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Articulations of Liberation and Agency in Yanagi Miwa's "Elevator Girls"

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by

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ABSTRACT

Miwa Yanagi's *Elevator Girls* series, a collection of glossy photographs featuring groups of similarly clad women lingering in expansive, empty arcades, made its international debut in 1996. While the pieces garnered positive reactions, Yanagi found that most Western viewers read her work as predominantly "Oriental"—confirming stereotypes of a highly polished techno-topic Japan that was still negotiating gender equality.

In this thesis, I explore alternative ways of reading Yanagi's *Elevator Girls* series, which, I argue, call attention to myopic views of commercialism and identity in order to provide an alternative reading of these women as agents of transgression and ideological transcendence. Whereas many viewed Yanagi's works as a comment on capitalist machinations, where consumerism has produced soulless, vapid feminine identities, I focus on the ways in which these women exercise agency without relying on notions of an individualized, unique ego.

INDEX WORDS: Yanagi Miwa, Japanese contemporary art, Consumerism, Elevator Girls, Globalization, Late-capitalism, Orientalism, International art market, Buddhism, Hybridity, Space, Place, Identity, *Ma*, Department store, Self, *Kami*, Artistic nationalism, Liminal personae

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

1   INTRODUCTION

Yanagi Miwa's *Elevator Girls* series (1994-1999), a collection of glossy photographs featuring groups of similarly clad elevator girls lingering in expansive, empty arcades, made its international debut in 1996 as part of the "Prospect '96" exhibit at the Schirn Kunsthalle exhibition space in Frankfurt, Germany.[1] The show featured a number of contemporary artists, including Cindy Sherman, Jeff Wall, Sam Taylor-Wood, and Morimura Yasumasa. The latter, a well-known Japanese artist, famous for appropriating Western images of high art and fashion, was responsible for Yanagi's discovery and inclusion in the show.[2] While using Yanagi's apartment for a photo shoot, Morimura came across a few of Yanagi's first *Elevator Girls* images, and decided to introduce her to his agent and the curator of the Frankfurt exhibition. She was quickly added to the line-up of artists representing Japan.[3]

Prior to her international debut, Yanagi Miwa's first solo exhibition (a performance piece titled *White Casket* that took place in 1993 at Art Space Niji in Kyoto) offered an introductory glimpse at the artist's collection of uniformed women, frozen within a constructed space. Renting out a gallery that contained a window onto the streets of Kyoto, Yanagi constructed a realistic elevator, within which she sat two models on a couch. Dressed in traditional elevator attire, donning hats and uniform suits, the elevator girls sat motionless for hours as passersby stared in through the windows. While this first performance introduced themes of performativity and gender, which would be found in her expanded *Elevator Girls* series, it was not until 1994, when Yanagi turned to photography, that she began to touch on various larger and complex critical elements addressing the inter-

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[1] The Japanese names presented within this text follow the Japanese model of family name first and given name last.

[2] Fran Lloyd, "Strategic Interventions in Contemporary Japanese Art," in *Consuming Bodies: Sex and Contemporary Japanese Art,* ed. Fran Lloyd (New York: Reaktion Books, 2002), 69.

[3] Miwa Yanagi, Interview by Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster and Hans Ulrich Obrist, in *Miwa Yanagi*, eds. Ariane Grigoteit and Friedhelm Hütte (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2002), 45.

section of gender, embodiment, identity, modernism, consumerism, and performativities of self in Japan and the contemporary world.[4]

The women in Yanagi's *Elevator Girls*, all fairly young in age, are dressed in the standard attire of a department-store hostess. The 1920s and 1930s saw the introduction of the elevator girl in conjunction with a series of other professions that opened to women following the rise of the consumer industry. She continued to feature in the Japanese culture through the decades of the twentieth century; however, by the 1990s the elevator girl was considerably less prominent. Though the elevator girl continues to exist in larger, high-end department stores, such as Mitsukoshi in downtown Tokyo, the subjects in Yanagi's photographs stand in more as a metaphor for Japanese feminine identities and conceptions of self than documentaries of a particular type of Japanese employee. Found standing behind department store counters, in elevators transporting shoppers between floors, or in the midst of a throng of people pointing customers in the right direction, elevator girls helped lubricate and ornament the shopping experience.

Typically hired for her youth and beauty, the elevator girl holds a highly contested position within contemporary Japan. As an icon of ideal Japanese femininity, she stands situated at the crossroads of a number of late-twentieth-century debates surrounding the history of female gender roles and mediated representations of femininity in magazines and advertisements. At the forefront of these debates stand a number of feminists who question a patriarchal society obsessed with all things *kawaii* (cute), a sexual attraction to underage girls, and a strand of social conservatisms intent on urging women into traditional domestic roles. Meanwhile, various Japanese intellectuals highlight the potentially harmful implications of capitalism, technology, and media representation on the nation and, more specifically, the Japanese female body. In choosing to photograph (in a format resembling the vivid gloss of advertisements) a collection of elevator girls in futuristic spaces mimicking havens of capitalist overconsumption, Yanagi catalyzes and calls attention to a vibrant

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[4] Linda Nochlin, Akiko Otake, and Chirstopher Phillips, *Heavy Light* (London: Steidl/Icp, 2008), 214.

array of contemporary socio-political disputes. And just as the perspectives surrounding these de-bates remain diverse, so do the responses to Yanagi's photographs.

Since its international debut in 1996, the *Elevator Girls* series has garnered a great deal of attention from critics in Japan and throughout the art world.[5] With major figures, like feminist theo-rist and critic, Ueno Chizuko, weighing in on her work, Yanagi has certainly reached a degree of high recognition, to the point that it is rare to find a retrospective or overview of contemporary Japanese art that does not feature at least a paragraph or two describing her work. In addition to these print-ed texts are a number of interviews, gallery reviews, and critical magazine and newspaper articles analyzing the nuances of her photographs. The resulting collection of descriptions, interpretations, and conclusions offer a complex array of works to draw from when undertaking research on the artist.

While each piece of literature discussing her work offers unique insight into the possible meanings behind the artist's first series, nearly all of these interpretations come to a similar conclu-sion: that these women are victims of a high capitalist Japanese complex, riddled with overcon-sumption, materialism, and an overwhelming desire to keep up with contemporary fashions. In this way, the elevator girls' bodies become the nexus of a maleficent collection of contemporary socio-political forces.[6] Be they concerned with a contemporary Japanese media industry that obsesses over and objectifies a group of attractive, young females, a socially conservative economic system that tends to offer women only part-time positions requiring little skill or labor, or a general sense of female entrapment within patriarchal gender roles, responses to Yanagi's *Elevator Girls* series articulate a fundamental concern over the contemporary state of Japanese women. A majority of critics point to the elevator girls' uniformity and languid, listless postures as a sign of their disem-

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[5] Indeed, Yanagi is currently one of the most recognizable figures in the Japanese contemporary art world.
[6] Peter Herbstreuth, "Difference within the Sameness—A Project of Remembrance Concerning the Visual Conception of Miwa Yanagi," in *Miwa Yanagi*, eds. Ariane Grigoteit and Friedhelm Hütte (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2002), 19.

powerment. Reading them as robots, dolls, puppets, or cyborgs, critics point to a strident dearth of individual identity and thereby call attention to a corresponding lack of agency.

To offer a few examples, the authors of the book *Contemporary Photography from the Far East: Asian Dub Photography* state, "the artist proposes a reflection on the difficulty of constructing one's own identity in a world that is increasingly oriented towards consumption, where an individual's freedom is damaged even in its capacity to perceive that which is truly desired."[7] In his critical introduction to *White Casket,* Okabe Aomi points out:

> These girls possess neither a feminist resistance nor a victimized conscience; they are forcefully molded into particular forms of speech as they happily comply toward other's gazes. They transform into beautiful "things" (commodities). This seems largely due to the artificial sense of beauty that Japan has generated and derived from the country's long-standing will to live up to the model West.[8]

In Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin's *Global Feminisms* catalogue, for the exhibition of the same name organized by the Brooklyn Museum, Kasahara Michiko writes:

> The expressionless young women in their elegant uniforms certainly create a symbolic image of the women who live in the highly developed capitalistic society of contemporary Japan, where "individuality is suppressed and intentionally encoded." Yanagi's works despair of an oppressive consumer society in which the only values are material objects, physical appearance, and the pursuit of wealth.[9]

Finally, in *Warriors of Art: A Guide to Contemporary Japanese Artists*, the author Yamaguchi Yumi explains that "[t]he confined space in which the uniformed elevator girl repeats the same words and gestures every day seems to be a metaphor for restrictions that society places on women's behavior."[10] Hence, like the analyses above, a majority of the writing on Yanagi's *Elevator Girls* series tends to read her images as a reflection of an injurious sociopolitical economic system stripping its women of their individuality, and thereby removing their means to empowerment. According to

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[7] Filippo Maggia, Francesco Lazzarini, and Foro Boario, "Miwa Yanagi," in *Contemporary Photography from the Far East: Asian Dub Photography* (Milano, Italy: Skira, 2009), 173.

[8] Aomi Okabe, "A Fabricated Modernism—Miwa Yanagi's Critical Vision," in *White Casket, Limited Edition (with Print),* ed. by Miwa Yanagi (PLACE OF PUBLICATION: Nazraeli Press, 2004), 4.

[9] Michiko Kasahara, "Contemporary Japanese Women's Self-Awareness," in *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art*, eds. Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin (London: Merrell, 2007), 100.

[10] Yumi Yamaguchi, *Warriors of Art: A Guide to Contemporary Japanese Artists,* trans. Arthur Tanaka (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2007), 164.

these critics, Yanagi's elevator girls are without any power of their own; they are victims without agency, helplessly trapped in a world of hyperconsumerism.

While the artist speaks a great deal about her work, she never deliberately states that these women should be viewed as victims. Contrastingly, in some instances Yanagi hints at the idea that her elevator girls do indeed have power and agency. In an interview published in *Heavy Light*, Yanagi explains that her elevator girls should not necessarily be considered powerless because they put on uniforms or dress up for a particular role; rather, there is a degree of freedom and pleasure to be found in not having to worry about expressing identity. She states:

> ...while I ironically represent the women who wear typical Japanese uniforms, my work isn't just ironic in that it also addresses the pleasures that women might feel in putting on a uniform and entering a commercial facility, or that one doesn't even have to make any kind of judgment in the first place. You can look at it as a person putting on a uniform and going out into the world, not really caring at all about identity issues. Feminists understand that aspect of pleasure as well, and so they understand my work very deeply.[11]

In another interview with Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster and Hans Ulrich Obrist, Yanagi points to an empowering relationship between the elevator girls and the spaces they occupy, pointing to the notion that the women actually find, as opposed to forfeit, agency within commercial spaces. The artist explains:

> In my works, there is a difference in agency, particularly in terms of the relationship between personal desire and space. In *Elevator Girls*, personal desires are constructed by moving through the commercial passageways of the department stores and becoming lost in the abundance of commodities. The women on their own do not have these desires.[12]

In my research I have found little describing the artist's own stance towards the work, even while many have labored to argue its existence. Her position, rather, remains ambiguous, just perhaps as do the answers to the issues that her images raise.

In contextualizing and emphasizing contemporary critiques on Yanagi's *Elevator Girls*, this thesis will stand as an alternative reading of Yanagi's women. In opposition to interpretations that read the elevator girls as victims of a less than modern, non-Western society still negotiating gen-

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[11] Nochlin, Otake, and Phillips, *Heavy Light*, 216.
[12] Yanagi, Interview by Gonzalez-Foerster and Obrist, 46.

der equality and economic success, the reading I propose will question, while it investigates, some of the residual orientalisms that play out on the international art stage. I will also explore the history of the elevator girl and her rise to prominence during the early-twentieth century as a means of comparing some of the nuances and similarities between the socio-political climate of Japan in the 1920s and the 1990s. Ultimately, these analyses will touch upon a series of international exchanges between Japan and the West, and will correspondingly work to contextualize various discourses surrounding the negotiation of a modern Japanese identity. Through this nuanced exploration into the myriad discourses and phenomena extant during the production and reception of Yanagi's series, this reading will reveal themes of agency and liberation. I argue that Yanagi presents her *Elevator Girls* series as a comment on a world intent on reading victimization and objectification onto the female body, and provides an alternative method for understanding these women and the world within which they are ultimately entwined.

As a nexus where dialogues of gender, postmodernity, consumerism, technology, and nationality meet, the body is not a focal point of conformity and cohesion; rather, like Donna Haraway's poststructuralist cyborg, it performs a more diacritical hybridity.[13] The Japanese body is a site of intersecting histories, politics, and cultural discourses, on and through which consumer practices intertwine with personal interests, where postcolonial concepts of self negotiate modernity, and where late capitalism works to redefine social statuses and relationships.

In this thesis, I will explore the ways in which Yanagi's *Elevator Girls* calls attention to myopic views of commercialism and identity in order to provide an alternative reading of these women whom Yanagi considers agents capable of transformation and authoritarian transcendence. Here, I am interested in alternative conceptions of self that challenge liberal modernist dualisms that characterize individuals in two camps: those acting as commercial pawns and those who lead a

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[13] Donna J. Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 142.

more substantial and fulfilling life of anti-commercial integrity. Instead of reiterating notions of consumerism as a negation of self, where identity and agency are rendered in opposition to commercialism, I would like to consider more transcendent notions of self, which deconstruct essentialist divisions between an inherent inner-subjectivity and an objective society that actively manipulates this otherwise passive subject. Correspondingly, instead of reading Yanagi's *Elevator Girls* series as a confirmation of consumerism's denial of subjectivity, I will consider how these women transcend the dialectical trappings of subjectivity versus objectivity, self versus non-self, and active versus passive to embrace a poststructuralist world of imminent performativity and discursive negotiation as a means of attaining a form of spiritual enlightenment.

In Chapter Two, I will look into some of the distinctions between the contemporary Japanese art scene and that of the still Western-centric international art market during the 1990s when Yanagi first presented the *Elevator Girls* series in Germany. This chapter will introduce some of the complex exchanges between the Japanese and international art markets, and therein contextualize some of the reasons behind the orientalist readings of her work. This chapter will also look into the ways in which an artistic nationalist endorsement of *nihonjinron*, or discussions of a "unique Japaneseness" by Japanese intellectuals and arts critics, affected the reception of Yanagi's photographs in the international art world.

Chapter Three will explore the history of the elevator girl in conjunction with the rise of consumerism in early-twentieth-century Japan. This analysis will highlight an historical moment of Japanese female empowerment as many women entered the public sphere to become prominent figures within the consumer industry. I will argue that this early history, which stood to transform the status of Japanese women, bears resemblances to the circumstances in 1990s' Japan. This similarity resonates within Yanagi's first series, which articulates hopes of an imminent process of renewed Japanese female transformation.

Chapter Three will also problematize a number of interpretations that situate agency and empowerment within strident enactments of individualism. Through an analysis of the Japanese concept of inter-subjectivity within society, the home, and the workplace, I will explore an alternative means to agency that does not rely on an individualist sense of self in opposition to the discourses and institutions of power that inform it; rather, I will highlight instances of Japanese performativity that recognize the elevator girl as an active participant in enacting various articulations of self in order to negotiate the socio-political terrain that ultimately implicates her within a series of intersecting relationships.

Chapter Four will offer a visual analysis of the surreal, dreamlike spaces that Yanagi constructs for her elevator girls. I explore a series of visual elements that identify the elevator girls' environs as non-places that exist beyond the parameters of a recognizable place and time. Analyzing the Japanese concept of *ma,* which articulates a corresponding collapse of time and place, I explore the implications of this space-time collapse on the relationship between the elevator girls and their environments. As opposed to viewing the elevator girls as captives, trapped within these consumer-esque enclosures, I offer an alternative interpretation that reads these cave and womb-like enclaves as spaces for renewal and transformation.

Finally, Chapter Five will explore a series of spiritual elements found in Yanagi's series that display characteristics of ritual liminality and Buddhist meditation practices. In this chapter, I will offer a poststructuralist interpretation of identity paired with Japanese Buddhist traditions of self-cultivation that seek to engage concepts of *no-self.* I will explore the ways in which the realization of no-self supports agency, just as a Judeo-Christian-centered West accesses agency through individualism. I will offer an interpretation of Yanagi's elevator girls as women engaged in their own process of self-cultivation, and thereby participate in their own transformation. This process of self-cultivation, which ultimately leads to enlightenment, highlights articulations of hope, agency, liberation, and transformation within Yanagi's first series.

Throughout these four chapters I intend to offer a more nuanced lens through which one may view Yanagi's *Elevator Girls* series—a lens that will more adequately bring into focus the rich intersection of philosophical, historical, and visual components that I believe to be embedded within the photographs. This multi-focused analysis, I hope, will not only lend insight into Yanagi's complex series, but will simultaneously offer an engaging analysis of contemporary concepts of self that will resonate beyond the glossy images of the *Elevator Girls* series.

2   EMBRACING AMBIVALENCE: CHALLENGING RESIDUAL ORIENTALISMS IN THE CON-
TEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL ART MARKET

"What a sad site it is! The Japanese should return to their nature and its old racial traditions, and then take, if there are any, the good points of western painting."[14] So claimed famed Japanese art collector, art critic, and philosophy professor, American-born Ernest Fenollosa, in 1882, upon studying various new works produced by Japanese artists taking up the Western medium of oil painting in Japan. This nationalist perspective, though voiced over a century before the production of Yanagi Miwa's first series, *Elevator Girls*, in the 1990s, articulates a number of orientalist assumptions about the unique and essential propensities of Japanese artists that continued to affect the artistic discourses and industries in and outside of Japan into the latter half of the twentieth century. Still a dominant force in the 1990s, the Western-centric contemporary art market and its constituent collectors, critics, museum directors, and gallery owners continued to direct the discourse of contemporary art, as well as influence Japan's own internal art industry. Responding to a series of antagonisms from the West throughout the twentieth century, which sought to delegitimize modern Japanese works of art and preserve traditional Japanese artistic styles, the Japanese art market adopted for itself narratives of a unique "Japaneseness," distinct from the West. As a result the Japanese art industry came to favor artists working in what were considered distinctly Japanese styles. Meanwhile, a majority of Japanese artists taking a seemingly Western approach to art found it difficult to find success in Japan (or at all) unless they gained recognition on the international art stage.

