setting's rejection of her more so than her inability to enter. This suggestion of women as the Other who can belong but is unable to fit into specific spaces, not because of her own inability but rather the societal factors that disallow her, is a vital part of Mori's suggestion that the societal fetishization and rejection of women cuts them off from connecting with male-dominated spaces in Japan.[166] These settings that are loud in their expression of the economic prosperity and advancements of a modernized Japan become just a backdrop in which Mori centers her cyborgs as shallow caricatures of the cute, stylized gendered cyborgs of popular culture and anime.[167] Decentering Japan's modernization as more so a warning of the dangers of this postmodern world in its possible transformations of what it is to exist as an East Asian woman in this "new" Japan. Mori's digitalized body becomes not just a technological cyborg but a cultural cyborg in her Otherness within these settings of Westernized Japan.[168]

The final work from the "Made in Japan" series I've chosen to center is *Birth of a Star* (1995), an aestheticized cyborg image that departs from the iterations we've covered so far in Mori's work. The previously discussed works of *Love Hotel* and *Tea Ceremony III* are based in the setting of modernized Japan creating a conversation between the feminized cyborg body and

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[165] DIKE BLAIR, We've Got Twenty-five Years Interview with Mariko Mori, Summer 1995, para. 12, https://blair.thing.net/pages/writing/writing33.html.

[166] Rina Kita, "Mariko Mori: The Extraterrestrial-Cyborg Heroine as a Glitch in the Matrix," 7.

[167] Wallis, "The Paradox of Mariko Mori's Women in Post-Bubble Japan," para. 4.

[168] Rhee, "From Goddess to Cyborg," 8.

its role in the Japanese context. The *Birth of a Star* image in comparison is distinct in its removal from the Japanese setting and instead the placement of the female cyborg monstrosity into an abstracted space that defies the conventions of reality. This space, though depicting nowhere specific, is reminiscent of the shojo manga book covers of the late twentieth-century. The female manga artists of the 1970s have been credited with establishing the convention of the shojo style, this style and visual language of shojo heroines as analyzed earlier in the context of Junji Ito's *Tomie* (1987) deploys feminine and cute aesthetics to characterize its protagonists as lovely, charming, and young. Explicitly dealing with the ambiguous setting of manga covers as a liminal space they are usually occupied by the imagery of flowers and bubbles as signifiers of young girl aesthetics. These liminal spaces can be in the manga context of fig.15 and fig.16 as two prevalent examples of the shojo heroine who both appear in these liminal spaces in their own covers. Liminal spaces as settings for the cutesy Japanese heroine extend themselves outside of manga into fine art such as *Birth of a Star* and even show up in Japanese technology advertisements of the late 1980s utilizing these shoujo aesthetics (fig.25). This intersection of popular culture, commerce, and the fine arts is a vital context for the overlapping of manga and anime aesthetics in contemporary art as it reflects not just pop culture but a broader image of Japanese culture and the intertwining of high and low art aesthetics.

Mori depicts a cyborg less aligned with vintage cyborg aesthetics and instead evokes the shojo heroine in her colorful and childish visual language. Departing from the silver bodysuits and less polished costuming, Mori is transformed into a creature too perfectly posed and styled to be anything human. The cyborg is a metallic pink with gravity defying floating purple hair, this image isn't made to relate to real Japan woman as the previous iterations did. Instead Mori appeals to the shared experience of adolescent Japanese girls of costuming shojo media, the

infantilized exaggerated protagonists appealed to fetishistic aethetics. Mori's depiction though feels quite the opposite, though Mori has the previously discussed mini skirt of the sexualized schoolgirl and in addition to more skin than she's previously displayed. Mori's cyborg doesn't appeal to beauty standard, she is instead unsettling due to Mori's usage of bright blue contact lenses that make her eyes milky and inhuman. There is a type of "girl's aesthetic" being displayed, not one of soft femininity or elegance, but instead Mori offers viewers a explosion of color, texture, and fun in her cyborg body. The popular culture theme is further emphasized in the display of this work on top of a lightbox which emits "eerie technopop", the work is backlit like an image of a religious figure, the image feels like a shrine dedicated to the girl's popular culture cyborgs of shojo media. Mariko Mori completely transforms herself into a figurine of a cyborg idol, she is essentially plastic frozen in space for the intent of being visually consumed by her audience.[169] The playfulness of the image and vacant stare still allude to the schoolgirl as a monstrous Other that has no thought outside of her executive function as a cyborg to serve. Mori's process of creation to use her own body to in theory represent all women in their shared experiences of social inferiority under patriarchal rule is a unification of feminine identities, a rebellion and embrace of these feelings of alienation as a dual identity.[170]

As Mariko Mori embraces conventional notions of Asian femininity as a form of protest through the reclamation of such aesthetics as a feminist message we can see a distinctly different approach to these themes in the work of contemporary multimedia artist Lee Bul. Bul explores

[169] Schreiber, "Cyborgs, Avatars, Laa-Laa and Po," 1.