While the influx of postmodern theory and concurrent deconstruction of "fine art" opened the doors to multiculturalism in the 1970s, resulting in a number of international contemporary art exhibitions such as *Prospect 96* where Yanagi made her international debut, the still Western-

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[14] As quoted in Bert Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations: Japanese and American Artists in the Early Postwar Years* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 13.

centric art market continued to favor Japanese works that suggested uniquely Japanese themes, including styles and concepts that directly referenced what was considered Japan's own, unique cultural make-up and history. Yanagi's instant success in the international art market affirmed many of the recurring stereotypes of orientalism: the artist's collection of seemingly robotic Japanese women, stripped of their humanity (and thereby their agency) by a monolithic matrix of Japanese social rigidity and conformity, patriarchal disenfranchisement, and hyper-consumerism resulting from the global spread of high-capitalism appealed to Western arts critics, who in turn believed that Yanagi's photographs ultimately reinforced notions of a Japanese society still grappling with its own modernity. And as critics highlighted a Japan still negotiating gender equality and economic stability, they simultaneously protected the West's position as the locus of modernity.

In this chapter I will explore the socio-political climate of the Japanese art market just prior to and during the 1990s in hopes of highlighting some of the difficulties and discourses that Yanagi encountered during the production of her *Elevator Girls* series between 1993 and 1999. I will analyze the politics surrounding Japanese art as its artists worked to negotiate status and success in an international art market still mired in divisions between "the West and the rest." I will also analyze the international art market's penchant for works of Japanese contemporary art that maintained themes of a uniquely Japanese artistic tradition, as well as those reinforcing the Japanese as quintessentially postmodern, or struggling with modernity and an "infantile" brand of Japanese capitalism. By offering insight into these historical and socio-economic trends as well as the Japanese artist's (namely Yanagi's) negotiation of success within both the Japanese and international art market, I intend to lend insight into the reception of Yanagi's work, and thereby set the stage for the following chapters which seek to offer an alternative, more nuanced reading of Yanagi's *Elevator Girls* series.

To understand Yanagi's and many Japanese artists' precarious and ambivalent positions within the international art market and the orientalist perspectives that continued to inform such

situations, I will begin with a brief description outlining the Japanese artist's impetus for gaining

recognition on the world stage, as many of the factors that contribute to what I argue stem from a

complicated, ambivalent relationship between the artist and her problematic status within Japan's

local art market. One of the main concerns voiced by Japanese artists prior to the end of the twenti-

eth century was a lack of support from their own government and art industry, which led many to

the realization that the only means of becoming successful in Japan, much less to succeed as a con-

temporary artist, was to enter the international market.[15] While recent trends in Japan reflect grad-

ual improvements in the sales and support of contemporary artists, the Japanese art market of pre-

vious decades details a less than accommodating industry. Reflecting on her initial years as a gal-

lery owner and art dealer during the 1990s, Yoshiko Isshiki comments: "When I began promoting

contemporary art in Japan, there was no market at all. We were only able to survive by establishing

links with international galleries and collectors."[16]

At a federal level, John Clark explains, the government offered an "extremely low, if not to

say minimal" degree of support for artists, while other institutions such as the Japan Foundation

and the Cultural Affairs Agency, which were active in international artistic exchanges, offered an

equally negligible amount of financial support.[17] Japan also lacked a means for artists to represent

their own work. Art galleries and art dealers were rare, forcing most artists to fund their own

means of display—an option that Yanagi pursued for her first show featuring a performance of the

Elevator Girls when she rented out Art Space Niji in Kyoto.[18] Without access to independent galler-

ies, "skuzzy warehouse spaces or disused edge-of-town office blocks," modern artists had only a

couple means of presenting their work: they could gain exposure through teaching or taking jobs in

design and advertising, or they could finance their own exhibitions by renting out loan galleries

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[15] J.J. Charlesworth, "Takashi Murakami: Something Like a Phenomenon," *Arts Review* 7 (2007): 35.
[16] Yoshiko Isshiki, "Influence: Today & Tomorrow: Yoshiko Isshiki," *ArtAsiaPacific* 4 (2009): 194.
[17] John Clark, "Fine Arts: The Conditions for Postmodernity in Japanese Art of the 1980s," in *Japanese Encounters with Postmodernity*, eds. Johann P. Arnason and Yoshio Sugimoto (London: Kegan Paul International, 1995), 165.
[18] Yanagi, Interview with Gonzalez-Foerster and Obrist, 44.

(*kahisarō*), many of which were located in busy, urban department stores.[19] The latter, which happened to be the most popular, was an expensive option, costing artists thousands of dollars per week, but it proved to be the best means of gaining public exposure.[20]

A third option consisted of gaining representation abroad, either in galleries or in curated exhibitions. International exposure not only offered a potential means to success outside of Japan, but would in some cases result in gaining follow-up representation at home, as in certain circumstances after receiving recognition on the international market, the Japanese artist would be offered a planned exhibition (*kikakuten*) at a commercial gallery in Japan, a rare opportunity that was typically reserved for established artists.[21]

Yanagi's own rise to success reflects many of these conditions: working as an art history instructor in the early 1990s in Kyoto, she financed her first show at Niji Art Space in 1993 before a lucky encounter with Japanese photographer Morimura Yasumasa launched her onto the world stage. While using Yanagi's traditional-style Japanese apartment in Kyoto for one of his photo shoots, Morimura (known for his staged photographs that presented him in various appropriated art historical masterpieces) stumbled upon a few of Yanagi's first *Elevator Girls* photographs. Preparing, himself, to take part in the *Prospect 96* exhibition in Germany, he introduced Yanagi to his agent, who in turn presented her photographs to the curators of the exhibition. She was delightfully accepted into the show, which in turn launched her career internationally and helped her gain recognition back in Japan. She has since become one of the most nationally recognized artists in Japan with numerous local exhibitions. In 2009 she was even invited to represent Japan at the Venice Biennale.

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[19] Clark, "Fine Arts," 164.

[20] Roddy Ropner and Kumiko Hirakawa, "Japan," in *The International Art Markets: The Essential Guide for Collectors and Investors,* consultant ed. James Goodwin (London: Kogan Page, 2008), 196. Department stores are believed to be the biggest art retailers in Japan. Works were displayed in the "art department" or the "cultural development department." Intended to offer the department store an air of sophistication, these small rental spaces have been attracting customers into stores since the early twentieth century.

[21] Clark, "Fine Arts," 164.

The difficulties in securing representation coincided with a lack of contemporary Japanese art collectors in Japan.[22] A majority of the Japanese art market sales reflected a primary interest in premodern Japanese styles. Apart from a thriving market trading in pre-Meiji pieces (pre-1868), the highest-ranking artists on the standard price index belonged to contemporary Japanese-style painters.[23] In other words, even contemporary sales reflected an interest in methods and styles of a premodern age. Hence, while sales of contemporary work did take place, nearly all of the work was composed in styles established prior to the arrival of Commodore Perry in 1853.

This interest in pre-Meiji aesthetics did not entail an aversion to Western styles, however. Though collectors tended to sidestep works composed by Japanese artists in Western styles, most of these collectors did buy Western art.[24] Indeed, Western art comprised the majority of all purchases made by Japanese collectors. At the peak of its economic rise in the late 1980s, Japan was estimated to have accounted for nearly 50 percent of the international art market. Christie's and Sotheby's, who trade predominantly in Western art, reported that 30 percent of its sales went to Japanese collectors.[25] Hence, it was not the style that deterred the purchase of Western-style art, but rather the fact that this style was rendered by a Japanese artist.

These patterns of collection reflect the belief that only Westerners were capable of producing valuable Western-style art, and that Japanese artists should refrain from trying to emulate them. Continuing a long trend that mirrored Fenollosa's statement from 1882, many Japanese art critics considered Western-style Japanese art a poor rendition of its original. Japanese artists who experimented with Western materials, methods, and concepts were dismissed as being derivative and unoriginal. Consequently, they were occluded from the annals of Japanese art history. Reflected in this position was the idea that Western styles were invented to express a distinctly Western worldview, just as Japanese styles had been tailored to articulate specifically Japanese sentiments. Born

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[22] Kenichi Kondo, "Takashi Murakami's Lowbrow Launch Pad." *ArtAsiaPacific* 49 (2009): 35.
[23] Noboru Tanio, "The Art Market in Japan," *Journal of Japanese Trade & Industry* 5 (1990): 27.
[24] Dan Fox, "Tokyo," *Frieze* 104 (2007): 150.
[25] Ropner and Kirakawa, "Japan," 194.

out of unique ways of looking at the world, the two would never adequately be able to articulate the perspectives of the Other. Hence, to appropriate Western styles was to look through a decidedly un-Japanese lens, and thereby step outside the parameters of a uniquely Japanese history of art.

Predicated on essentialist notions of irreconcilable difference, this perspective reflects what Japanese art historian Bert Winther-Tamaki terms "artistic nationalism," which describes an artistic identity that is "fundamentally contingent to national identity." In other words, art, in the artistic nationalist worldview, "functions as an identity."[26] Winther-Tamaki identifies four main character-istics defining artistic nationalism: the first being an ideological assumption that there are barriers in the mutual understanding of art between foreigners; the second, that an art work's value corre-sponds with its capacity to represent a national identity; the third component relies upon the recognition of this national distinction on an international level, whereby the nation's art may be compared and ranked with that of other nations (typically within international exhibitions) for the sake of gaining favorable recognition by foreign viewers; and the fourth, that such national art re-flect "fundamentally indigenous" characteristics based on local media, methods, and concepts root-ed in a national history, territory, and collection of mythologies, while artistic elements that cannot be directly linked are traced to foreign sources.[27]

Reflecting many of these artistic nationalist characteristics was an entire school of twenti-eth-century Japanese nationalist discourses referred to as *nihonjinron*, or "discussions of the Japa-nese," which, comprising a long history of texts and theories espoused by an intellectual elite, was dedicated to defining and championing notions of a distinctly unique Japanese identity. As Peter Dale makes clear in his text, *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness,* the proponents of *nihonjinron,* worked to construct an idea of particularity that has remained consistent through the eras. Dale explains:

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[26] Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations,* 7.
[27] Ibid., 7-8.

> They implicitly assume a culturally and socially homogenous racial identity virtually un-
> changed from prehistoric times down to the present day…they presuppose that the Japa-
> nese differ radically from all other known people….displaying a conceptual and procedural
> hostility to any mode of analysis which might be seen to derive from external, non-Japanese
> sources.[28]

Comprised of decades of writings, this genre came to influence generations of Japanese citizens, generating a national ideology of Japanese uniqueness.[29] Hostile to any perspective that challenges this distinction, *nihonjinron* advocates refuse to acknowledge or concede to foreign influences that might destabilize this sense of unfaltering Japanese identity.[30]

The origins of *nihonjinron* stemmed from Japan's initial exchange with foreign nations, and namely from a series of self-reflections corresponding with the country's new relationship with the West in the late 1800s. While these earlier concerns, which reached their peak in the 1920s and 1930s, pertained to an imperial-era collection of predominantly federal figure heads and intellectu-als who worked to articulate a national identity on a newly globalized world stage, the influx of hy-per-capitalism and theories of globalization in the 1980s brought with them renewed threats to particularity corresponding with transnational exchanges of information and capital on the public level.[31] In response to fears that globalizing economic trends would assimilate the world's myriad cultures into a homogenized reflection of Western modernity, many Japanese intellectuals revital-ized previous *nihonjinron* discussions. These discourses manifested in notions of a universal Japa-nese middle class and a homogenous Japanese race of people with a correspondingly unified cul-ture rooted in a unique Japanese history.

The visual arts took part in these dialogues as well, continuing a long history of artistic na-tionalism. Correspondingly, many Japanese arts critics, art historians, and philosophers refused to incorporate Western-style artists into a history of Japanese art; for, to include them would ultimate-

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[28] Peter N. Dale, *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), i.
[29] Ibid., 15.
[30] Ibid., 28.
[31] Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Re-Inventing Japan: Time, Space, Nation* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1998), 177.

ly disrupt an immutable cultural identity, and thereby call into question the entire enterprise of ar-

tistic nationalism and Japanese uniqueness.

Consequently, a number of artists were ignored by Japanese art critics, leading to what

many contemporary art historians consider to be an incomplete history of Japanese modern art.

Amano Taro states:

> As of this day…no distinct methodology, viewpoint, or historical perspective has yet been
> established for Japanese art. Our country's contemporary art has not been clearly defined
> because of the conflicting interpretations of Japanese modernism, another indication of the
> vacuum that exists in the area of Japanese modernist theory. [32]

Dale offers an insightful explanation for this incompleteness as it pertains to *nihonjinron*, stating

that the continual failure of *nihonjinron* proponents to conceptualize contemporary realities stems

from the refusal "to acknowledge the modern within themselves."[33] In every attempt to connect

present-day circumstances to a hallowed past, *nihonjinron* ignores or interprets away a set of im-

portant moments that have the potential to lend insight into contemporary socio-historical reali-

ties. Peter Dale clarifies:

> Their insistent habit of entrapping social life, history, culture and politics within the con-
> founding, entangling nets of archaic "traditions" and "unique characteristics" has deprived
> their audience of the linguistic and conceptual resources indispensable for understanding
> the socioeconomic roots and historical contexts from which that culture and its interpreta-
> tions have emerged.[34]

Contemporary Japanese art history has become so entwined with Western art history, styles, and

techniques in the modern Japanese artistic imagination that it is impossible to differentiate the two.

The failure to recognize the Japanese artist's appropriation of these styles not only neglects a num-

ber of important critical concepts presented within modern Japanese visual culture, but this lack of

critical analysis also denies future artists and critics a foundation upon which to do further re-

search.

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[32] Amano Taro, "Some Issues of Circumstance: Focusing on the 1990s," in *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky*, ed. Alexandra Munroe (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 70.
[33] Dale, *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness*, 33.
[34] Ibid., 20.

Alienated by *nihonjinron* inattention and a lack of art critics willing to offer them contextualized public exposure, many Western-style Japanese artists turned to the international market in the hopes of finding more support. The international market, however, played host to its own mixture of problematic notions of the Japanese, placing the Japanese artist in an ambivalent position. In its attempts to comprise a history of Japanese art, the West, which undeniably dominated and directed the international art market, organized Japanese art into a few categories. All art was categorized into pre-Meiji and post-Meiji periods, revealing a Western-centric, orientalist tendency to distinguish between art made prior to Western influence and art made afterwards. This separation reinforced the notion that Japanese art had been adulterated by Western styles, that ever since the country's pure Japanese aesthetics were contaminated by Western intrusion, the Japanese had not yet recovered the achievements of their classical past.[35] Likewise, the West partitioned postwar contemporary art into two camps: Western-style art and Japanese-style art, which further displayed a penchant for two brands of Japanese artistic production: either romantic, Zen-inspired, tranquil pieces, or as Dan Fox describes, "the manga spawned, shiny, pop culture universe of sugary cuteness."[36] Thus, according to Western artistic categorizations, Japan was still channeling its Medieval religio-aesthetic traditions, as it simultaneously grappled with its newfound set of modern technologies. This reinforced the impression that the non-Western Japanese 'Other' was not yet prepared for the modernities that the West had introduced. Consequently, this division led to a problematic means of viewing Japanese art. As Alexandra Munroe states, "Either the work appeared too Western and hence lacked originality—a basic tenet of modernism—or it appeared too traditional—a quality that is antithetical to modern art's internationalist vision."[37] This perspective ultimately questioned whether or not the Japanese were truly modern or merely cloaked in modern

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[35] Alexandra Munroe, "Scream Against the Sky," in *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky*, ed. Alexandra Munroe (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 20.
[36] Fox, "Tokyo," 148-149.
[37] Munroe, "Scream Against the Sky," 20.

trappings. It reinforced the idea that modernity resided in the West, and that the non-Western

"Other"was inherently incapable of being modern, much less producing modern art.

Many of these stereotypes about Western-style Japanese art are informed by the *nihonjin-ron* school of thought, as Westerners like to imagine and consume notions of the Japanese as a still

exotic culture mired in mysterious traditions and ancient mindsets.[38] While interested in *nihonjin-ron's* "unique" characteristics, which reiterate Japan's ineffable, impenetrable, and thereby exotic

charm, the West adapts the *nihonjinron* attitude to their own collection of interests and fantasies.

Thus, the Japanese artist is caught at a complex crossroads of identity construction, as both cultures

encourage the artist to take different forms. This perhaps explains why Japanese artists who make

it in Japan are rarely introduced to the international market, and, vice versa, artists who succeed in

the international market often fail to gain recognition in Japan. [39]

As neither one nor the other, the Western-style Japanese artist holds an ambivalent position

between the two, the negotiation of which for the sake of artistic success is ultimately a perfor-mance in itself. Yanagi expresses this ambivalence in an interview in the Japanese-English online art

publication, *ART iT*, "I doubt any good could come of an artist attempting to position themselves in

art history. Better not to seek any particular position or affiliation."[40] Displaying the foundations for

this ambivalence, she goes on to reflect over the contemporary status of the Japanese art market in

Japan, highlighting its entanglement with the West:

> Even though it's a weak industry here in Japan, there's a powerful elitism surrounding fine
> art, which seems to be designed with the Western bourgeoisie in mind. I sensed for the first
> time the helplessness of fine art. That probably did me good, actually (laughs). That kind of
> environment helps to clarify what one is personally engaged in—forcing you to question the
> nature of art, and the individuality of art practice, among other things. You have to be con-
> stantly questioning yourself, or that clarity dissipates.[41]

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[38]Dale, *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness*, ii-iii.
[39] Tanio, "The Art Market in Japan," 27.
[40] Miwa Yanagi, Interview with ART it, *ART iT*, last modified July 19, 2009, http://www.art-it.asia/u/admin_interviews/ny8YGCieDwx1kSE07MaF?lang=en
[41] Ibid.

Hence, Yanagi admits that the Japanese art market was problematically entwined with Western interests and collection patterns, which, she notes, tended to affect her own artistic practices.

While the Western-dominated international art market has continued to embrace traditional-style Japanese artists, ever since its initial discovery of Japanese *ukiyo* prints in the nineteenth century, it has simultaneously helped to reinforce a number of orientalist stereotypes about the country and its people.[42] While many of these stereotypes help fuel the demand for Japanese works, thereby providing the artist financial support, eager collectors hungry for works that confirm their own fantasies of the Japanese ultimately encourage Japanese artists to engage in self-orientalism as a means to profit. This question over whether or not Japanese artists play into orientalist stereotypes is problematic in itself, however, as it assumes that there is an authentic Japanese identity for the artist to deny—a spurious notion, considering just how entangled the Japanese are in the construction of their own identity. Yanagi confirms this view in the *ART iT* interview; when asked whether or not she's traded on her own Japanese origins when creating new works, Yanagi replied:

> I find something duplicitous about only turning one's own country, just the history of the country in which one was born, into art. This means of course that even if someone was carrying the burden of such history deep within their being, I'd wonder if it were really true. Nor do I like works that are cheap reflections of the forms of one's own cultural sphere, or political issues. Appropriating that sort of thing wholesale will never change the world. For example, showing the "fiction" of the nation state in a "fictional" manner will ultimately leave you out of contention in any relevant discussion.[43]

Thus, Yanagi herself recognizes the "fictive" nature of the notion surrounding an authentic Japanese identity.

Yanagi's peer, Murakami Takashi, the highest grossing contemporary artist to come out of Japan, has received a notably large amount of criticism for self-orientalizing for the sake of sales. His "superflat" theory in particular has been criticized for its celebration of an essentialist Japanese identity, one that presents the Japanese as high-tech adolescents who escape the monotonous busi-

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[42] Taro, "Some Issues of Circumstance," 71.
[43] Yanagi, Interview with ART iT, http://www.art-it.asia/u/admin_interviews/ny8YGCieDwx1kSE07MaF?lang=en.

ness world to engage in cartoon fantasies [Figure 1].[44] While his success may be tied to his rein-

forcement of this "superflat" identity, I argue that Murakami's art practices reflect more the artist's

ambivalent position between two equally instructive entities, the West and Japan, than it does on

his motives for selling art work. His attempts to contextualize "superflat" aesthetics into a Japanese

history of art, specifically by connecting his cartoon characters with the manga of *ukiyo* prints two

centuries earlier, reflect Murakami's desire to reconcile criticisms from the West that question Ja-

pan's ability to create its own modern art and criticisms of Japan that insist on recognizing only

those artists who contribute to the progression of an unadulterated Japanese culture.[45] While Mu-

rakami admits that he studies the international art market to understand its mechanisms of power

and consumption, the ways in which the artist engages with the market suggest that he does so in

an attempt to subvert it.[46] As Westerners purchase his self-orientalizing pieces, he calls attention to

the still extant racisms and stereotypes that circulate through an international market that claims

to be multicultural. Thus, Murakami negotiates a delicate position between Western orientalisms of

the Japanese and indigenous calls to a Japanese nationalist identity. Therefore, while Murakami

may be profiting from a set of collectors consuming what they believe to be an "authentic" Japanese

aesthetic, the artist's numerous works expressing similarly ambiguous attitudes, attest to the art-

ist's ambivalent position on the international stage.

The reception of these works by the West has indeed been problematic. In criticisms of Mu-

rakami's manga and anime-inspired works, many have argued that instead of *ukiyo* origins, the in-

dustry was born from American comic book illustrations, thereby suggesting that Murakami's ex-

plicitly modern style is actually a Western style in disguise.[47] For others, Murakami's "superflat"

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[44] Yoshitaka Mori, "Subcultural Unconsciousness in Japan: The War and Japanese Contemporary Artists," in *Popular Culture, Globalization and Japan*, eds. Matthew Allen and Rumi Sakamoto (New York: Routledge, 2006), 187.
[45] Ibid., 185.
[46] Ibid., 187.
[47] Dong-Yeon Koh, "Murakami's 'Little Boy' Syndrome: Victim or Aggressor in Contemporary Japanese and American Arts?" *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 11, no. 3 (2010): 397.

theories characterize the epitome of contemporary Japaneseness. Emphasizing a lack of hierarchy, a breakdown of high and low culture, appropriation, and deconstruction to the point where everything is relative, "superflat" resembles postmodernism *par excellence*.[48] These criticisms which question Murakami's "authentic" Japanese style at the same time that they emphasize a uniquely Japanese hyperpostmodernism reflect trends in 1990s' contemporary Western interpretations of Japanese contemporary art intent on locating a uniquely Japanese style and identity. Indeed, Murakami's success, along with a series of other Japanese contemporary artists whose works include themes of postmodernism and elements particular to pre-Meiji Japanese art or distinctly Japanese culture, including Morimura Yasumasa, Kimura Tsunehisa, Mori Mariko, Teroka Masami, and Yanagi Miwa, to name but a few, call attention to a Western-centric art world interested in collecting and reinforcing their own orientalist conceptions of the Japanese [Figures 2 – 6]. While on the one hand these interpretations and collection patterns seek to locate and legitimize a unique Japaneseness rooted in artistic nationalism, they also ultimately maintain Japanese art's position on the periphery of the West and its constituent art world. This is made stridently clear in interpretations of Yanagi's *Elevator Girls*.

Critics of Yanagi's first series have reveled in the postmodern fantasy-scapes of the elevator girls' surroundings, at the same time that they've honed in on a matrix of uniquely rigid and oppressive Japanese socio-economic phenomena. While many point to the girls' uniform attire and languid postures as a sign of the ill-effects of Japanese conformity and insistence on social harmony, and others underscore the girls' trapped positions within the department store as a metaphor for the harmful machinations of postmodern, or late-capitalist, hyperconsumerism, still more interpret her photographs as a feminist critique of overly prescriptive and conservative patriarchal social codes. What each of these interpretations engender is a distinctly orientalist view of Japan as a

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[48]Yoshiko Shimada, "Afterword: Japanese Pop Culture and the Eradication of History," in *Consuming Bodies: Sex and Contemporary Japanese Art,"* ed. Fran Lloyd (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), 188.

country still struggling to achieve true modernity in line with that of the West—one that is still ne-

gotiating gender equality, economic success, and self-empowerment via individual agency.

In addition to these interpretations is another collection of analyses, which highlight the

girls' inhuman qualities. Referring to them as dolls, robots, mannequins, puppets, and cyborgs, crit-

ics of Yanagi's *Elevator Girls* series participate in a larger trend of Western orientalism geared to-

ward defining the Japanese as inhuman workaholics. Corresponding with Japan's economic boom in

the 1980s, commonly referred to as the "economic miracle," David Morley and Kevin Robins explain

that these views comprise a contemporary response to Japan's destabilizing position in relation to

the West as a non-Western economic superpower. By describing the Japanese as cold, machine-like

workaholics, Morley and Robins explain, the West attempted to strip them of their humanity,

thereby making it seem as if Japanese modernity and economic success was the result of not play-

ing by the rules. Hence, these orientalisms worked to assert tactically the West's "rightful" place at

the center of modernity. Morley and Robins state:

> The comparative lack of success of the European and North American economies must then
> be a consequence of abiding by universal principles and moral codes. Through such reason-
> ing, it is possible, even in the face of competitive failure, to reaffirm the essential (that is,
> civilizational) supremacy of Western culture.[49]

Thus, as the West began to lose its position as the sole caretaker of modernity, it retaliated with a

set of stereotypes affirming that the Japanese were impersonal robots or cyborgs who were engag-

ing in an illegitimate form of modernity.

To further destabilize Japan's economic status, Westerners also emphasized Japan's grow-

ing consumption of Japanese comic books (*manga*) and cartoons (*anime*) as a sign of a less than de-

veloped form of late-capitalism. Indeed, many viewed the Japanese indulgence in a fantasy-laden

consumer-sign economy as an indication of what Jean-Francois Leotard referred to as "infantile

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[49] David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Bound-aries* (New York, Routledge, 1995) 167.

capitalism."[50] Plugged into their computers, watching cartoons, and escaping into comic books, the Japanese, to many Westerners, seemed like unfeeling, infantile cyborgs, either working non-stop or affixed to an endless barrage of technologies as a means of accessing cartoons. Murakami's images, pulled from *manga* and *anime*, confirmed these stereotypes, as they reflected a nerdy, fantasy-obsessed youth (*otaku*) generation plugging into their computers to escape the realities of everyday life. With 70 percent of his sales taking place outside of Japan, 60 percent in the United States and Britain alone, Murakami's "superflat," *otaku*-inspired works emphasized the kinds of Japanese art that the West found valuable.[51]

Interestingly, as Japanese art critics and historians participate in the construction of a unique Japanese identity in contrast to the West, many of these art figures absorb and appropriate the orientalisms that the West produces.[52] Engaging in Winther-Tamaki's third characteristic of artistic nationalism, in which a nation's art must be recognizably distinct from that of other nations, many orientalisms—which display the Japanese as particularly spiritual as opposed to materialistic, considerably postmodern, or uniquely engaged in trends of fantasy and hyper-technologies—reverberate in Japan and reflect in Japanese works of art, thus creating a continuous feedback mechanism that ultimately stands to destabilize all notions of an authentic Japanese identity. For this reason, critics who continue to search for and highlight a purely Japanese aesthetic should be disregarded in contemporary critical theory if there is to be any means of adequately articulating contemporary modes of visual expression and artistic identification. Indeed, while inequalities of power continue to exist within transcultural and transnational flows of information, commodities, and populations, the insistence upon an authentic identity by which to interpret works of art,

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[50] Yumiko Lida, "Between the Technique of Living an Endless Routine and the Madness of Absolute Degree Zero: Japanese Identity and the Crisis of Modernity in the 1990s," *Positions* 8, no. 2 (2000): 430.
[51] Koh, "Murakami's 'Little Boy' Syndrome," 400.
[52] Reiko Tomii, "Historicizing 'Contemporary Art': Some Discursive Practices in *Gendai Bijutsu* in Japan," *Positions* 12, no. 3 (Winter 2004): 630.

should be discarded for a more nuanced investigation into the ways in which those works ultimately engage the hybrid exchange between cultures and economies.

In the following chapters I intend to do just this in order to recognize Yanagi's position within a complex, heterogeneous entanglement of discourses, ideas, and consumer capital traded between Japan and the rest of the world. For as an international artist, who was once an art historian, as well as a contemporary consumer with access to all matter of literature and consumer goods, Yanagi is anything but distinctly Japanese. Rather she is a hybrid artist, as all modern and contemporary Japanese artists are, who must negotiate the politics, theories, and economic trends of the international and local art markets, as well as those of everyday life.

With that said, it is important to note that Yanagi, along with the other artists mentioned in this chapter, do not operate on a flat, unparticularized plane of global interaction: while she certainly draws from a transnational collection of ideas and inspirations, she also participates along with her contemporary Japanese peers in a series of artistic trends taking place in post-Showa era Japan that articulate interests in bodily transformation (*henshin*), performativity, fantasy, and new media.[53] Thus, in the following chapters, I will touch not only on a collection of transnational concepts and phenomena influencing artists across the globe, but an equally influential compendium of philosophies and phenomena taking place in contemporary and historical Japan. Through this contrapuntal lens I hope to extend a more nuanced means of understanding Yanagi's first series that reflects her position within these myriad situated knowledges.

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[53] Eric C. Shiner, "Fashion Altars, Performance Factors, and Pop Cells: Transforming Contemporary Japanese Art, One Body at a Time," in *Since Meiji: Perspectives on the Japanese Visual Arts, 1868-2000*, ed. J. Thomas Rimer (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), 168-175.

3   THE ELEVATOR GIRL AS A NEW TYPE OF JAPANESE WOMAN

Whereas the previous chapter worked to situate the production of Yanagi's *Elevator Girls*

and the varied Western interpretations and analyses of her first series within the complex political

and discursive exchanges taking place between Japan and "the West" in the contemporary interna-

tional art world of the 1990s, this chapter seeks to explore, more specifically, the subjects of Yan-

agi's photographs—namely, the contested identity of the elevator girl as a particularly modern Jap-

anese phenomenon. By delving into the history of the elevator girl and the numerous debates sur-

rounding her mediated, socio-economic status, I hope to offer the reader a more nuanced lens

through which to view Yanagi's photographs and, in turn, to speak to Yanagi's observation, follow-

ing reactions to her first international show in 1996, that "no one really understood the most basic

level [of] who the elevator girls were."[54]

An historical analysis of the elevator girls will show that contrary to Western assumptions,

the females depicted in Yanagi's photographs, though they don similar uniforms and gaze off list-

lessly into their vacuous consumer spaces, are not mere facile representations of a stereotypically

victimized female, trapped within an abstract matrix of oppressive patriarchal mechanisms; nor do

they represent the lifeless shells of human beings, hollowed out by the machinations of global capi-

talism and hyper-mediation. While the identity of the elevator girl is implicated within these appa-

ratuses, to be sure, what I intend to demonstrate in this chapter is that she is as much a living agent,

replete with the power to affect real change on a socio-cultural level, as a contested signifier of con-

sumerism, modernity, and changing gender roles. Indeed, Yanagi's elevator girls reflect real women

with real concerns and aspirations. Though they may be entwined within a nuanced collection of

socio-economic and cultural discourses, they are also active subjects that participate as productive

accomplices in the representation and performance of their identities. Thus, I argue that one should

read Yanagi's images less as a critique of patriarchal forces working out their deleterious effects on

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[54] Nochlin, Otake, and Phillips, *Heavy Light*, 215-16.

the female body, and more as a conscious reflection on the complex understandings of what it means to be a "woman" in 1990s' Japan. While viewers are right to recognize a degree of criticism, Yanagi's images also articulate sentiments of hope and positivity toward women's positions within society—a perspective that I will make clear in the following pages.

A majority of the interpretations of Yanagi's *Elevator Girls* series choose to describe the girls as one, or a combination, of the following: as "clones" or "photostatic copies," highlighting the women's uniformity (and thereby want of individuality) in dress, stance, and personality; as "cyborgs" or "interchangeable robots," arguing that the girls are "lacking any warmth," or humanity; as "dolls" or "puppets," pointing out that they have been "forced to play" specific roles; or as symbols or metaphors of Japanese commercialization, commodification, and consumerism, as a means of emphasizing their mediated and highly crafted positions within Japanese society.[55] What all of these descriptions have in common is the perception that the girls lack autonomy and individualism, which, following the Western cult of independence, implies a denial of agency; for, as Westerners are wont to conceive, individualism and identity are the platforms upon which one may realize empowerment. It is this lack of individualism that drives many to believe that Yanagi's photographs are fundamentally critical. And as arts critics search for the culprit responsible for the girls' dearth of personality,

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[55] Okabe Aomi refers to them as "...clones born out of the alienation of the great city": Okabe, "A Fabricated Modernism," 4; Ueno Chizuko claims that the girls are "as alike as photostatic copies and lacking any warmth": Ueno Chizuko, "Miwa Yanagi," in *Miwa Yanagi*, eds. Ariane Grigoteit and Friedhelm Hütte (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2002), 65; Uematsu Yuka states, "...in their uniforms they lack any individuality. They are completely anonymous and their humanity had been extinguished...Yanagi transforms them into cyborg-like beings": Yuka Uematsu, "Miwa Yanagi's Field of Vision," in *Miwa Yanagi*, trans. Jeffrey Hunter, ed. Miwa Yanagi (Kyoto: Tankosha Publishing Co, 2009), 122; Felippo Maggia, Francesco Lazzarini, and Foro Boario state both that, "They look like dummies, interchangeable robots programmed to delight those watching them..." and that they "are forced to play the roles that satisfy the expectations and needs of others rather than follow their own dreams and desires": Maggia, Lazzarini, and Boario, "Miwa Yanagi," 173; Hasegawa Yuko explains that the girls are "placed like dolls": Yuko Hasegawa, "Post-Identity *Kawaii*: Commerce, Gender and Contemporary Japanese Art," in *Consuming Bodies: Sex and Contemporary Japanese Art*, ed. Fran Lloyd (New York: Reaktion Books, 2002), 130; C.B. Liddell refers to them as "puppets no longer needed": C.B. Liddell, "Fiction for the Real," *Japan Times Online*, May 3, 2007, Thursday, http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/fa20070503b2.html (accessed March 27, 2010); and Kasahara Michiko explains, "The expressionless young women in their elegant uniforms certainly create a symbolic image of the women who live in the highly developed capitalistic society of contemporary Japan, where 'individuality is suppressed and intentionally encoded'": Kasahara, "Contemporary Japanese Women's Self-Awareness," 100.

many fall back on the monolith that is globalization and its constituent capitalist enterprises: com-
modification, marketing, and hyper-consumerism.