[170] Federica Cavazzuti, "The Path to a Collective Spirituality in the Art of Mori Mariko," *Kervan. International Journal of African and Asian Studies* 26, no. 1 (July 12, 2022), https://doi.org/10.13135/1825-263X/6890.

femininity and the female body through radical disruptions of those aesthetics in the utilization of body horror and anime as means of critique.[171]

The comparison of these two artists as East Asian women is with the intention of exploration of how East Asian feminism functions in the institution, and the importance of Japanese popular culture in a building of a regional feminist visual language. The identitiies of Mariko Mori as a Japanese artist and Lee Bul as a Korean artist are vital to understanding the shared themes but different approaches to their feminism. Both nations have experienced difficulties with modernization as a Western ideal; as national and international identities conflict with one another, each artist responds to East Asian representation of femininity and its monstrosity in the gaze of the identity of the Other. But another distinction in their work is Mori's Japanese perspective of Westernization as an idealized society; she responds to a society that embraces commodification even in its treatment of women as commodities in society, consumable and aestheticized. Lee Bul on the other hand exists in the context of a history of colonization in Korea resulting in a rejection of Western ideals, and being born into a military dictatorship is manifested in Lee's approach of destruction and satire when dealing with idealized feminine form.[172] Mori embraces dual Eastern and Western identities, and the hyper-gendered depictions of women as a space of critique through feminism that is soft and quiet, Lee on the other hand rejects the natural female body and instead pushes back against the East Asian women as submissive and docile; subversion of the same beauty standards and critiques results in completely different approach based in the greater cultural context the artist's exist within. [173]

<u>CYBORGS W1-W10 (1998-2006)</u>

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[171] Rhee, "From Goddess to Cyborg," 10.
[172] Rhee, 12.
[173] Wallis, "The Paradox of Mariko Mori's Women in Post-Bubble Japan," para. 11.

Contemporary artist Lee Bul was born in Yeongwol, South Korea in 1964 under the Park Chung-hee Dictatorship. Born to parents who were political dissidents meant that the artist and her family spent a lot of her childhood moving around to avoid political persecution, additionally this title of dissident limited Lee Bul's options for her future career with the artist being one of the only available options. This led Lee to graduate from Honggik University in 1987 with a degree in sculpture, this happened also to be the same year that Korea declared itself a representative democracy freeing itself from the strict military dictatorship.[174] This time period is when Lee debuted in the Korean art scene as a radical performance artist, the artist's exploration of the dystopian female body would enable the artist to establish herself within the post-globalization international art scene.[175][176] Lee has reached extreme success in the contemporary art world securing her title of fine artist through the validity and commercial success of her artworks. The artist's work has appeared in twelve biennials, along with a large number of solo shows with respected institutions such as the New Museum and National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art. Lee Bul is represented by Lehmann Maupin and Thaddaeus Ropac,[177] and continues to have solo and group exhibitions across the world. Currently residing in Seoul, South Korea [178] Lee is an artist whose work is heavily influenced by her identity as an Asian woman, in addition to influences from East Asian popular culture and the cultural and political fears of the East.

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[174] "Home | Cy-Candy: Female Bodies and Cyborg Theory," sec. 4 paras. 1–4.

[175] "Home | Cy-Candy: Female Bodies and Cyborg Theory," sec. 4 paras. 1–4.

[176] "MORI ART MUSEUM [LEE BUL: FROM ME, BELONGS TO YOU ONLY] 4 February - 27 May, 2012," MORI ART MUSEUM, accessed April 12, 2024, http://www.mori.art.museum/english/contents/leebul/index.html.

[177] "Lee Bul - Biography, Shows, Articles & More," Artsy, accessed April 12, 2024, https://www.artsy.net/artist/lee-bul.

[178] "MORI ART MUSEUM [LEE BUL."

Lee is a valuable example in our process of defining how body horror and the feminine motifs of the cyborg and schoolgirl show up in fine art with the intention of expressing broader messages through the usage of feminine visual language. In addition to solidifying the connections between the East Asian popular media of anime and manga to contemporary art, as a specific lens that defines the charged relationship between fine art and low art and the ways they are deeply intertwined. We will be covering a couple of particular works from Lee that showcase her relationship with feminine body horror, which will be contrasted and accompanied by Lee's *Cyborg W1-W10* (1998-2006) series as the main focus of this section. The first two works that will help us build an understanding of Lee's usage of body horror are two of the artist's early performance works that are intertwined in their themes and subject matter. The performances of *Cravings* (1989) (fig.26) (fig.27) and *Sorry for Suffering- you think I'm a puppy on a picnic?* (1990) (fig.28) are connected through their featuring and focus on Lee's broader works of fabric costumes stuffed with sponges that invoke organic abstracted form; these costumes deconstruct Lee's body in addition to offering viewers horrifying distortions of the human form. The original *Cravings* (1989) performance took place at the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul, South Korea. The performance featured Lee and three other performers wearing the soft sculptures and moving around the museum's lobby as microphones embedded in the costumes amplify the sounds of the movement. Shown in (fig.26) in a poor-quality video image is the performance, we can see Lee dragging herself down a staircase as a large crowd surrounds her watching. Lee's recreation of the work on her own in an outdoor setting is photographed, this image is clearer allowing us to view not just Lee in costume but also the other soft sculpture works (fig.27). The work Lee wears is a white costume that appears to be an abstracted combination of duplicated limbs and phallic tentacles, along with some growth-like additions