Looking over the origins of Japanese mass consumerism in the 1920s and its development
up through the mid-1990s, however, reveals a series of breakthroughs for women, rather than their
gradual decline into automatism and a broken spirit. Associated with the influx of modernism
(*modanizumu*), the rise in consumerism and mass production in Japan brought with it not only
transformations in everyday lifestyles, but also a variety of new opportunities for women, including
new means of self-expression through consumption. As Japan became a "full-blown mass society" in
the mid-1920s, the mass production of myriad goods coincided with the introduction of varied con-
sumer choices and new tastes.[56] Women, as the predominant shoppers of the household during this
new era, suddenly gained access to a broader array of products, which allowed them to craft,
through the refined process of selection, specific constructions of self and family. Responsible for
the home and the appearance of their husband and children, it was important for housewives in
particular to remain abreast of the latest fashion trends (as poorly dressed family members were a
reflection of an unsophisticated or subpar housewife).[57] In charge of most, if not all, of the family's
income, housewives made a majority of the major purchasing decisions, including everything from
food and daily necessities to the family car. These decisions required a significant level of cultural
sophistication and research into the modishness, quality, and availability of products. Thus, what
was significant about the rise in Japanese consumerism, according to Barbara Sato, "was the em-
powerment that consumerism, as an expression of decision making, offered to them. Women fig-

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[56] Marilyn Ivy, "Formations of Mass Culture," in *Postwar Japan as History*, ed. Andrew Gordon (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 242.
[57] John Clammer, *Contemporary Urban Japan: A Sociology of Consumption* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 70.

ured as active role players weighing the positive and negative consequences of the commodification of the everyday."[58]

Heightened consumerism also offered women the means to new strategies of resistance against social norms. In manners similar to those outlined by Michel de Certeau, who emphasized opportunities to renegotiate actively the dominant social standards and directives within even the smallest of one's mundane activities, consumers, according to John Clammer, exercise myriad tactics through consumption, and thereby "invest their own meanings and derive their own enjoyments, which are not necessarily the prescribed or 'official' ones."[59] Indeed, shopping may be considered a liberating practice, in that one can make independent choices, satisfy personal desires, and actively craft a personal identity outside or beyond those sanctioned by tradition or social conformity. While a consumer society can be "highly destructive to the human spirit" recognizes Clammer, "there is more than one way to be a consumer society," and in Japan, "where the social bonds are already tight, [consumption] may provide a way out: a zone of liberation, play, and the imagination where other expressions of these are circumscribed."[60] Thus, instead of seeing the rise of consumerism as a phenomenon that necessarily brought with it the bracketing or delimitating of agency via socio-cultural praxis and enactments of self, one may view this trend as generally positive as far as Japan is concerned. With the advent of a consumer society came a corresponding flourish of mass popular culture, which resulted in the transformation of a society previously directed by a select group of state and elitist intellectuals into one driven by the interests and actions of the masses.[61] And as a prominent figure of these masses, women substantially helped shape the future of Japanese culture.

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[58] Barbara Sato, *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 16.
[59] Clammer, *Contemporary Urban Japan*, 63.
[60] Ibid., 93.
[61] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 42.

As the housewife's active role as a consumer expanded, so did her foray into the public sphere. Not only did she gain access to a collection of new consumer spaces (the department store being one of them), she also found herself at the center of new marketing industries.[62] Magazine and advertising companies, recognizing that women were the primary consumers in their rapidly expanding market, began to produce articles, ads, and new products that directly addressed the female shopper. Thus, women found themselves reflected in mass media, and thereby were implicated in the process of shaping its simultaneous production and presentation of femininity—a trend that only continued through the years, on into the 1990s when Yanagi produced her first series.

This movement into the public eye met, and continues to meet, varying degrees of criticism and trepidation, however, as women negotiate and respond to representations of themselves in the media. As Lise Skov and Brian Moeran have pointed out, as consumer identities, they are "highly ambivalent because it has made women very receptive to the controlling strategies of marketing, at the same time as they have been drawn into a central role in the Japanese economy and simultaneously increased their personal autonomy."[63] What this observation suggests, and what is important to keep in mind, is that these women are not mere victims of an omnipotent media industry, doomed to find themselves depicted in sundry bastardized articulations of themselves; rather, women, as consumers did, and continue to, have a great deal of agency, and are quite capable of impacting the media and its corresponding female representations. Consequently, it may be short-sighted for arts critics, reflecting on Yanagi's *Elevator Girls*, to assume that Yanagi's females represent the defeated state of contemporary women, defined against their wills by an industry intent on overseeing and maintaining specific ideals of Japanese womanhood and femininity. Indeed, analyses such as Felippo Maggia, Francesco Lazzarini, and Foro Boario's that highlight "the difficulty of constructing one's own identity in a world that is increasingly oriented towards consumption"; or

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[62] Lise Skov and Brian Moeran, "Introduction: Hiding in the Light: From Oshin to Yoshitomo Banana," in *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan*, eds. Lise Skov and Brian Moeran (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), 5.
[63] Ibid.

Ariane Grigoteit and Friedhelm Hütte's suggestion that Yanagi is appropriating the gloss of contemporary advertising in order to challenge its sinister machinations; as well as Hasegawa Yuko's observation that the girls are "stripped of any sense of physicality" similar to images of women found in contemporary advertisements, may go too far in attempting to identify consumption and advertising as wholly menacing and contrary to women's personal interests.[64] After all, as Skov and Moeran claim, "Despite obvious ambivalences, the identification of women as consumers has been widely celebrated as emancipation and empowerment at the same time."[65] At best, I argue, these women reflect the ambivalences facing women in relation to the Japanese consumer society; to argue that they are outright symbols or metaphors for the ill effects inflicted upon them by such apparatuses is not only myopic, but, in turn, performs a similar offense: by categorically denying the women's varied relationships with and responses to media and consumption, they simultaneously refuse to acknowledge the elevator girl's own tactics and means to exercising agency.

While many have pointed to Yanagi's women as representations of the ill effects of hyper-consumerism and marketing, it is important to notice that in Yanagi's *Elevator Girls*, they are not in the process of consuming goods, making it perhaps more relevant to discuss their roles as employees of the department store. As with the case of women in the Japanese consumer society above, looking back to the origins of the elevator girl, who appeared in conjunction with the rise in consumerism and the first department stores during the 1920s, offers insight into what I argue are the more nuanced understandings of Japanese womanhood portrayed in Yanagi's first series. Furthermore, an interview with Yanagi states that during the production of *Elevator Girls* she "was interested in the history of the production of commercial space in department stores and the flow of capitalism," suggesting a corresponding potential interest in the initial appearance of elevator girls during the same period. Thus, I argue that it is necessary to include an analysis of the elevator girl's

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[64] Maggia, Lazzarini, and Boario, "Miwa Yanagi," 173; Ariane Grigoteit and Friedhelm Hütte, "Stopover in Berlin," in *Miwa Yanagi*, eds. Ariane Grigoteit and Friedhelm Hütte (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2002), 4; Hasegawa, "Post-identity *Kawaii*," 131.
[65] Skov and Moeran, "Introduction," 31.

origins, as her presence within early department stores during the interwar years is certainly sig-

nificant and most likely would have been noted by Yanagi during her research into the history of

the department store.

The elevator girl, also recognized as a shop girl (*shappu gāru*) or mannequin girl (*manekin*

gāru), entered the workforce as one of many new types of professions offered to women in the ear-

ly twentieth century in conjunction with the rise in mass production, consumerism, and the first

department stores.[66] Associated with the "new woman" (*atarasii onna*) of the 1910s, these modern

girls (*modan gāru*), or *moga* for short, took on a variety of occupations (including the one-yen taxi

girl (*entaku gāru*), the gasoline girl (*gasorin gāru*), and the usherette *(kinema gāru)*), and a majority

of them were young, unmarried, educated, urban women, characterized by their contemporary

western fashions, donning short hair, a wide-brimmed hat, heels, and a vibrantly-colored dress that

reached just below the knees [Figure 7].[67] This attire is not unlike that worn by Yanagi's elevator

girls, though the skirts have risen above the knee in more recent years, the hair has gotten a little

longer, and the dresses, following the trends of professional apparel in the 1980s and 1990s, have

been exchanged for matching two-piece suits. [Figures 8 – 9]. All of these professions adopted for-

eign names, such as *elebeta gāru* for elevator girl, which associated the new professional woman

with "high collar" sophistication and modern luxury.[68] The elevator girl, like many of her peers in

other positions, was hired for her youth and sexual charm; while shuttling shoppers from floor to

floor, welcoming incoming customers, directing consumer traffic, or answering questions, she was

intended to lubricate the shopping experience, all the while standing in as an erotic, yet tasteful

symbol of the department store's lavish refinement.[69] The elevator girl was also often featured on

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[66] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 13.
[67] Ibid., 46.
[68] Ibid., 119. These connotations of luxury are similar to the ways in which French names and descriptions lend products an added degree of elegance for English speakers in the United States.
[69] Ibid., 121- 123.

posters and in advertisements, helping to sell Sapporo beer, Suntory wine, and Calpis, a sweet soft

drink that claimed to offer the consumer a healthy dose of calcium.[70]

While descriptions such as these suggest that the elevator girl was, indeed, an object of con-

sumer titillation, her position within 1920s Japan was much more ambivalent than many art critics

analyzing Yanagi's photos have acknowledged. Although she acted as an erotic symbol used to sell

products, she represented the changing status of women in Japan. The elevator girl, alongside many

of her contemporary peers working in similar positions, was a modern girl, which, at the time, de-

noted a new type of woman—one who was highly educated, single, and transgressive in her desire

to work after graduation rather than jump directly into marriage. Following the "new woman" of

the 1910s, who was forthright in her insistence on women's equality and entrance into the public

sphere, the modern girl of the 1920s, as a professional woman, was "associated in the public mind

with defiance."[71] While the modern girl may not have been as vocal as her forebears on her position

regarding women's rights, with her lack of a self-defined stance garnering a degree of criticism from

early twentieth-century intellectuals who thought she may be just a vapid female unconsciously

following the trends, the elevator girl, as a modern girl, nonetheless symbolized the changing social

status of women.[72] Correspondingly, the modern girl, according to Sato, did not just represent a few

women who had moved into new positions of employment alongside men; rather, "she represented

the possibilities for what all women could become." She offered a new means of being for women

that was in opposition to traditional roles that confined her to the domestic sphere and a new slate

of conservative Showa-era state-sanctioned propaganda that otherwise urged her to be a "good

wife and wise mother."[73]

Not only did the modern girl challenge the concept of a fixed female identity by presenting a

multiplicity of women's personas, but she also helped to transform traditional concepts of feminini-

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[70] Ibid., 46.
[71] Ibid., 49-51.
[72] Ibid., 48.
[73] Skov and Moeran, "Introduction," 22.

ty and masculinity. With the rise of the modern girl and her affiliated entrance into the professional

world came a series of new perspectives regarding the modern gendered subject. Following the

success of Henrik Ibsen's production of *A Doll's House* (1897) in Japan, which highlighted the main

character Nora's unrest with her prescribed role as a housewife, the corresponding new woman

and her successor, the modern girl, both championed Nora's departure from the house into the pub-

lic arena, and championed a series of changing perspectives on love, marriage, sex, education, and

the workplace.[74] Calling for equality in education and employment and the right to choose one's

own mate and marry for love, the modern girl established many of the progressive perspectives

that remain relevant in contemporary Japanese society.

Just as the media worked to meet the demands and interests of the new female consumer,

so did they offer the new working woman a forum to articulate her rising professional status. Maga-

zine and newspaper industries, recognizing a market of new readers, featured images, articles, pe-

riodicals, job postings, and products geared toward the modern girl. Many magazines offered wom-

en a platform to discuss their everyday professional encounters, in the form of confessions, which,

in turn, helped forge and support a new professional female identity as more and more women

found themselves reflected in the shared experiences of their peers. Thus, crafted through her own

practices, the modern girl achieved a new level of cultural power via mass women's magazines, and

thereby became "a symbol of modern life and a role model for autonomy."[75]

Given this information, which points to a history of the elevator girl as an active woman im-

plicated in the process of challenging traditional gender roles, I am wary of those interpretations of

Yanagi's work that seek to emphasize only the victimized status of her female subjects. While these

women were in the process of negotiating their own equality and battled against a collection of

conservative ideologies working to maintain their domestic statuses, they were certainly not with-

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[74] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 27. It is interesting to note that Yanagi's women are occasionally compared to dolls, when in the 1920s, as a pioneer into the workforce and out of the "doll's house," she would have been considered a rather more active and independent character.
[75] Ibid., 117-118.

out their own means to agency and resistance. And if Yanagi was indeed looking back to the origins

of consumerism, as mentioned above, then surely she would have recognized that these women

were integral in transforming the socio-cultural status of women in Japan. Thus, I argue that Yan-

agi's elevator girls represent a corresponding collection of active women with the capability of

transforming their current socio-cultural statuses.

Although one could argue that the contemporary women presented in Yanagi's photographs

are far removed from the women of the past, and thus represent an outmoded identity, a look into

the contemporary status of women in 1990s' Japan reflects a similarly promising foray. The socio-

economic terrain at the end of the twentieth century offered Japanese women a rife position to

transgress contemporary conservative ideals attempting to delimit their expressions of self. Just as

the new consumer economy of the early twentieth century offered opportunities for women to en-

ter the professional world, an information-driven post-bubble Japanese economy of the 1990s of-

fered women a variety of different positions within the workforce. Prior to the collapse of the stock

market in 1990 and its corresponding economic recession, Japan experienced a period of economic

success in which families were able to thrive on the husband's income alone. The disappearance of

this bubble, which coincided with new labor laws in 1989 that sought to rid the Japanese workforce

of discriminatory hiring practices, provided a series of new job opportunities previously closed to

women, including a variety of managerial positions traditionally reserved for men.[76] While these

changing conditions forced many women into the workplace to supplement their household's in-

come, the recent addition of labor laws that forced companies to refrain from discriminating

against women in the hiring process, worked to ensure that women could gain employment within

a variety of fields and hierarchical positions.

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[76] Junko Saeki, "Beyond the Geisha Stereotype: Changing Images of 'New Women' in Japanese Popular Culture,"
in *A New Japan for the Twenty-First Century: An Inside Overview of Current Fundamental Changes and Problems*
ed. Rien T. Segers (London: Routledge, 2008), 194.

In conjunction with the stock market collapse came the death of Emperor Shōwa Hirohito in 1989 and with it a history of conservative ideals stretching back to the pre-war days of 1926. His death, for many Japanese, corresponded with the end of an era, bringing in a series of criticisms pertaining to politics as well as social and economic policies.[77] Included was a renewed evaluation of attitudes surrounding gender, resulting in a series of new feminist perspectives and equal rights policies. Consequently, attitudes toward women in both the professional and social arenas began to change, and, throughout the duration of the 1990s, both men's and women's approaches to traditional gender roles switched to endorsing rather than disputing them.[78] Now, newer generations find the domestic chores more evenly divided, where men participate in the raising of children, while more and more women bring home a majority of the family's income.

Just as the 1920s saw dramatic changes in women's roles, so did the 1990s. Therefore, to assume that Yanagi intended to present a purely cynical view of women without agency in contemporary Japan is to ignore all of the positive changes taking place at the time, not to mention women's central role in negotiating these transformations. With that said, it is important to point out that each woman's process of negotiation is unique, pulling from a personal collection of challenges, concerns, desires, and interests. While some may find themselves still hemmed in by traditional values, others may find only a series of open doors; still more women may embrace their roles as good wives and wise mothers, while their peers find myriad mundane ways to resist them. We should view Yanagi's elevator girls similarly: as a diverse collection of women, each with their own trials, tribulations, and aspirations. Indeed, (as quoted in the introduction of this thesis) Yanagi states:

> ...while I ironically represent the women who wear typical Japanese uniforms, my work isn't just ironic in that it also addresses the pleasures that women might feel in putting on a uniform and entering a commercial facility, or that one doesn't even have to make any kind

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[77] David Elliott, "The Four Ages of Woman: Portraits of Innocence, Desire, Oblivion, and Enlightenment," in *Miwa Yanagi*, trans. Jeffrey Hunter, ed. Miwa Yanagi (Tankosha Publishing Co, 2009), 68.

[78] Kenneth G. Henshall, "Tradition Meets the Modern World: The Hesitant Emergence of the New Woman," in *Dimensions of Japanese Society: Gender, Margins and Mainstream* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999), 26.

of judgment in the first place. You can look at it as a person putting on a uniform and going out into the world, not really caring at all about identity issues. Feminists understand that aspect of pleasure as well, and so they understand my work very deeply.[79]

As Yanagi states, even though the elevator girls may be dressed the same, that is not to say that they think, act, and feel the same. I assert that it is this view that Yanagi suggests when she states: "Even though they appear to look the same, their difference exists within the sameness. The difference is so minute that you may not notice it from the outside."[80] In looking at Yanagi's photographs, one may recognize corresponding differences in demeanor, stance, and gaze, potentially reflecting each elevator girl's differing worldview as a result of her own personal collection of experiences, both positive and negative. Correspondingly, Yanagi's triptychs and spliced-together panoramas in *Aquajenne in Paradise II* (1995), *Information City: Fountain Garden / Woods of Shine / Elevator* (1996), *Before and After a Dream* (1997), and *Midnight Awakening Dream* (1999), at times, present multiple vanishing points within the same photograph and may reflect the elevator girls' multiplicity of perspectives [Figures 10 – 13]. Indeed, each photograph reflects one or more of the elevator girls' personal vantage points, together creating a more holistic view of their surroundings.

It is interesting to note that in the process of casting models for this series, Yanagi insisted on interviewing each one, asking a variety of questions pertaining to current occupation, age, and even where each woman saw herself in 50 years—supporting the argument that each model's unique perspective was a factor in being included in the photograph. The diversity in responses to this last question inspired Yanagi's second series, *My Grandmothers* (1999-2009), in which she used a series of prosthetics, props, and digital manipulations to realize the women's imaginations of themselves in 50 years time—a follow-up that seems to speak to the idea that the women in Yanagi's *Elevator Girls* series may look the same but in fact harbor their own personal worldviews and ideas for the future.

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[79] Nochlin, Otake, and Phillips, *Heavy Light*, 216.
[80] Herbstreuth, "Difference within the Sameness," 21.

That Yanagi chooses to portray a collection of similarly clad women, however, is significant. While many critics have chosen to interpret the girls' uniformity as a sign of their lacking individuality, identity, and autonomy, and thereby a corresponding lack of agency, I argue that it stands to reflect their positions within a community, or solidarity of differences, not simply between women (although that is certainly a major undercurrent in this series), but between the individual and society as well. This profound connection between the self and Other, as well as the self and environment, in which the two are so closely intertwined as to blur the boundaries between them, is a fundamental element in understanding Japanese social relations and concepts of self. An exploration into Yanagi's representations of subjectivity and conformity requires that one take this matter of Japanese psychological orientation into account, lest one problematically assume a Western worldview that automatically constructs divisions between the individual and society, an assumption that I think many arts critics have mistakenly made. A Japanese perspective that finds these two intimately intertwined offers alternative articulations of agency and self-empowerment, not beholden to strident enactments of individualism. While I will offer a more in-depth analysis of this relationship between self and society and self and environment corresponding with Yanagi's first series in the following chapters, it is important to offer here a brief understanding of this perspective in order to understand more fully the ways in which Yanagi's *Elevator Girls* simultaneously evokes agency despite presenting views of uniformity.

Noting the profound degree to which Japanese peoples emphasize the importance of self-sacrifice for the "group" and social responsibility, Dorinne K. Kondo, in an anthropological investigation into the articulations of self within the workplace, explains this phenomenon in full:

> In the factory, in the family, in the neighborhood, in language, in the use of space, in attitudes toward nature and toward material objects, the most insistent refrain, repeated over and over again and transposed into countless different keys of experience, was the fundamental connectedness of human beings to each other.[81]

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[81] Dorinne K. Kondo, *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 9.

While conducting research in Japan and working in a factory making confections, Kondo describes

her "always already" implicated status within a series of social relationships:

> I was never allowed to be an autonomous, freely operating "individual." As a resident of my neighborhood, a friend, a co-worker, a teacher, a relative, an acquaintance, a quasi-daughter, I was always defined by my obligations and links to others. I was "always already" caught in webs of relationships, in which loving concern was not separable from power, where relationships define one and enable one to define others.[82]

What Kondo so eloquently articulates is the extent to which the individual is understood as a con-

sistently renegotiated construct, used by Japanese peoples to assert, in strategic ways, a sense of

self that simultaneously weaves them into the larger fabric of the group.[83] Rather than harboring

essentialized understandings of self and identity, the Japanese recognize that the concept of self is

never coherent or complete; instead, it is an illusory fabrication that is ultimately implicated within

a larger matrix of social, cultural, and political discourses and praxes. Consequently, assuming that

agency is inimically tied to one's exertion of self as an individual is an act of false consciousness—

one that glosses over the deeper implications of socio-political, economic, and cultural processes

working themselves out through the enactments of self. Kondo explains that an analysis of Japanese

social relations can thus offer important insights for Western feminists in the process of decon-

structing the cohesive subject:

> Although Western feminists have undertaken the important work of deconstructing "the whole subject" by pointing to differences within "Western culture," the relationally defined self of American women still remains solidly within a linguistic and historical legacy of individualism. Relationally defined selves in Japan—selves inextricable from context—thus mount a radical challenge to our own assumptions about fixed, essentialist identities and provide possibilities for a consideration of cultural difference and a radical critique of "the whole subject" in contemporary Western culture.[84]

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[82] Ibid., 26. For these reasons, one may recognize that the elevator girl, in addition to feeling obligated to work professionally and thereby please her employers, also felt an obligation to make the consumer's shopping experience pleasurable.
[83] Ibid., 10.
[84] Ibid., 33.

By dispensing with notions of individuality as the foundation for agency, Kondo asserts that we may more fully be able to acknowledge "the play of multiple discourses and shifting, multiple subject-positions."[85] Furthermore, we may recognize that the self is not only entangled within a complex, contradictory amalgamation of socio-cultural and political discourses, but, also harbors the same plurality of contradictory positions.[86] In this perspective, the self is always already a hybrid entity negotiating its stance within a series of inconsistent and contradictory relationships.

In turning back to Yanagi's *Elevator Girls*, one may recognize, therein, not only a collection of multiple histories and situated worldviews, but also a series of women, each of whom grapples with an equally complex series of relationships that in a single moment may both challenge and embrace traditional gender roles and concepts of femininity. While they may look and act alike, their positions beyond the surface are far more nuanced. Therefore, we may read Yanagi's images not as simple antagonisms between women (or the self) and society, but rather as a reflection of the ambivalence these women may feel as they stand situated within these complex discourses. Indeed, we should not read their conflicted positions as a sign of their stilted means to agency, for they are always already active agents negotiating their movements through the social terrain; rather, we should recognize the women within these photographs as participating in a complex enactment of community—one that offers signs of hope for a better future.

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[85] Ibid., 44.
[86] Ibid., 45.

4 ELEVATOR GIRL HOUSE OR ELEVATOR DREAMHOUSE? IDENTIFYING THEMES OF LIBERATION AND AGENCY IN YANAGI MIWA'S NON-PLACES

There will soon be a need—perhaps there already is a need—for something that may seem a contradiction in terms: an ethnology of solitude.

—Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*[87]

Our election cry must be: Reform of consciousness not through dogmas, but through analysis of mystical consciousness that is unclear to itself, whether it appears in a religious or a political form. Then people will see that the world has long possessed the dream of the thing—and that it only needs to possess the consciousness of this thing in order really to possess it.

—Karl Marx, *Der historische Materialismus: Die Frühschriften*[88]

While many arts critics who have written on the *Elevator Girls* series have paid close attention to the girls presented within Yanagi Miwa's photographs, analyzing embedded articulations of Japanese femininity, subjectivity, identity, or lack thereof, few have given mind to the artist's intricate articulations of space and place. Those that have commented on the girls' surroundings have done so in a way that briefly hints at the eerie emptiness of Yanagi's panoramas, the antiseptic sheen of her consumer spaces, and the surreal, dreamlike, even futuristic aesthetic of her digital manipulations. Quick to recognize a familiar, albeit twisted, collection of shopping malls, train stations, hotel lobbies, and art museums as a generic symbol of a ubiquitous and nightmarish hyper-capitalism working out its sinister machinations on the Japanese female body, writers on Yanagi's first series reveal an implicit relationship between place/space and identity, one that privileges place and space over human subjectivity. This environmentally determinist point of view not only presupposes that the elevator girls are ineluctably determined by their socio-political milieu, thereby occluding their means to agency, but also reveals an anxiety in response to globalization. Indeed, interpretations that point to the elevator girls' identical uniforms, doll-like postures, and glassy-

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[87] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995), 98.

[88] As quoted in Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 467 [N 5a, 1].

eyed gazes highlight fears that globalization's homogenizing forces are erasing particularities of place and space, in turn erasing local distinctions that cultivate individualism and difference—two characteristics that, for Westerner's at least, define one's humanity and means to empowerment.[89]

Given these assumptions—that place/space determines identity, that capitalism's global reach is erasing difference, and that individualism is the stepping stone to agency—it is not surprising that Yanagi's elevator girls are read as cold, robotic, lifeless victims, lacking the warmth of humanity and the will to power. In further analyzing the surreal, dreamlike elements in Yanagi's photos, however, I argue that one may point to an alternative conception of place/space that articulates a dually constitutive relationship between the girls and their environment, one that reflects their own imaginary projections. As implied in the titles of her photographs, including *Midnight Awakening Dream*, *Before and After a Dream*, *Aquajenne in Paradise*, *A Transient World*, *Eternal City*, and *Information City: Fountain Garden / Woods of Shine / Elevator*, Yanagi's images depict more than the everyday confines of a department store lift; rather, they present examples of the girls' transformative engagement with their surroundings. Engaging Michel de Certeau's metaphor of *a grammar of space*, I argue that the girls actively write the spaces they move within and, through this act of imaginative production, generate a transgressive appropriation of the dominant socioeconomic order.[90] The results of this enunciative process, through which the girls tactically reimagine their environments, are a series of surreal panoramas, which mimic at the same time that they reinterpret the manicured, consumer atmosphere of the department store.

In this chapter I will demonstrate how the girls' imagined interior spaces reflect a series of non-places, characterized by their transience, their commercialism, and their familiar, yet indiscernible architecture. I will argue that these non-spaces foster solitude and meditation, which in

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[89] Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004), 157-158. Kwon offers an insightful analysis of this ideological understanding of place in relation to identity in her readings of Lucy Lippard's *The Lure of the Local* (1997).
[90] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Stephen Rendall (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).

turn inspire alternative ways of being that do not rely on identity politics, individualism, or notions

of an essential, stable, and cohesive self to activate agency. In examining Yanagi's articulations of

non-place, I will draw from Walter Benjamin's discussions on "dreamhouses" from his *Arcades Pro-*

ject and the Japanese religio-aesthetic concept of space-time, known as *ma* (間), outlined by Robert

Pilgrim, Isozaki Arata, and Günther Nitschke, to point to a set of positive spiritual non-places that

foster the destabilization of otherwise problematic binaries, such as self/Other, individu-

al/community, self/environment, and local/global, which ultimately work to delimit and confine

the mobility and enactment of self.

While a number of the artist's titles (including *Elevator Girl House 1F, 2F, 3F, B1, B2, and B3*)

offer hints that the spaces presented in the *Elevator Girls* series refer to a collection of interiors,

numbered by floors, it is in an interview with Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster and Hans Ulrich Obrist,

that Yanagi confirms that each of these spaces are intended to be read as a series of elevator-esque

enclosures. In response to Gonzalez-Foerster and Obrist's comments highlighting how these spaces

gradually become larger and larger, to the point that they become near metropolitan microcosms,

Yanagi maintains that "[i]t is still an isolated, small space; we are still, so to speak, in an elevator."[91]

Furthermore, she states, "I have inserted aquariums, museums, airports, and train stations as part

of department store interiors," drawing attention to the notion that, like an elevator, each of these

consumer havens opens up to another interior, creating a seemingly endless labyrinth of indoor

commercial enclaves. [92] And like Tokyo's complex network of underground shopping arcades, in

which long corridors lined with stores and subway terminals link together a grid of hotel lobbies,

museums, and shopping outlets, dotted with islands of foliage, Yanagi's elevator houses offer their

denizens a veritable bio-dome, from which they never need emerge.

Enhanced by Yanagi's graphic manipulations, however, these semi-familiar spaces detour

from documentary photographs of particular locations to take on the appearance of surreal fantasy-

[91] Yanagi, Interview with Gonzalez-Foerster and Obrist, 47.
[92] Ibid., 48.

scapes: in *Looking for the Next Story II* (1994) [Figure 14] and *Aquajenne in Paradise I* (1994) [Figure 15], a wall of shop displays project, from within, verdant hills teeming with endless sprays of flowers; in lieu of advertisements, in *Elevator Girl House B3* (1997) [Figure 16], a subway platform offers glimpses into a saltwater aquarium housed within the station's walls; and in *Elevator Girl House B4* (1998) [Figure 17], the girls linger beneath the surface of a digitally produced waterline as a column of fish swim through an elevator shaft above them. Throughout these images, the counterintuitive juxtaposition of traditionally distinct places (the subway platform, the aquarium, and the botanical garden) works to disrupt the viewer's easy identification of the place presented; each "place," is reengineered just enough to produce a sense of detachment. Without a firm sense of location, the viewer becomes disoriented and, in this moment of dazed dislocation, begins to float, liberated from the guidelines of place and purpose.

This psychospatial dislocation is amplified in Yanagi's panoramas, which splice together scenes in a heterogeneous display of multiple vanishing points. Stationed at the crossroads of two or more vectors in *Elevator Girl House* (1995), *Looking for the Next Story I* (1996), *Information City: Fountain Garden / Woods of Shine / Elevator* (1996), *Eternal City I* (1998), and *Midnight Awakening Dream* (1999) [Figures 18, 6, 11, 19, 13, respectively], the viewer is afforded a simultaneous view of various alcoves and potential pathways. From this multifarious vantage point, the viewer is inadvertently "here and there" as he or she gains access to multiple locations at once. This destabilizing simultaneity only enhances the disorientation initially produced via the reconfiguration of familiar places, leaving the viewer in a kind of *every-place*.

The manipulation of these photographs not only disorients the viewer spatially, but temporally as well. Just as it is difficult to "place" Yanagi's scenes, it is hard to identify them on a timeline; and thus, the viewer floats outside the linear trajectory of history, just as he or she floats above the geographical grid. It is this spatiotemporal ambiguity that has led many to describe Yanagi's photo-

graphs as "dreamy," and "science-fiction-like"—honing in on the images' "unreal," fantastic aesthetics.[93]

Margaret Morse, author of *Virtualities: Television, Media Art, and Cyberculture*, connects this "derealizing" detachment from time and place with the production of "nonspaces." In a chapter discussing articulations of space in the shopping mall, freeway, and television, she explains, "The first distinguishing feature of nonspace is its dreamlike *displacement* or separation from its surroundings."[94] She characterizes the nonspace as "a differently constituted kind of space…of both experience and representation, an *elsewhere* that inhabits the everyday."[95] In these nonspaces, the individual loses touch with the here-and-now as he or she moves within its fictive, virtual architectures. For Morse, the shopping mall (featured so prevalently in Yanagi's photographs) is one example of a nonspace. Similar to the freeway and the television, it offers an interior akin to "a city, indeed a world in miniature"—a visual articulation made manifest in Yanagi's *Eternal City I*.[96]

Although they may resemble, and even reference a "real" world beyond their walls, like Baudrillard's third-order simulacra, nonspaces only reflect a coded, and thereby fictive, version of the "outside world." The actual world that the shopping mall is meant to resemble has long since passed into a postmodern semiosphere, in which the "real" itself has become an endless chain of unanchored signifiers.[97] In this way, Yanagi's ever-unfolding fantastical commercial spaces resemble a Baudriallardian hyperreal landscape, delivering a world unhinged from history and rife with the floating remnants of deconstructed signs and symbols. The empty interiors, like empty signifier chains, infinitely replicate and build off of one another, repeating similarly empty commercial motifs. Here, there are no exits, because there is no real world beyond.

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[93] Yanagi, Interview with Gonzalez-Foerster and Obrist, 67; Peter Weiermair, ed., *Prospect: Photography in Contemporary Art* (Frankfurt: Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, 1996), 12.

[94] Margaret Morse, *Virtualities: Television, Media Art, and Cyberculture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 103.

[95] Ibid., 102.

[96] Ibid., 104.

[97] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra & Simulation* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994).

Anthropologist Marc Augé takes a similarly textual approach in his description of "non-places."[98] Akin to Morse's "nonspace," Augé's text-laden "non-place" is marked by a similar break with the real. In non-places, texts not only help the individual negotiate spaces, but, in fact, are responsible for defining and giving those spaces meaning. "[Text] creates the image," he states, "[it] produces the myth, and at the same stroke makes it work."[99] Thus, the elevator girls' interactions with maps in *A Street with Maps* (1997) [Figure 20] and a model city in *Eternal City I* and *II* [Figures 19 and 21] are significant, as they point to a textual world entirely composed of codes and symbols. Legible only by a series of socially recognized reading conventions, these maps are emblematic of floating signifiers. They do not refer to a "real" world beyond the floating commercial world; rather, they extend the logic of the simulacrum, which is to say, everything floats. Even the title *Midnight Awakening Dream* describes an experience of waking up from one dream world only to enter another.[100] With this photo, Yanagi suggests that there is no concrete, stable world to wake up to, only an endless series of "floating worlds."

Augé's non-places also entail a break from history, resulting in spaces that never escape from an ever-perpetuating present. While non-places may suggest and make reference to "real" historical objects, places, and ideas, the "real" histories to which they refer are ultimately manufactured mythologies representing the desires of a continually evolving zeitgeist. Consequently, Augé states that in non-places, "[e]verything proceeds as if space had been trapped by time…as if each individual history were drawing its motives, its words and images, from the inexhaustible stock of an unending history in the present." In a similar vein, Yanagi's frozen images, caught in a series of commercial spaces, disconnected from time and place, represent the eternal present of non-places. As her titles *A Transient World* and *Eternal City* suggest, the elevator girl house is an unstable, fleet-

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[98] Marc Augé, *Non-Places*, 76.
[99] Ibid., 84. While many theorists have distinguished between place and space, including de Certeau, here Augé and Morse's terms are functionally interchangeable.
[100] Herbstreuth, "Difference Within the Sameness," 20.

ing, and ephemeral world, no longer anchored to modern concepts of place and time. Yanagi's pho-

tographs represent non-places, in which time and space have collapsed into an eternal now.