appearing similarly to rabbits and fetuses. The work is horrific in its implication of it being attached to Lee's body, growing and extending out of her in an oddly maternal nature. Though the work is successful in its abstraction of the female body, it challenges societal notions of bodies that are correct or right. It also invokes innate tones of the phallic appendage and the female reproductive system, which signifies the inability to escape gendered forms even through the usage of distortion entirely.

In (fig.28), the costume used in *Sorry for Suffering-you think I'm a puppy on a picnic?* (1990) is seen splayed out in the grass behind Lee. The latter performance took place over twelve days when Lee wore the costume as she traveled from South Korea to Japan, ending up at the Takizawa Theater before reenacting one of her other performance works. Both of these performances are intertwined in their biological horror used to communicate feminist themes and critiques, as we see Lee completely erase her body and replace it with tentacle-like appendages and abstract forms. The *Sorry for Suffering-you think I'm a puppy on a picnic?* (1990) costume, while still monstrous in its form, offers a different type of beast than its predecessor. The wearable sculpture is made up of a more solidified form that has appendages growing out of it, creating rather than a mashup of growth and forming a more distinct monstrous body that covers Lee. The red, orange, and off-white coloring of the work emphasizes its fleshiness; the fabric and sponge transform into muscle and tissue; this contrasts with the previously mentioned completely white soft sculpture that appears as the flesh of an animal or human turned inside out.[179] The ornamentation on the costume is distinctly feminine, and Lee's head is accessible in both works, so it is obvious that it is being worn by a woman. The work without an actual body wearing it is interesting on its own, but when placed on the body of a woman, it completely shifts its message.

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[179] Rhee, "From Goddess to Cyborg."

Rather than just abstracting human forms, Lee is communicating to her audience that this is an apparent effort to challenge or, better yet, destroy society's understanding of womanly forms. Lee does not let herself be sexualized; she covers herself in horror to hide any hint of her own genitals or sex organs, leaving behind a woman without a body.

These guerilla performances were focused heavily not just on Lee's monstrous forms and odd movements but on the public as an environment and audience. The works are almost site-specific in the sense that they interact with societies that are more conservative in their treatment of women, and by using public spaces that are high-traffic, they depend on the disruption of the people in those spaces. If you were to move these performances into a white gallery space, it would be like forcing Lee to speak to a wall rather than the more significant East Asian societies that she is commenting on. Though Lee was able to translate these commentaries into a sculptural work that is successful in its placement within a gallery space, *Monster: Pink* (1998/2011) (fig.29). This work, initially built in 1998 but rebuilt in 2011, is the epitome of the monstrous form. The work is an amorphic compilation of pink tentacles that intimidate as much as disturb, towering over its viewers at over six feet tall; the statue appears to reach out and invade the space of its audience. The work is fabric stuffed with cotton, which is built onto a wire frame, almost as if giving one of Lee's wearable fabric sculptures an abstracted mannequin, allowing the work to exist outside of human forms. This allows *Monster: Pink* to be void of gender, race, or class in its visual existence, though it is created by a woman, and the usage of pink as its coloring immediately connects the monster back to its femininity in its analysis. Lee's manifestation of the body interrupts and critiques idealized representations of the feminine form,[180] challenging the viewers' preconceived notions of what a feminine body looks like. This

[180] "Feminist Ideologies of Lee Bul and Lin Tianmiao — Reshapingworlds," para. 4, accessed April 12, 2024, https://reshapingworlds.com.au/Feminist-Ideologies-of-Lee-Bul-and-Lin-Tianmiao.