Other than just visual manifestations of abstract postmodern theory, however, Yanagi's

dreamscapes depict more than a series of mere surface plays. Like the floating signifiers presented

within Yanagi's images, the photographs themselves circulate as a series of tangible, yet unan-

chored, visual data, hoping to trade on their references to a mythical reality in a similarly fleeting

world. Yanagi's photographs, and the worlds they depict, are the heterogeneous products of multi-

ple socio-political, economic, and psychological influences—all of which, while disconnected to an

essential root in modernism's sense of reality, are real in their capacity to negotiate meaning and

change. Yanagi's images, which reflect elements of the contemporary world outside of her photo-

graphs, for similar reasons, should be taken seriously; for they ultimately offer significant ontologi-

cal and existential revelations about being in this world.

In attempts to contextualize Yanagi's photographs within this nexus of intersecting influ-

ences, many arts critics have pointed to the images' glossy veneers (which resemble commercial

advertisements) and depictions of consumer spaces and products as a reference to an expanding

global economy of capital and merchandise.[101] Associating her non-places with a destabilization of

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[101] To cite a few examples: Lisa Baldissera links Yanagi's series with a group of Neo-Pop artists "resistant to the post-industrialist and late-capitalist value structure." She goes on to state, "The empty architecture and the girls—sometimes in display cases, at other times toppled and heaped like dolls—pose as a metaphor for the role of women in Japanese society as well as for the economic shift of the 1990s": Lisa Baldissera, "Walking a Bit Towards the Full Moon: Postmodernism, History, and Imagination in the Work of Sayaka Akiyama, Manabu Ikeda, Yoshiaki Kaihatsu, Kohei Nawa, Tabaimo, and Miwa Yanagi" in *Great New Wave: Contemporary Art from Japan*, eds. Lisa Baldissera and Sara Knelman (Hamilton, Ontario: Art Gallery of Hamilton, 2008), 16-19; Ueno Chizuko compares the girls to "photostatic copies…lacking any warmth as living human beings": Ueno, "Miwa Yanagi," 65; Peter Herbstreuth quotes one Japanese critic who viewed the works as "bringing into light the oppression and isolation women feel in such environments, as if they have been deprived of their identities and have been reduced to a mere part of the scenery": Herbstreuth, "Difference within the Sameness," 19; Michiko Kasahara describes the elevator girls as "a symbolic image of the women who live in the highly developed capitalistic society of contemporary Japan, where 'individuality is suppressed and encoded'": Kasahara, "Contemporary Japanese Women's Self-Awareness," 100; Filippo Maggia, Francesco Lazzarini, and Foro Boario explain, "More than a critique of the homogenization imposed by fashion…the artist proposes a reflection on the difficulty of constructing one's identity in a world that is increasingly oriented towards consumption, where an individual's freedom is damaged even in its capacity to perceive that which is truly desired": Maggia, Lazzarini, and Boario, "Miwa Yanagi," 173; Yuka Uematsu calls attention to their lack

self, many have analyzed Yanagi's photographs as criticisms of contemporary globalization, lamenting its departicularization of unique places into a series of corporate, consumer monoliths. Reading Yanagi's similarly clad and aloof elevator girls as the dehumanized product of global capitalism's homogenizing objectification, these writers articulate a series of assumptions about the intersection of globalization, place/space, and identity; they reveal that place/space determines identity, that globalization is predominantly concerned with the spread of capital, and that these international flows of capital, which determine place, ultimately work to determine identity as well. The resulting syllogism reads as thus: globalization, as the flow of capital, homogenizes places, and thereby homogenizes identities into non-identities.

Corresponding with these assumptions are a set of concerns and anxieties founded upon implicit value judgments, correlating identity and difference with humanity and agency. Following this argument, the international exchange of capital works to erase difference, and thereby erase the individual's humanity, turning them into mere objects, or automatons of capitalist materialism and consumption.

Doreen Massey, author of *Space, Place, and Gender*, considers the corresponding anxiety over this dehumanized "non-identity" as the problematic reading of globalization as the strict flow of capital. She argues:

> On this interpretation, then, it is time, space, and money which make the world go round, and us go round (or not) the world. It is capitalism and its developments which are argued to determine our understanding and our experience of space. But surely this is insufficient…The current speed-up may be strongly determined by economic forces, but it is not the economy alone which determines our experience of space and place.[102]

of individuality, stating that "Multiple elevator girls are featured in each work in the series, and in their identical uniforms they lack any individuality. They are completely anonymous and their humanity had been extinguished. By embedding them seamlessly into the artificially created space of the image, Yanagi transforms them into cyborg-like beings": Uematsu, "Miwa Yanagi's Field of Vision," 122.

[102] Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 147-148.

Globalization also includes the transfer of information, desires, and affective concepts of race and gender.[103] Rather than viewing it as a predominantly economic phenomenon, globalization should be recognized for the myriad alternative exchanges that engage individuals, personally and socially. In returning to Yanagi's photographs, one should not necessarily turn to a negative interpretation of capitalism to explain its various consumer spaces or its seemingly distracted females; rather, one may also recognize a series of global cultural exchanges, including fashions, languages, and aesthetics.[104] Furthermore, the girls' uniforms need not stand as a direct marker of global homogenization or the erasure of difference; on the contrary, as Yanagi explains in an interview with Wakasa Mako in 2001:

> Even though they appear to look the same, their differences exist within the sameness. [The] difference among them is so minute that you may not notice it from the outside. I feel the distinctions are getting more and more detailed. As a result, they look more similar because of the minute distinctions made within the sameness.[105]

In *Space, Place and Gender*, Massey documents a series of people's movements through similar spaces as examples of varying interests, desires, and reasons for movement. It is possible that the elevator girls' myriad positions, interactions, and directed gazes signify a similar collection of distinct, personal desires, interests, and motivations working themselves out in subtle, yet significant ways.

What Massey's argument also entails is the notion that not all individuals require unique places and spaces to feel comforted or to act upon their own interests. Indeed, similarity and uniformity may prove comforting to some. Yanagi hints at a similar perspective in the *Heavy Light* interview quoted in the introduction, in which she explains that her series "also addresses the pleas-

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[103] Ibid.
[104] Furthermore, to suggest that Yanagi's elevator girls are losing their identities in the homogenizing spread of global capital problematically reinforces the idea that women are the carriers of local and/or national traditions and moral values, thereby problematically associating them with stasis.
[105] Miwa Yanagi, interview by Mako Wakasa, August 19, 2001, *Journal of Contemporary Art,* http://www.jca-online.com/yanagi.html (accessed January 22, 2010).

ures that women might feel in putting on a uniform and entering a commercial facility…"[106] This feeling of "pleasure" that Yanagi alludes to reveals a potentially liberating analysis of the images at hand. In her interview with Gonzalez-Foerster and Obrist, Yanagi even points to a sense of agency cultivated through these commercial spaces:

> In my works there is a difference in agency, particularly between personal desire and space. In *Elevator Girls*, personal desires are constructed by moving through the commercial passageways of the department stores and becoming lost in the abundance of commodities. The girls on their own do not have these desires.[107]

In the same interview, the artist notes that she "was reading Emile Zola at the time as well and was interested in the history of the production of commercial space in department stores and the flow of capitalism." This points to a late-nineteenth-century, early-twentieth-century view of utopian readings of Parisian shopping arcades. While Yanagi specifically cites Zola as one particular inspiration for her images, an exploration of Zola's works offers less revealing connections than a number of passages from *The Arcades Project* and an earlier version of "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century" from 1935 by Walter Benjamin, who was a contemporary of Zola's. Indeed, a number of surprisingly similar comparisons lead me to speculate on whether Yanagi accidentally crossed names in her interview, or was at least familiar with Benjamin's writings.

The most striking comparison concerns Benjamin's reference to these new urban-industrial arcades as "dreamhouses" and Yanagi's dreamy *Elevator Girl Houses*. And just as the artist's fantasy-laden elevators come to incorporate additional spaces, including museums, train stations, airports, hotel lobbies, botanical gardens, and aquariums, so do Benjamin's "dreamhouses" comprise a collection of "winter gardens, panoramas, factories, wax museums, casinos, and railroad stations."[108] Both the dreamhouse and the elevator girl house also describe enclosed spaces; compare Benjamin's statement, "Arcades are houses or passages having no outside—like a dream" with Yanagi's, "My dream experiences are often these types of spaces: the women in my work are stopped in them,

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[106] Nochlin, Otake, and Phillips, *Heavy Light*, 216.
[107] Yanagi, Interview with Gonzalez-Foerster and Obrist, 46.
[108] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* 405 [L1, 3].

they cannot leave the passing scenes…they have already seen these places of consumption and underground malls, these aquariums with no exit."[109] So too do both spaces resemble microcosms.

Benjamin quotes the *Illustrated Guide to Paris*:

> These arcades, a recent invention of industrial luxury, are glass-roofed, marble-paneled corridors extending through whole blocks of buildings, whose owners have joined together for such enterprises. Lining both sides of the corridors, which get their light from above, are the most elegant shops, so that the passage is a city, a world in miniature.[110]

In addition to the examples above, both Benjamin's dreamhouses and Yanagi's elevator girl houses present similar portrayals of a contemporary collapse of time and space. In an article analyzing Benjamin's revolutionary perspectives in *The Arcades Project*, Susan Buck-Morss reiterates his idealistic views concerning the potential of working with new forms of mechanical reproduction (namely the photograph and the film):

> When the artist-as-philosopher takes over as tools the formal principles of this new medium, he is able to capture the modern experience of time (increased tempo) and space (fragmentation) which are no longer describable in Kantian categories, and, via non-sequential time frames, close-up montage, he can begin to analyse modern reality with a scientific, politically critical eye.[111]

This sped-up, fragmented collapse of space and time, which Benjamin refers to as a "spacetime," (the German translation of which, *zeitraum*, he plays with to create "*Zeit-traum*," or "dreamtime") manifests in Yanagi's panoramas. As mentioned above, the traditional concepts, here described as "Kantian categories," of time and space are spliced together to create similarly fragmented, "non-sequential time frames."[112] The frozen moments of a seemingly endless present, in which the eleva-

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[109] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 406 [L1a, 1]; Yanagi, as quoted in the interview with Gonzalez-Foerster and Obrist, 47.

[110] Walter Benjamin, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century: Exposé of 1935," in *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 3.

[111] Susan Buck-Morss, "Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk*: Redeeming Mass Culture for the Revolution," *New German Critique* 29 (Spring/Summer 1983): 213.

[112] Some have pointed to Yanagi's use of vignettes to argue that the viewer is looking into the shopping arcade after it has closed, as if through a small peephole; however, the darkened edges around the periphery of some of her photographs, which resemble the use of hazy borders to signify a shift in time or consciousness in video-montage, may refer to Benjamin's montages. Thus, the vignettes deployed in *Looking for the Next Story I and II* (1996 and 1994, respectively), *Aquajenne in Paradise I* (1994), and *Elevator Girl House B3* (1997) similarly extend a near out-of-body experience, in which time and place give way to transient dislocation.

tor girls stand poised and still, looking off into the commercial non-spaces that surround them, is

reflected in Benjamin's description of the dream-state as a temporary pause or stagnation before an

"awakening." He states:

> We seek a teleological moment in the context of dreams. Which is the moment of waiting. The dream waits secretly for the awakening; the sleeper surrenders himself to death only provisionally; waits for the second when he will cunningly wrest himself from its clutch-es.[113]

For Benjamin, the Paris arcades, with its collection of commodities and fabricated spaces, present a

reflection of humanity's past and present desires. More than mere objects of exchange value or

store-rooms for the display of merchandise, these products and spaces, which he referred to as

"dream-images" or "wish-images" represent symbols of society's collective interests, wishes, and

aspirations.[114] In walking through an arcade, or dreamhouse, the individual gains access not just to

a series of consumer products, but to an archive of humanity's history; indeed, a museum of social

psychology and economic productivity. Thus, Benjamin states, "Museums unquestionably belong to

the dreamhouses of the collective," as they offer a spectacle of society's own historical hopes and

dreams.[115]

Each wish-image or dreamhouse, Benjamin argued, also represents the teleological result of

centuries of social and economic exchange. Rather than a manifestation denoting the time period in

which it was produced, each commodity or space, as the culmination of a dialectical chain, contains

within it all time periods, and thereby collapses humanity's entire history into a tangible object. In

this way, wish-images or dream-images, when viewed through the appropriate lens, according to

Benjamin, are also "dialectical images."[116] Coming to consciousness of this fact, that the dream-

image and dreamhouse were potential windows into an extensive history of negotiations and inter-

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[113] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 390 [K1a, 2].
[114] Buck-Morss, "Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk*," 213.
[115] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* 406 [L1a, 2].
[116] Buck-Morss, "Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk*," 215. Interestingly, Yanagi makes a similar comparison when she states, "Isn't it interesting how museums become department stores?" Yanagi, Interview with Gonzalez-Foester and Obrist, 48.

relations, is akin to the process of "awakening"—one with the potential to enlighten the individual

of his or her own ontology and productive capabilities, and thereby inspire him or her to take hold

of this power and realize his or her own dreams.

If Yanagi's images indeed allude to Benjamin's descriptions of nineteenth-century Paris ar-

cades, it is possible too that they similarly offer hints of their liberating potential; in which case,

Yanagi's descriptions of the girls' interactions with the available abundance of commercial com-

modities and spaces as occasions for the activation of desire and agency may compare with Benja-

min's own views towards items of mass-production as wish-images, dream-images, or dialectical

images. More than mere consumer objects of use value or exchange value, like Benjamin's wish-

images, the articles of clothing lining the right wall of *Midnight Awakening Dream*, as its title might

also suggest, or the layers of women's shoes in *Elevator Girl House 3F* (1998) [Figure 22]*,* are poten-

tial keys to an awakening and activation of agency. Likewise, Yanagi's females, who resemble Ben-

jamin's dreaming collective in waiting, may recall Benjamin's belief that passing through these

dreamhouses could awaken its denizens to a new frame of consciousness, opening them "not only

into a distant or bygone world but also into a better one."[117] Thus, as Buck-Morss elaborates, this

"dream-world," housing the trappings of consumer-culture, according to Benjamin, was capable of

inspiring in those who passed through it and engaged with its "dream-images" a means to individu-

al political awakening.[118]

This moment of waiting prior to awakening, Benjamin describes, is characterized by deep

inner-reflection and exploration. [119] Comparing the passage through the halls of the arcades to the

dreamer's absorption and translation of his own internal noises and sensations, Benjamin's internal

journey resembles a process of self-meditation. Correspondingly, the elevator girls' aloof postures

and lack of social interaction, which are often interpreted as the listless, empty gazes of figures

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[117] Benjamin, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century," 9.
[118] Buck-Morss, "Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk,*" 214-215.
[119] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 389 [K1, 4].

stripped of their humanity, may reveal their own personal introspection. Looking into their own reflections in the shiny marble floors and glass shop displays, and even at times at the other elevator girls who stand as mirror replicas of themselves, Yanagi's females may be engaging in Benjamin's corresponding withdrawal into self.

Augé corroborates this hypothesis when noting the tendency of non-places to inspire solitude and "encounters with the self."[120] In non-places, Augé explains:

> What [the individual] is confronted with, finally, is an image of himself, but in truth it is a pretty strange image. The only face to be seen, the only voice to be heard, in the silent dialogue he holds with the landscape-text addressed to him along with others, are his own: the face and voice of a solitude made all the more baffling by the fact that it echoes millions of others…The space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude and similitude.[121]

Detached from traditional forms of time and place, where space and time collapse as the past folds into the present within the environment of the non-place, the individual enters a psychological state of interiority. This retreat into self, however, is simultaneously a communal act: all those harbored within the dreamhouse or non-place pass into self-reflection together, each confronted with the same communal collection of dialectical images. In this way, the individual's meditative moment becomes a communal meditative moment, blurring the division between self and Other, individual and community.

Interestingly, these depicted moments of self-introspection and binary-blurring meditation, inspired by a collection of surrounding mundane objects and spaces, resemble the characteristics of Tendai Buddhism's means to enlightenment, or Buddha-hood, in which the subject, by reflecting upon the fleeting, transitory elements of a continually renewing present via the meditation on everyday phenomena and aesthetics may transcend the sufferings of this world into an alternative state of being that embraces flux and instability. Following its introduction in the 8th century, Tendai Buddhism, Chinese in origin, melded with Japanese Shinto traditions to become one of the most

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[120] Augé, *Non-Places*, 84.
[121] Ibid., 83-4.

predominant religions in Japan. Fostered by the imperial families during the Heian period (794 – 1185) and by the warrior classes during the following Kamakura era (1191 – 1333), Tendai Buddhism, most commonly associated with Zen practices, inspired many of Japan's traditional Buddhist arts, including Noh Drama, Ikebana, and Tea Ceremony. Music and the visual arts, such as painting, drawing, and sculpture, were also largely influenced by its philosophies, resulting in a vast compendium of religio-aesthetic objects and performances, upon which Tendai followers could meditate.[122]

A critical element in these arts was the Japanese concept of *ma* (間), a religio-aesthetic term with numerous equivocations. While it has come to mean an interval, gap, space, or in-between-ness in modern Japanese language, according to Richard Pilgrim, *ma* originally referred to a "pregnant nothingness," in which time and space collapsed in anticipation of the descent of *kami* (gods) into voids.[123] In other words, each space was inseparable from time, as the object or space at hand was intrinsically tied to moments of potential mystical occupation; the two being significant only in their correlation.