work is in extreme contrast to the Lee Bul sculpture series that will be the focus of this section, *Cyborg W1-W10* (1998-2006) (fig.30), a series of hyper-feminized mechanical depictions of the female body. While *Monster: Pink* is gender-less, organic, an invasion of its audience's comfort and space, the *Cyborg W1-W10* series is hyper-feminine, sleek, inorganic, statuesque, and vulnerable to its audience's gaze. The sculptures act as a reflection of *Monster: Pink*; rather than removing gender and sexuality for its viewers, the *Cyborg W1-W10* series digs into the overly sexualized cyborgs found in Japanese anime and manga. The entire series of sculptures follows the same concept, with material and stylistic changes in the cyborg imagery. The sculptures depict cyborg figures that are hyper-exaggerated in their secondary sex characteristics, towering over their viewers at over six feet tall, the mechanical woman's breasts, hips, and hourglass figure creating disproportionate inhuman forms. The cyborgs are anonymous, missing not just their heads but one arm and one leg, respectively. This insinuation of violence against the sculptures, this victimhood through fragmentation,[181] is tied to its hyper-femininity. These are not just gender-less robots built for battle; instead, Lee is offering us broken female forms that are seemingly turned off. Which disrupts perceptions of technologically perfected human forms through the vision of advanced robotic forms that aren't correct or "perfect." The cyborgs are hung from the ceiling when they're exhibited, frozen in time, and vulnerable to their viewers. This state of hanging invokes visions of a butcher shop, puppetry, and even the gallows. Rather than this raised state marking the cyborgs as objects of worship, they appear as petrified armored forms exhibited by their viewers.[182] Additionally, the white coloring of the cyborgs mimics classic European sculptures, along with the missing limbs of the sculptures, evoke feelings of the passage of time, that we are seeing artifacts from another world distant from our own (fig.31).

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[181] "Home | Cy-Candy: Female Bodies and Cyborg Theory," sec. 4 para. 16.
[182] Rhee, "From Goddess to Cyborg," 10–11.

To dig a bit deeper into the different iterations of Lee's cyborgs and their differences, we can begin with *Cyborg W1-W4*. These specific sculptures are made out of silicone, an unexpected material for a subject that is traditionally imagined as being made out of metal and wires. This choice of silicone has an apparent association with plastic surgery, and silicone implants are commonly used for breast enlargement. These iterations have what appears to be metal plating implemented in their armor, the bolts giving an exaggerated robotic feel, reminding its viewers that this is a constructed body. The breasts are dramatically geometric in shape, both sexualizing the cyborg and mocking its own insertion of this organic secondary sex characteristic into a mechanical form. The more mechanical imagery is juxtaposed with Lee's usage of ruffles in the sculptures' design; the placement of the ruffles on the hips is reminiscent of the mini-skirts we have seen previously used in depictions of school girls in the manga. This sweetness or femininity the ruffles imply is contrasted with the sharpness of the cyborg's nails, which are pointed and long and become claw-like and threatening.[183] These iterations are the only ones with physical traits such as ruffles and nails to imply their femininity outside of just the shape of their bodies.

The next iterations of the *Cyborg* series have an extreme change in material, moving from silicone to ethylene-vinyl acetate (EVA) panels and fiber-reinforced plastic (FRP). This material changes the sculpture from being fleshy and soft to being hard and solid. Additionally, there is a jump from the shininess of the first sculptures to this extremely matte second set. These changes make the bodies feel even more mechanical, their soft-skin light finish replaced by the hard, cold implication of metal. *Cyborgs W5-W7* has a more ornate design, using more minor details and marks to create what appears to be a more high-tech look to the armor. This

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[183] "Home | Cy-Candy: Female Bodies and Cyborg Theory," sec. 4 paras.8–12.

ornamentation also creates dramatic shadows on the cyborg's form, creating a more dramatic and intense look for the body. The silhouettes of these sculptures are more rounded than *Cyborgs W1-W4* and have less exaggerated breasts and hips; *Cyborgs W7* is pictured in (fig.32). This is in no way to say these versions are less sexualized or clearly feminine; Lee can maintain their femininity and sexuality while also making a cyborg that is more technologically advanced. The ruffles previously used are replaced with a rounded panel around the hips, more so implying a wrap-skirt effect over the supermini ruffled skirt that was implied in *Cyborg W1-W4*.(fig.30). This skirt switch also represents Lee's development of the cyborgs, from super exaggerated and caricature-like depictions to more sophisticated and mature cyborgs.

The final iterations of *Cyborg W8-W10* are also made out of EVA and FRP but are the most distinctly different in their form. As seen in figure.33, which shows *Cyborg W9*, these sculptures are almost prepubescent in their appearance due to how incredibly petite they are; this is where we see some of the earlier mentioned Lolicon aesthetics reappear with these bodies that combine women and children in their characteristics. The form is exceptionally slim and lanky, though it still has its large breasts and what appears to be extra panels on its hips to give the illusion of them being more expensive than they are. Compared to *Cyborgs W5-W7*, Lee moves back to a more minimalist design, creating a sleeker and cleaner look.[184] This iteration wears underwear, while the rest of the cyborgs are clothed in this armor; Lee chose to protect the modesty of these sculptures. While it covers and protects, it also implies that there is some sort of genital or private part of the sculpture gendering the cyborg. The specific sculpture *Cyborg W9* (fig.33) is missing not just one arm, one leg, and its head; its other leg is also cut off below

[184] "Home | Cy-Candy: Female Bodies and Cyborg Theory," sec. 4 paras.8–12.

the knee; this makes the sculpture feel even more grotesque and broken in its butcher-like display.

This series is heavily referential to the cyborg animes of the ‘80s and ‘90s; the over-sexualized, subservient female cyborg is hung for viewers to consume with their gazes. Though Donna Haraway’s “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth-Century” is one of the most influential pieces of feminist cyborg academia, Lee herself has made it clear that although she was aware of the work, she more so aimed create commentary on anime’s depictions of mechanical women.[185] Lee has stated that her original conception of the series stemmed from the hyper-gendered cyborgs that appear in Japanese animation. Specifically, Japanese manga and anime that have bled into South Korea’s pop culture, an extension of the growing East Asian regional pop culture identification.

The shared inspiration garnered from the anime caricature of East Asia’s hyper-gendered cyborg as deadly but beautiful young women build a greater visual language for cyborg aesthetics as a means of objectification and control. These aesthetics in conversation with Donna Haraway’s manifesto make a clear distinction between Eastern and Western approaches to feminism and the ways in which Haraway’s feminist theory is embedded so deeply in the experiences of the Western white feminist that it becomes not applicable to global contexts.

Both Mariko Mori and Lee Bul attempt to recontextualize the sexualized female cyborgs of anime through the imagery of sexualized bodies that subvert and ridicule an eroticized viewing; due to their exaggerated caricature of feminine bodies. The distortion of feminity becomes grotesque and monstrous, defying the possible sexual desirability of the bodies.[186]

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[185] “Home | Cy-Candy: Female Bodies and Cyborg Theory,” sec. 4 para.16.
[186] “Home | Cy-Candy: Female Bodies and Cyborg Theory,” sec. 4 paras.20–21.

Through Lee Bul's work, she rejects the feminine body, disrupting and destroying depictions of its form until it is unrecognizable as anything other than monstrous. The subjectivity of the body is explored, and the confrontation between the audience and the cyborgs is uncanny in the alienated but familiar forms.[187][188] The pursuit for bodily perfection is rejected, and the cyborgs are hung for viewing as symbols of a failed feminine form. This gendering of the cyborg, is in direct contrast to Haraways claims of cyborgs as gender-less beings. The pursuit of bodily perfection is manifested in the artworks of both Mariko Mori and Lee Bul, as both women construct bodies that appear distorted, biological horror is explored in the stillness and uncanny natures of their artworks.

As both Lee Bul and Mariko Mori reject the label of feminist, they don't appeal to Haraway's depictions of Westernized feminism. In a 2002 interview Lee Bul expresses her discomfort with the label as she feels it limits possibilities, a common phenomenon with East Asian female artists.[189] Women's rights movements in East Asia were limited compared to the rapid progression of Western feminism, so there has been a misalignment in terms of perspectives on how feminism should look in the contemporary world.[190] East Asian feminists put focus more so on what the feminine identity is outside of the patriarchal society, creating self identification through feminine aesthetics. Mori is able to achieve this by her soft feminism, as she speaks through the subtext of her monstrous beings rather than appealing to direct confrontatons with patriarchal society. Lee on the other hand deploys this expression of

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[187] Lan, "Technofetishism of Posthuman Bodies: Representations of Cyborgs, Ghosts, and Monsters in Contemporary Japanese Science Fiction Film and Animation," 82.

[188] "The Art Of Lee Bul: Of Cyborgs Monsters And Utopian Landscapes," Culture Trip, October 3, 2014, para.4, https://theculturetrip.com/asia/south-korea/articles/the-art-of-lee-bul-of-cyborgs-monsters-and-utopian-landscapes.

[189] "Home | Cy-Candy: Female Bodies and Cyborg Theory," sec. 4 para.5.

[190] "Feminist Ideologies of Lee Bul and Lin Tianmiao — Reshapingworlds," para. 2.

feminism through her complete rejetion of the idealized feminine body, instead aligning hersself with the horror of the internal and rethinking of her own body. Both of these fine artists are able to communicate their experiences as East Asian women in the context of popular culture as a means of communicating societal context through the usage of specific iconography. These references to popular culture creates a setting and context for these depictions of bodies, allowing a nuanced approach the the visual analysis of the images as feminist artworks.

CONCLUSION

To conclude this research, I would like to offer possible further explorations of these themes of the popular culture motif as a tool for fine art. As the vast scope of this project has limited my ability to go as in-depth into further explorations of the implication of caricatures as both oppressive and a form of satirical activism, I imagine there would be many examples of this relationship and usage. Additionally, the depictions of female monsters in popular culture constitute a vast number of iterations of the ways feminine motifs may characterize their subjects, in addition to the many cultural contexts that these archetypes carry that may shift their messaging or usage. The lens of globalized East Asia in the 1990s allowed me to use specific expressions of ethic stereotypes such as techno-orientalism and the conception of the Eastern

Other. Therefore with the placement of other cultural lenses and their own historical contexts, the associations and depictions of the popular culture motif would shift to reflect a new set of monstrosities. This is the value of the proposal of the existence of a feminine language for body horror, as the expression of feminine internalized emotions into physical pain and distortion is a universal phenomenon. Barbara Creed's characterization of the monstrous feminine ss an ageless and global figure, a universal coding for the misogynistic expressions of femininity in media is essential in its versatility in various feminist contexts. My extension of the concept into stylized depictions of women, as seen in the shojo art style described in my first chapter, is another concept I continued to be intrigued by. How do infantalized aesthetics combined with the adult form create uncanny proportions? And how does that communicate broader commentaries on the horror of the hybrid identities as they are visualized to be fetishistic and unsettling.