This deeper, spiritual understanding of the term is most directly expressed in the arts. Characterized by negative spaces in drawing and painting, and moments of "no-action" in theater and music, *ma*'s seemingly empty moments and spaces are actually rife with emotional, creative, and imaginative energy. Recalling the word's initial spiritual origins, these voids offer access to spiritual power and rebirth. According to Isozaki Arata, these empty intervals "may be related to

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[122] Byron Earhart, *Japanese Religion: Unity and Diversity* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2004), 83-127.

[123] For various translations of *ma*, see Arata Isozaki, "Ma (Interstice) and Rubble," in *Japan-ness in Architecture,* trans. Sabu Kosho, ed. David B. Stewart (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006): 81-100; Arata Isozaki, *MA: Space-Time in Japan* (New York: Cooper-Hewitt Museum, 1979); Günther Nistchke, "'Ma:' The Japanese Sense of 'Place' in Old and New Architecture and Planning," *Architectural Design* 36, no. 3 (1966): 116-156; Günther Nitschke, "Ma—Place, Space, Void," in *From Shinto to Ando: Studies in Architectural Anthropology in Japan* (London: Academy Editions, 1993), 48-61; and Richard Pilgrim, "Intervals (*Ma*) in Space and Time: Foundations for a Religio-Aesthetic Paradigm in Japan," in *Japan: In Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives,* eds. Charles Wei-hsun Fu and Steven Heine (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 55-80.

Shinto ideas of seclusion in a sacred space for the purpose of renewal (*komaru*), especially in caves,

tombs, and *tama-bako* ('soul-boxes'), which though containing nothing—are filled with sacred

power to be imparted to those who have entered."[124] Thus, these "pregnant nothings" which later

made their way into Tendai Buddhist practices, offer opportunities for rejuvenation and enlighten-

ment. By meditating on the fullness of emptiness, the individual may begin to blur the boundaries

between otherwise distracting, limiting, and constructed binaries that impede one's freedom to an

otherwise more dynamic means of being. As Pilgrim points out:

> Such experiential "places" evoke, by their very nature, a sense of reality characterized by a
> dynamic, active, changing, poetic immediacy instead of being merely objective or subjective.
> It is in keeping with what Joseph Kitagawa has described as Japan's "unitary meaning struc-
> ture" or "poetic, immediate, and simultaneous awareness" within which past and future,
> time and space, are collapsed into the present, and time [is] not perceived as an independ-
> ent reality from nature [or space]. It is an opening or emptying of oneself into the immedia-
> cy of the ever-changing moment beyond distinctions and in between the "this and that"
> world.[125]

Yanagi's photographs, as depictions of non-places, characterized by the intersection of time and

space and a continually renewing ephemeral presence in the now, resembles the Japanese experi-

ence of *ma.* And like the caves and voids within which *kami* descend and the individual attains a

transformation in consciousness, Yanagi's cavernous, commercial dreamscapes, akin to Benjamin's

dreamhouses, may be interpreted as transformative "*tama-bako*," or "soul-boxes," offering its eleva-

tor girls alternative ways of being in, and engaging with, the contemporary world—ways of being

that embrace the instability of time and place, and find within its corresponding deconstruction of

an "authentic, cohesive" self an equally empowering means to liberation and agency.

Within these soul-boxes or dreamhouses, the elevator girls engage the Buddhist sense of *no-

self*, deconstructing their positions in relation to their environs to become extensions of their social

matrices and surroundings. Similar to poststructuralist deconstructions of self (à la Judith Butler),

which describe an amalgamation of learned and performed subjectivities, the elevator girls work to

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[124] Isozaki, *MA: Space-Time in Japan*, 13.
[125] Ibid., 66.

recognize that identity and individualism are constructs, built upon dualities of subject and object, being and environment. Rather than confirm a concrete sense of being within, or in opposition to, the world around them, the girls seek to transcend these binaries and recognize a more imminent notion of constant recreation or, in poststructuralist terms, constant re-production and performance. The enlightened self is one that acknowledges its inner emptiness, which is to say: there is not an absolute unique identity at the core of one's being. And by unlearning the epistemologies of identity and individualism, the elevator girls open a boundless space for being, creativity, imagination, and transformation.

5   ELEVATOR GIRLS AS LIMINAL PERSONAE: ACCESSING AGENCY THROUGH SELF-

CULTIVATION AND MEDITATION

"A self is not an entity but an activity."

—Winnie Tomm[126]

Up to this point, I have attempted to stress the ways in which Yanagi's photographs empha-

size a breakdown in dichotomies between self and Other, self and society, and self and environ-

ment, at the same time that I have intended to articulate elements of agency and themes of libera-

tion throughout her first series.[127] While resembling postmodern methods of deconstruction, these

destabilized dichotomies also resemble Buddhist methods for achieving enlightenment, through

which the practitioner works to detach his or her sense of self from an individualized ego as a

means of acknowledging his or her embeddedness within an everyday world of imminent construc-

tion and becoming. Entangled with the elevator girls' history of female empowerment via consum-

erism, their implicated status within a workplace and society rooted in social harmony and uni-

formity, as well as their surrounding dreamscapes in Yanagi's photographs, which lend a sense of

dislocation from place and time, are hints that imply Buddhist steps toward enlightenment and lib-

eration. By analyzing the modern girls' history of self-cultivation, their performative, even medita-

tive, roles as employees, their isolation within the elevator, and their positions within non-places, I

will demonstrate how Yanagi's elevator girls represent a collection of empowered women, actively

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[126] Winnie Tomm, "A Religious Philosophy of Self," in *Gender, Genre, and Religion: Feminists Reflections*, eds. Morny Joy and Eva K. Neumaier-Dargyay (Ontario, Canada: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1995), 249.
[127] In Chapter Two, I explored Yanagi's ambivalent position between the Japanese and predominantly West-ern international art market, highlighting the ways in which these two domains at once intersect as they di-verge, in turn deconstructing the distinctions between Japan and the West as well; in Chapter Three, I turned to the history of the elevator girl as a new type of woman who inserted herself within a rapidly expanding consumer society to emphasize the ways in which women simultaneously reinforce, resist, and acknowledge multiple intersecting discourses that work to define them, underscoring as well the difficulties in demarcating between the self and society or self and the group; and in Chapter Four, I examined Yanagi's articulations of place and time, analyzing the ways in which her surreal, fantastic environments take on the form of trans-formative spaces, where the distinctions between self and environment disassemble to reveal the ways in which the two may be considered mutually constitutive.

working upon their sense of self, community, and environment, and thereby their status within Japanese society in ways that are rooted in Buddhist practice.

At the foundation of the elevator girl's means to agency is the disavowal of an essential self, rooted in individuality, that is utterly dominated by such invisible monoliths as global capitalism, social codification, and patriarchal oppression (all three of which have been interpreted as reasons for the elevator girls' limited status). For, what each of these destabilized binaries between self and Other, self and society, and self and environment reveals is a breakdown in strident antagonisms. Thus, interpretations that claim Yanagi's *Elevator Girls* series as a simple Marxist critique, identifying her female subjects as victims of a patriarchal, capitalist system of artificial bourgeois values, reinforce and re-inscribe romantic ideologies of Western modernism; they assume a universal concept of subjectivity rooted in Western, romantic, humanist concepts of individualism. In an attempt to avoid facile distinctions between capitalism and the body, or between ideology and identity, as if they were two mutually exclusive entities, in this chapter I will explore the Buddhist concept of *no-self* in order to step outside of an identity-centric, or what Daisetz T. Suzuki refers to as an "egocentric," reality. This, I believe will offer access to the empowerment and agency that Yanagi alludes to in reference to these women.

Before embarking on this journey into Buddhist consciousness and ritual praxis, it is important to point out that Yanagi, to my knowledge, has not indicated whether or not she considers herself religious, much less has claimed membership to a specific sect or doctrine. With that said, the Buddhist concepts and rituals I allude to in this chapter represent well-known philosophies and practices that have woven themselves into the foundations of Japanese society and culture, much as Judeo-Christian beliefs have come to orient many Western world views and practices.

In Japan in particular, according to sociologist Ian Reader, religious ideas and activities have become so embedded within everyday life that many performing or espousing such concepts and

routines do not recognize them as having religious foundations.[128] Thus, Japanese people take part in a great deal of religious activities, as well as adhere to and reinforce various religious philosophies in everyday society while claiming that they are not religious. Recognizing the confusion this causes amongst scholars studying Japanese religious practice, Reader goes on to explain that this disconnect may be a matter of terminology, as much of Japanese society qualifies the term *religious* to mean someone who adheres to one belief system in opposition to all others. This contradicts the majority of Japanese people who identify with multiple religious worldviews, including a predominant intermingling of Buddhism and Shintoism, along with occasional interspersions of Daoism and Confucianism. Furthermore, many religious activities have become social activities, offering Japanese peoples opportunities to gather and foster a sense of community, such as during festivals, births, and funerals.[129] Still more religious concepts have found their way into social decorum, aesthetics, and conceptions of self.

For the purpose of this thesis, I will introduce many of these Buddhist (as well as Shintoist) concepts, under the assumption that even if Yanagi did not espouse Buddhism, or Shintoism, she would at least have been familiar with its axioms and motifs (many of which have seeped into the ken of Japanese culture). Thus, whether they were conscious or unconscious inclusions, we may still recognize some of their Buddhist (and at times Shintoist) characteristics for the sake of identifying some of Yanagi's liberating connotations.

At the end of Chapter Two I called attention to the multiplied and often contradictory positions of the self, highlighting the elevator girls' heterogeneous array of perspectives and personal histories by pointing to Yanagi's deployment of multiple panels and vantage points within her photographs. Even though Yanagi's women may look the same, each woman harbors a particular cross-section of experiences, interests, and concerns that influences her orientation and outlook on the

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[128] Ian Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1991), 12.
[129] This participation may be considered similar to those, for example, who partake in the celebration of Christmas and Easter as an opportunity to spend time with family rather than as a means for celebrating Jesus's birth or resurrection.

world. While these multiplied vantage points and triptychs, on the one hand, point to the variety of

perspectives held by the various women in the photographs, they also represent the various con-

nections and obligations in which each woman may take part. Each vanishing point that leads off

into an infinite abyss implicates her within another relationship, another vector of socio-political

constitution. Thus, she stands at a literal and figurative crossroad, at which she becomes a multi-

tude of selves, some complementary and others contradictory.

While this may lead to a degree of ambivalence, Dorinne K. Kondo emphasizes the extent to

which this pluralized sense of being offers a more holistic view of how the self is always entangled

within a multivalent network of power and meaning. It also lends itself to agency, as the self may

emphasize and perform various enactments of self in acts of resistance, compliance, or identifica-

tion. This recognition that the self is not cohesive and consistent, but rather is defined by a series of

intersecting relationships and mechanisms of power that work to give it shape, offers the simulta-

neous realization that power is not something that is "merely repressive, a mechanism applied from

above and outside, a substance some people possess and some people do not."[130] Instead, everyone

has access to power, which they may exercise through various performances, narrations, and self-

constructions. As Kondo states:

> Rather than universal essences, selves are rhetorical assertions, produced by our linguistic
> conventions, which we narrate and perform for each other. Identities on the individual level
> resist closure and reveal complicated, shifting, multiple facets. And selves were never sepa-
> rable from context: that is, from the situations in which they were performed, the audience
> to whom the narrative production of "self", the historical and political/economic discourses,
> and the culturally shaped narrative conventions that constructed "the self."[131]

This concept of the self as an entity perpetually implicated within a network of social, eco-

nomic, and physical forces, that is continually performed and renegotiated resembles the Buddhist

concept of *no-self*, which considers the ego-centric self ideological and illusory. Instead of a cohesive

being upon which systems write their ideologies, the self is an inessential extension of its social ma-

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[130] Kondo, *Crafting Selves*, 221.
[131] Ibid., 307.

trices and surroundings. Anthropologist and architectural historian, Günther Nitschke, highlights

the distinctions between Eastern and Western concepts of self:

> In the Japanese language, and thus in society, a person is conceived of as a flexible and easily linkable *dividuum*, that is, as a part split from and belonging to a larger whole. Everyone is educated to shake off the delusion of a separate individual ego, and to express supra-individual values. What characterizes a person as human is that one is always together with other humans…In contrast, the Western mind has tended to envisage the human being as a perfect and self-contained *individuum* (that is, indivisible whole) who should be encouraged to view the self as real, to discipline it and to express highly individual values. The desire to produce individual genius, a "superman", has haunted all of Western history.[132]

Similar to poststructuralist deconstructions of self, which describe an amalgamation of learned and

performed subjectivities, the Buddhist self works to recognize itself as a construct built on dualities

of subjects and objects, being and environment, self and Other. As opposed to celebrating a concrete

sense of being in opposition to a world, society, and discursive arena apart and distinguishable

from the self, Buddhist practice works to move beyond these binaries and acknowledge notions of

imminent recreation, or in poststructuralist terms, continuous re-production and performance.

This *no-self* is one that acknowledges its inner emptiness, which is to say, it dispenses with any ab-

solute original identity at the core of its being. The empty self is a constructed self, stabilized by a

set of narratives. By deconstructing these discourses, one finds that there is no center or concrete

self to refer to, only a never-ending chain of floating signifiers. Daisetz T. Suzuki explains:

> Ego…useful as it may be for our daily intercourse as social beings, is an empty phonetic symbol. We refer to the ego or self by using the pronoun *I* when we are introspective and bifurcate ourself into subject and object. But this process of self-introspective bifurcation, which is part of our attempt to orient the self, is endless and can never lead us to a terminating abode where "the self" comes comfortably to rest. The "self" we may conclude, is after all nonexistent.[133]

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[132] Nitschke, "Ma—Place, Space, and Void," 58.
[133] Daisetz Teitarō Suzuki, "Self the Unattainable," in *The Buddha Eye: An Anthology of the Kyoto School and its Contemporaries*, ed. Frederick Franck (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2004), 4-5.

In this way, he states, "we make puppets of ourselves with the tools of our own making."[134] By one's own means, through language, philosophy, politics, and self-orienting narratives, people fashion who they are and create roles for themselves. There is no static self apart from these attachments; rather, the self is composed of a series of these discourses and concepts—as an organic-semiotic amalgamation of self.

This comprehensive interconnectedness, in which the divisions between self and Other, self and society, and self and environment breakdown, is most notably reflected in the first photograph of Yanagi's series, made in 1994, titled *The White Casket* [Figure 23]. In a series of four panels Yanagi presents a group of three elevator girls lying in a circle on the floor of an elevator. In a progression from the top left image to the bottom right, the collection of three photographically defined women gradually dissolve to become one with their environment, resulting in the final image, which presents an abstract design composed of red, viscous globules mimicking the wrapping paper of the famed Mitsukoshi Department Store [Figure 24].[135] Here, the complete intersection of self and environment (in this case the company represented by the wrapping paper) becomes clear; the women, rather than standing in contrast to their surroundings, defined against it, bleed into it to reflect this concept of being defined and articulated by the physical and socio-economic terrain within which they are implicated.

The blurring of boundaries between the employee and the company is one facet of a larger tendency in the obscuring between self and Other that manifests as social harmony in Japan. Both Kondo and John Clammer describe the identification process of the Japanese craftsman, laborer, or employee with their particular job and company as being akin to becoming one with that company

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[134] Daisetz Teitarō Suzuki, "The Buddhist Conception of Reality," in *The Buddha Eye: An Anthology of the Kyoto School and its Contemporaries,* ed. Frederick Franck (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2004), 29.
[135] Interestingly, the Mitsukoshi Department store, whose headquarters are located in Tokyo, was one of the first large department stores that sprung up during the rise in consumerism in the early twentieth century. It employed some of the first elevator girls, as well as was one of the first department stores to include an art gallery where consumers could view and purchase Japanese works of art.

and/or task at hand. Clammer offers the analogy of the craftsman towards his craft as a means of distinguishing between the Western and Japanese employee-company-job relationship:

> The modernist identification of self and task cannot be read in the same ways as in the West—as primarily a function of goals and capitalist work relations—but rather on the analogy of the craftsman—a person so dedicated to a task that absorption into it becomes the end result. You do not so much learn a craft as become it.[136]

This dedication and utter "absorption" into one's work, whereby the self dissolves into the craft, task, or company, is rooted in the Japanese Buddhist practice of self-cultivation (*shugyō*), considered a form of personal maturation. The process of self-cultivation involves disciplining the body and mind in such a way that theory and practice no longer stand opposed but work in tandem. Through physical practice and complete mental focus one could eventually meld theory and practice to access a creative, and less awkwardly conscious, active mode of self. This concept of self-cultivation, made popular in the West by the phrase "be the target" in Eugen Herrigel's *Zen and the Art of Archery* (1953), espouses the idea that through discipline and focus one may not only reach a point of "no-mind" or unconscious creativity couched in no-self, but would also gain a heightened position of awareness about the interconnection of the self and the world. This process implied a sense of maturation in which the individual who had reached enlightenment (*satori*) or, in other words, learned to act without ego would simultaneously become a better person at the same time that he would improve society.[137] Work, in particular, was an excellent means to realize this cultivated, enlightened, mature, no-self, positively entwined within society and his surrounding environs.[138]

I write "*he* would improve society" in the above paragraph to emphasize that traditionally only men would participate in the company workplace, much less study craftsmanship, or even take part in Buddhist rituals of self-cultivation for the sake of reaching enlightenment. While the occasional woman did participate in Buddhist transformation practices as nuns, it was not until the ear-

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[136] Clammer, *Contemporary Urban Japan*, 82.
[137] Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, 108.
[138] Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*, 11.

ly to mid-twentieth century that women were given access to Buddhist training sessions and re-treats, as until this point Japanese society considered them incapable of achieving enlightenment all together.