I hope to offer readers the opportunity to view visual culture in its broader societal implicaitons, specifically the potential harm created through visual depictions of marginalized communities. What many write off as just an image, aesthetic, artstyle, are all implicit in the real exploitation of vulnerable groups. The normalization of pedophilic media as covered in my first chapter is a dangerous rabbit hole, one in which criminal behavior is defended and excused as aesthetic preferences. When consuming harmful media we are all complicit in the further oppression of those marginalized, therefore being conscious of the media we're consuming is valuable to avoid internalizing or normalizing problematic and dangerous stereotypes or characterizations.

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IMAGE LIST

Fig. 1. Mariko Mori, Love Hotel (1994)

Fig. 2. Students of Fukuoka Jogakkou, Fukuoka, Japan, in their school uniform. 1920s

Fig. 3. Cover of porn magazine featuring a school girl. *Pixie 17*, 1998, Tokuo: Bauhaus Shuppan.

Fig. 4. *The Dream of The Fisherman's Wife* - Hokusai 1814

Fig. 5 Hideo Azuma, *Hizashi* (1979-1984), Reprint Cover (2018)

Fig.6 Guerrilla kogal in customized school uniform relaxes with her pistol. Courtesy of the artist Koshiba Tetsuya. Front cover of the manga book Enjo Kosai Bokumetsu Undo (Assisted Dating Extermination Movement) 1998.

Fig.7 Girl in sailor uniform gropes a doll dressed in kimono, 1970. Courtesy of the artist Saeki Toshio, 1997, Tokyo: Treville Co. Ltd.

Fig.8 A perverse schoolgirl is fondled by a leering schoolmaster with an axe in his head, 1970. Courtesy of the artist Saeki Toshio, The Early Works, 1997

Fig.9 Junji Ito- *Tomie* (1987) Volume one, chapter one, page 4, panel number 1

Fig. 10. *Tomie* (1987) by Junji Ito, Chap one vol one, Page 8 panel number 4

Fig. 11. Junji Ito- *Tomie* (1987) Volume one, chapter one, Page 32 panel number 1

Fig. 12. Junji Ito- *Tomie* (1987) Volume one, chapter two, page 70 panel number 6

Fig. 13. Junji Ito- *Tomie* (1987) Volume one, chapter two, page 86 panel number 5-6

Fig. 14 Junji Ito- *Tomie* (1987) Volume one, chapter four, page 188 panel number. 1-3

Fig. 15. “Fruits Basket” volume 1, published January 1st 1999, by Natsuki Takaya

Fig. 16. “Sailor Moon” volume 1, published July 6th 1992, by Naoko Takeuchi

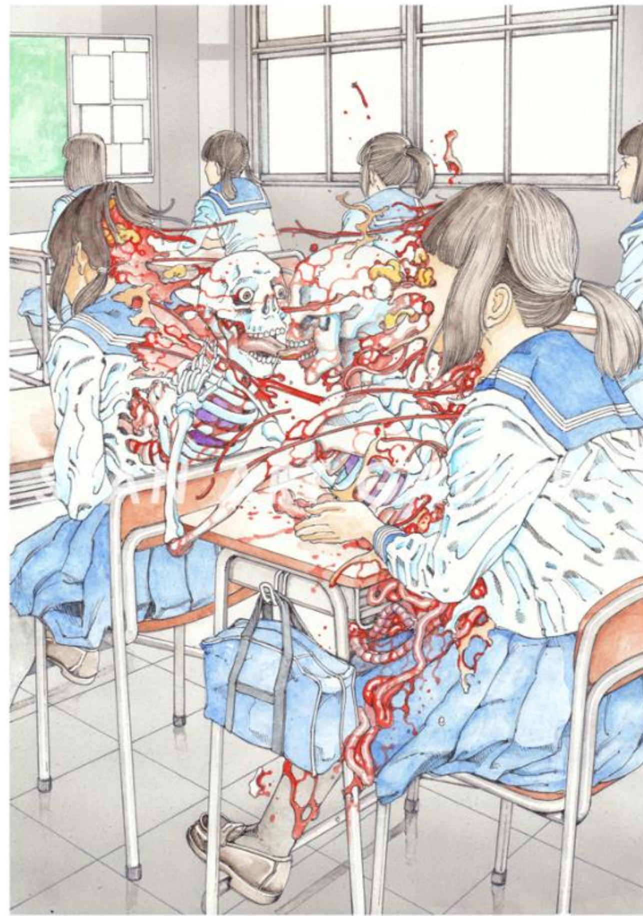

Fig. 17. Shintaro Kago, "Skeleton kiss 3" Giclee Print sold at JAPAN EXPO in france, circa. 2021

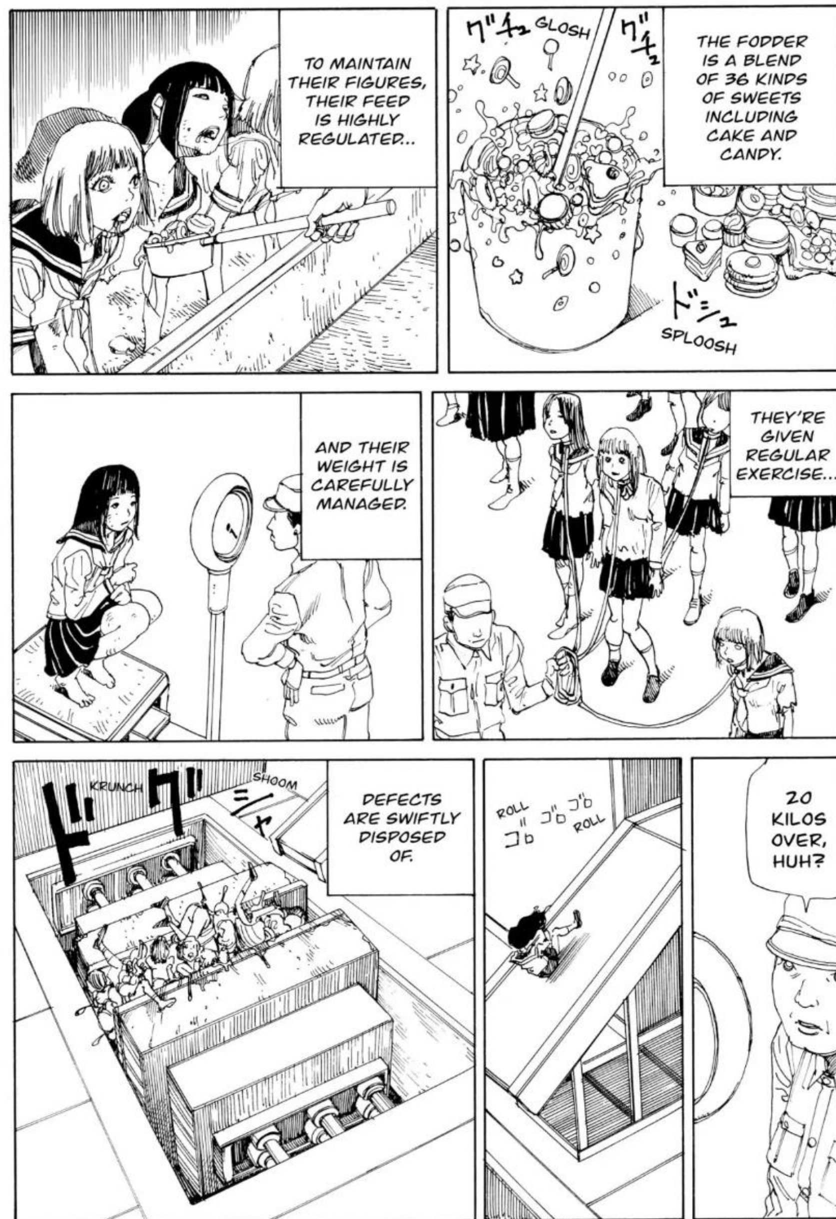

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Fig. 18. “The Town of Japan’s Best Beauties" Super Dimensional Love Gun (2017). By Shintaro Kago, page 6, panel number 1-6

Fig. 19. “The Town of Japan’s Best Beauties" Super Dimensional Love Gun (2017). By Shintaro Kago, page 8, panel number 1-6

Fig. 20. “The Town of Japan’s Best Beauties" Super Dimensional Love Gun (2017). By Shintaro Kago, page 9, panel number 1-2

Fig. 21. Mariko Mori, *Play With Me* (1994)

Fig. 22. Advertisement for the Gall Force shooting game from MSX Magazine. (1986)

Fig.23 Mariko Mori, *Tea Ceremony III* (1994)

Fig.24 Mariko Mori, Birth of a Star, (1995)
3D Duratrans print and acrylic, sound (3:20 min.)
Light box: 73 × 50 × 6" (185.4 × 127 × 15.2 cm)
Duratran print: 72 × 48 × 1/4" (182.9 × 121.9 × 0.6 cm)

Fig. 25. Saito Yuki in PC-8800 Advertisement, Microm BASIC Magazine, December 1987

Fig. 26. Lee Bul, *Performances 1989-1996* (still). DVD, 15:40 minutes. Installation view, *Lee Bul*, MCA, 2004. Image courtesy and © the artist. Photograph: Paul Gren

Fig. 27 Lee Bul, *Cravings*, 1989, performance, Jang Heung, Korea, © Photo: Studio Lee Bul

Fig.28 *Sorry for suffering – You think I'm a puppy on a picnic?* (1990), Lee Bul. Twelve-day performance at Kimpo Airport, Narita Airport, downtown Tokyo and Dokiwaza Theater. Courtesy Studio Lee Bul

Fig.29 *Monster: Pink* 1998 / 2011, fabric, cotton filling, stainless-steel frame, acrylic paint, 210 × 210 × 180 cm, Courtesy: Studio Lee Bul

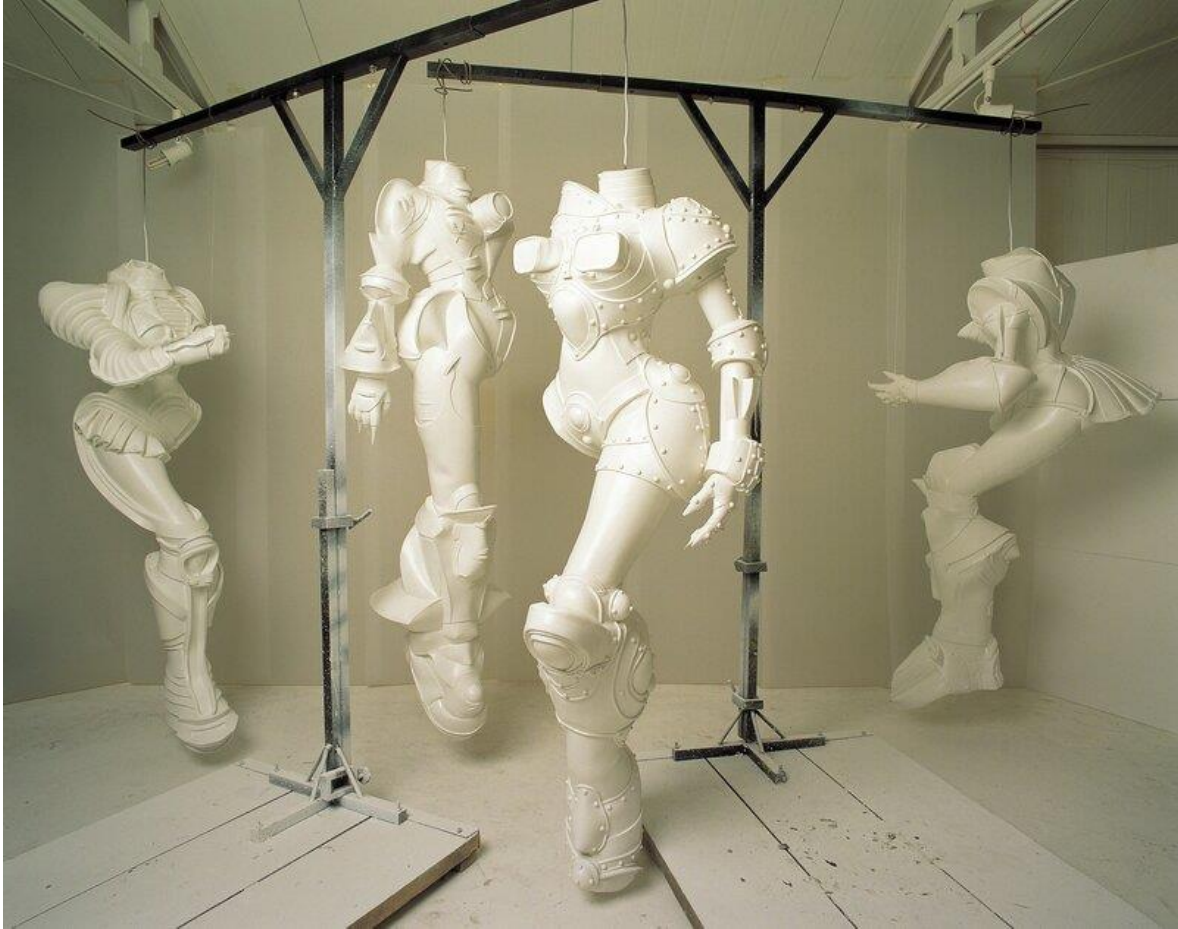

Fig.30 Lee Bul, Cyborg W1-W4, 1998. Cast silicone, polyurethane filling, paint pigment. Photo: Yoon Hyung-moon. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig.31 Phidias? *Aphrodite with Tortoise (Athenian Aphrodite Urania?)*. 5th century BCE. Pentelic marble.

Fig.32 Lee Bul, *Cyborg W7*, 2000. Hand-cut polyurethane panels on FRP, polyurethane coating. Installation view at Amorepacific Museum of Art.

Fig.33 Lee Bul, *Cyborg W9*, 2006. Hand-cut EVA panels on FRP, polyurethane coating, 180 x 60 x 70 cm.

fig.34 "Ghost in the Shell" theatrical release poster (1995)