During the 1920s, however, as the consumer industry expanded and the modern girl entered the workforce, the practice of self-cultivation was extended to females. Magazines in the Taishō era, which gradually recognized women as a class of professionals, interested in self-improvement and becoming more knowledgeable participants in the public realm, marketed ideas of self-cultivation to its readers.[139] Many of these women, a majority of whom were middle-class, young, educated, part-time employees, took up philosophical texts and religious meditation as a means of becoming more self-aware and self-critical. For these women, self-cultivation came to be understood as a means to spiritual and cultural cultivation.[140]

In this way, the modern girl, which included the elevator girl, gained access not only to the public realm and became a prominent figure in the consumer industry, but she also became implicated within the greater Japanese socio-cultural discursive sphere. Through self-cultivation she became an integral part of society, at the same time that she found herself implicated within a greater interconnected cosmos. And while it is true that many magazines emphasized work and self-cultivation as a means to improving her position as a "good wife, wise mother," she was nonetheless largely involved in redefining her status within Japanese society.[141]

In turning to Yanagi's *Elevator Girls* series, I argue that her subjects bear resemblance to the newly implicated, self-cultivating modern girls of the 1920s. As argued in Chapter Two, we may view Yanagi's contemporary elevator girls as standing at a parallel position to the *moga* in the Taishō era, as they embark on new modes of consciousness and being in the world, as well as new enactments of self and means to agency. Representing various states of self-cultivation, Yanagi's

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[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid., 134.
[141] Ibid., 137.

women make strides towards enlightenment, and thereby actively work toward gaining their free-
dom. For, in Japan, as opposed to the West, freedom is not always already present, but is something
to be "achieved" through self-cultivation.[142] Hence, choosing to participate in self-cultivation is in
itself exercising self-empowerment—an exercise that not only involves gaining a state of higher
self-awareness through self-examination, but taking a more participatory role in the larger Japa-
nese community as well.

One of the most popular methods of self-cultivation, and in turn a means to reaching en-
lightenment, is meditation.[143] During the 1980s and 1990s, Japan experienced what was called the
"Zen Boom," a sudden influx of interest in Zen Buddhist spiritual practices, namely meditation.[144]
Intended to "correct the mode of one's mind by putting one's body into the correct postures," medi-
tation is often accompanied by silence, isolation, and a seated position.[145] In other instances medita-
tion includes the chanting of mantras and/or a slow upright shuffle in a circular pattern. Looking at
Yanagi's *Elevator Girls*, we may notice a similar compendium of seemingly meditative components:
closed off and isolated within a series of relatively dark, silent spaces, the elevator girls either re-
cline, sit, or stand as they gaze off into the distance, look into their own reflections (which are mir-
rored in the other surrounding elevator girls), or focus on a particular item, such as a pair of shoes
in *Elevator Girl House 3F*, an illuminated map in *A Street with Maps*, or a microcosm of packages in
both *Eternal City I* and *Eternal City II* [Figures 22, 20, 19, and 21, respectively].

The latter, whereby the elevator girl stares at an object before her, recalls the practice of
meditating on a mandala, a minimalist work of art, or a finely manicured Zen garden. By focusing on

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[142] Kasulis, Thomas P., "Editor's Introduction," in *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory*, edited by
Thomas P. Kasulis, trans. Shigenori Nagatomo and Thomas P. Kasulis (Albany: State University of New York
Press, 1987), 9.

[143] Yasuo Yuasa, "Author's Introduction to the English Edition," in *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body
Theory*, edited by Thomas P. Kasulis, trans. Shigenori Nagatomo and Thomas P. Kasulis (Albany: State Univer-
sity of New York Press, 1987), 26.

[144] Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, 103.

[145] Yasuo Yuasa, "Theories of Artistry (geidō)," in *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory*, edited by
Thomas P. Kasulis, trans. Shigenori Nagatomo and Thomas P. Kasulis (Albany: State University of New York
Press, 1987), 105.

these forms, the Buddhist practitioner may find the "formless in the form," which is to say that he or she could use the form or object to break down the distinctions between subject and object, self and Other. The form, in this way, was intended to trigger enlightenment and undifferentiated being.[146]

Interestingly, the mandala, a circular-shaped spiritual diagram intended to foster enlightenment in the meditating viewer, appears in a number of Yanagi's photographs. In *Aquajenne in Paradise II*, various elevators open onto a circular room at the center of which is a mandala-shaped floor mosaic lit from above by an oculus [Figure 10]. The girls all focus their attention on this central design as if caught in the midst of silent meditation. In *Elevator Girl House 3F*, a collection of elevator girls stare down into an octagonal display case housing layer upon layer of white shoes [Figure 22]. One elevator girl, on the left, even sits on the edge, allowing her feet to dangle into the depths of the display, as if in mid-process of becoming one with the surrounding objects. In *Eternal City I*, another group of elevator girls encircles a microcosm or "city" of white packages, while a mandala-esque skylight shines directly down upon them [Figure 19].[147] The women stare at the miniaturized metropolis before them as if they are awakening to a new perspective on the world. Japanese art historian Eric C. Shiner notes that this is also the only photograph in which the women stand in a space open to the outdoors, suggesting hints at liberation and enlightenment.[148] Yanagi's *Paradise Trespasser II* (1998) not only features another mandala-esque skylight above the elevator girl laying below it, but the photograph itself is also shaped like a mandala, its perspective skewed through a fish-eye lens as if offering an alternative image of reality [Figure 25]. Indeed, it seems that the viewer, in this instance, is intended to use this photograph (and arguably the others as well) as

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[146] Kobori Sōhaku Nanrei offers an excellent conversation between a Zen monk and a discile in which the two discuss this process of reaching enlightenment in the midst of meditating on a painting of persimmons: Kobori Sōhaku Nanrei, "A Dialogue: A Discussion Between One and Zero," in *The Buddha Eye: An Anthology of the Kyoto School and its Contemporaries,* ed. Frederick Franck (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2004).

[147] Peter Herbstreuth calls similar attention to the mandala in this photograph when he notes that "one [of the elevator girls] is apparently located in the corner of a mandala, an ideal configuration, which exists only as an ideal image and concept. It is in this context that there arises the state between being awake and dreaming which is characteristic of many pictures": Herbstreuth, "Difference within the Sameness," 20.

[148] Shiner, "Fashion Altars, Performance Factors, and Pop Cells," 181.

a means of reaching their own transformed state of consciousness and being in the world (perhaps even one that views the women within it as making integral contributions to society).[149]

In another photograph, *Elevator Girl House B4*, which showcases the vague outline of a mandala ascending around an elevator shaft above a collection of seated and reclining elevator girls, Yanagi introduces an underwater effect: just above the heads of the elevator girls stands the transparent surface of a body of water, as if the women are submerged beneath it [Figure 17]. While this may at once symbolize a transitional moment in which the elevator girls have not yet broken the surface, or dividing line, between self and Other, it may also refer to the use of water to purify and ready the mind for transformation. Nearly all Shinto shrines and many Buddhist temples offer *temizuya*, or water fountains, for visitors to use as a means of washing away impurities before greeting the *kami* or resident Buddhas.[150]

Also suggesting a connection to Buddhist enlightenment and transformation are many of Yanagi's titles. With names such as *Aquajenne in Paradise*, *A Transient World, Before and After a Dream*, *Eternal City, Paradise Trespasser,* and *Midnight Awakening Dream*, Yanagi alludes to the ephemeral, transient nature of enlightenment, a Buddhist paradise in which one finds oneself in an ever-changing, present, in-between state, akin to the state of being between dreaming and awakening. In the process of attaining enlightenment, one comes to realize that the world of differentiated egos, objects, places, and discourses are not objective, but illusory. They represent a dream in which categories, identities, and objects are arbitrarily defined. The awakened, or enlightened, being of no-self recognizes that these definitions, forms, and modes of being are not fixed; rather, true reality is ephemeral and in a constant state of imminent renegotiation. This ephemeral nature, characterized by a state of "nothingness" (*mu*), extends to all things, including space, time, objects, and other human beings.

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[149] Many of the images are presented from a vantage point that situates the viewer within the photograph, as if he or she were also an elevator girl. This position lends to this idea that the viewer should use these images as a means to his or her own enlightenment.
[150] Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan*, 140.

As argued in Chapter Three, the surreal, empty spaces that Yanagi's elevator girls inhabit recall *tama-bako*, or "soul boxes," which impart upon their visitors sacred powers of renewal and transformation. These "soul boxes" of collapsed space and time that house their spiritual practitioners (here represented by the elevator girls) offer access to this comprehensive nothingness, in which the self breaks down the boundaries between self and society, self and objects, as well as self and environment. In other words, the process of reaching enlightenment involves deconstruction not only on a social level, but on a spatial level as well. Nishida Kitarō, a Kyoto School Zen Buddhist philosopher, describes this comprehensive interconnectedness between the self, society, and environment as the "place of nothingness" (*mu no basho*).[151]

This "place of nothingness" is also represented and referred to as "*ma*," or the void that houses the relationships between the binaries of subject/object, self/Other, self/society, and self/environment. As "the ground of all existence," Carl Olsen explains, "It is *ma,* an interval between two or more spatial or temporal things, that makes possible the coexistence of opposites, stands behind, and unites such opposites as being and nonbeing."[152] More than a place, *ma* is an experience of this void that allows for the interconnection of all things. Nitschke explains:

> The "void" in the Buddhist sense is not a concept arrived at by rational thought, but an expression of an incommunicable individual experience, accessible only to a person practicing meditation…The "experience of consciousness" is the "experience" of the "void", or "nothingness", or "emptiness". It is therefore not a philosophical or aesthetic concept, but a notion derived from personal experience, a notion both beside and beyond the experience of our physical world.[153]

To offer another perspective, *ma* may be considered a kind of transparent matrix. If one were to draw a series of lines on a piece of paper that connected all of the objects, individuals, discursive machinations, locations, and definitions in existence, the piece of paper containing this diagram would represent a rational view of the space that *ma* encompasses. This would only be a rational

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[151] Alicia Volk, *In Pursuit of Universalism: Yorozu Tetsugorō and Japanese Modern Art* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 129.
[152] Carl Olsen, *Zen and the Art of Postmodern Philosophy: Two Paths of Liberation from the Representational Mode of Thinking* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 12.
[153] Nitschke, "Ma—Place, Space, and Void," 59.

view, however, as it is the experience, the theoretical-corporeal living within this diagram that represents the true meaning of *ma*. To experience *ma* is to recognize that all of the connected dots constitute one another in their connection, and therefore these dots simultaneously exist, at the same time as they do not exist. Seeing the world from this theoretical and physical point of view is to see the world within *ma*; it is to see the world as it is from a state of enlightenment.

This mode of in-betweenness in the state of self-cultivation represents, particularly in Yanagi's photographs, a liminal stage of transition between dreaming and awakening. In his book *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Victor Turner describes this "in-between" stage, and the people within it, as characterized by a sense of ambiguity. He explains:

> ...this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions.[154]

He goes on to describe many of the attributes of this liminal persona. Of particular note in relation to Yanagi's photographs are a set of attributes characterizing submissiveness, passivity, and silence; in instances where there exist a group of individuals in the liminal stage, they may be dressed uniformly offering a sense of homogeneity. They may also be located "in a symbolic milieu that represent[s] both a grave and a womb."[155] Hence, Yanagi's homogeneously clad women, gathered in silent, cave-like dwellings (many of which present the underground floors of Japanese departments stores), offer a glimpse into what may be considered a kind of ritual process, in which the subjects stand between two stages of being: in this case, who the elevator girls were and who they will become. Indeed, these "soul boxes" that they stand within may be considered akin to Turner's "womb-like" spaces, from which the elevator girls will emerge anew.

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[154] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New Brunswick: Adeline Transaction, 1969), 95.
[155] Ibid., 96-107.

This liminal stage offers hints at a renewed, in this case, enlightened, liberated self and, thus, implies liberation and renewed empowerment for Yanagi's subjects, rather than a simple representation of alienated, victimized women. Having chosen a path of self-cultivation, these women work toward an enlightened position, from which they may more consciously and creatively enact and realize an empowered sense of self, one that is actively engaged within Japanese society, as well as the greater socio-political discourses taking place in contemporary Japan.

While many have been inclined to view this unanchored sense of reality, or "floating world" of unfixed selves, as a nihilistic conception toward, and position within, the world, Buddhism purports that it offers a more fulfilling realization of liberation, one that simultaneously implicates the transformative self within a society capable of equal transformation. Rather than considering the deconstruction of self a negative activity that removes the foundations of concrete identity (and thereby a platform for agency), one should consider this process a means of freeing oneself from psychological entrapments, which ultimately work to delimit and confine one's mobility and enactment of self within a continuously changing world.[156] In other words, it is the authority given to the ego, and all of the psychological attachments to this ego, that ends up regulating and incarcerating the self, in turn making it incapable of participating in and responding to society. To recognize this imprisonment and detach oneself from it through the shedding of egocentric assumptions is a form of freedom. As Zen Buddhist philosopher Masao Abe writes:

> Buddhist salvation is thus nothing other than an awakening to reality through the death of ego, i.e., the existential realization of the transiency common to all things in the universe, seeing the universe really *as it is*. In this realization one is liberated from undue attachment to things and ego-self, to humanity and world, and is then able to live and work creatively in the world. "Awakening" in Buddhism is never for a single instant ever in the slightest something other than, or separated from, the realization of universal transitoriness.[157]

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[156] Masao Abe, "God, Emptiness, and the True Self," in *The Buddha Eye: An Anthology of the Kyoto School and its Contemporaries,* ed. Frederick Franck (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2004), 64.
[157] Ibid., 53.

Hence, one awakens to freedom and enlightenment once one recognizes this world and the self as entities that are continuously constructed. From this standpoint the awakened individual may more creatively perform his or her own enactment of self. Furthermore, with the knowledge that this enactment of self, even on a mundane basis, ultimately engages all other phenomena, one may take notice of one's own power and position within the world.

It is significant that Yanagi originally conceived of this series as a performance in both her conception of the elevator girls as women performing a role, and her initial choice to present the elevator girls in a performance piece in her first exhibition at Art Space Niji in Kyoto in 1993. Discussing how she came up with the idea for *Elevator Girls* Yanagi stated:

> I lectured in art history and also taught about traditional textiles. As for artists teaching art history, there are people out there who can do it, but for me, I had the feeling that I was an actress performing a role. In a small classroom, I felt like an announcer telling the story of art history; that's when I first thought about elevator girls, who use ceremonial speech over and over all day long in even smaller boxes.[158]

Perhaps hoping to call attention to this performative element, Yanagi hired two models and set about building a realistic elevator within the gallery space. Her models, dressed as elevator girls, sat silent and still on a sofa in the middle of the gallery, while passersby peered in through the window from the street.[159] Eventually Yanagi moved to photography in order to gain more control of the process, finding it difficult to keep the models poised. "They got sick right in the middle of things, or anemic, and often they would just up and leave," Yanagi explained.[160] The photographs not only offered a way to keep this from interrupting the work, but also allowed Yanagi a means to create more elaborate environments.

Perhaps also supporting this interest in performativity is Yanagi's history with Takarazuka, an all-female theater troupe that featured young women performing both feminine and masculine roles. Raised by her mother and grandmother, the three of them frequented the Takarazuka theater

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[158] Nochlin, Otake, and Phillips, *Heavy Light*, 214.
[159] Ibid., 214.
[160] Ibid.

throughout her youth. At one point Yanagi's family even hoped that she would become a member of

the Revue.[161] Founded in 1913 by a railroad and department store tycoon, Kobayashi Ichizō,

Takarazuka offered audiences "a chance to dream of other lives in other worlds."[162] The fans, David

Elliot explains, enjoyed the theater for a number of reasons:

> There are varying interpretations of the attraction of Takarazuka for female audiences: the barely concealed lesbian subtexts of the plots; the perverse empowerment audience members experience in seeing women as "supermen"—beautiful agents of action and desire; or, more innocently (or perhaps naively), simply the pure fantasy and escapism of the genre.[163]

The female actors, consisting mostly of young women at the age of 19, trained in the art of studying

kata, or "technologies of gender," which involved learning intonations, stylized gestures, move-

ments, and speech patterns—elements of performance not unlike Yanagi's elevator girls who were

trained in greeting customers in polite manner and speech.[164] These cross-dressing performances,

as well as the cropped hair donned by the women impersonating men, challenged conventional

gender roles and sparked contemporary debates, which also featured concerns over the new mod-

ern girl, about "the meaning and significance of women."[165] Many fans used these debates over

Takarazuka and the modern girl to reject actively contemporary gender roles.[166]

In 1924 a new, larger Takarazuka Grand Theater was built in Tokyo, capable of seating

3,000 people. The theater (the largest of any Japanese theater in that period) comprised one part of

a larger entertainment complex that included a botanical garden, a library, an amusement park, a

spa, an entomology museum, an art museum, and a zoo.[167] While Yanagi disapproves of the roles

and plays that the Takarasiennes performed, claiming that they participated in "the construction of

'little girls'…based on female ideals created by Japanese men of the past: women who are loyal to

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[161] Uematsu, "Miwa Yanagi's Field of Vision," 125.
[162] Jennifer Robertson, *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 4-7.
[163] Elliot, "The Four Ages of Women, 69.
[164] Robertson, *Takarazuka*, 12.
[165] Ibid., 6.
[166] Ibid., 16.
[167] Ibid., 5.

their men and educated as a 'good wife, wise mother,'" it is hard to ignore the similarities between the "city in miniature" that she presents in her *Elevator Girls* series and the massive consumer Takurazuka complex that comprised a similar collection of museums, stores, and botanical gardens; not to mention that the Takarazuka Grand Theater was originally named "Paradise" before being renamed "Family Land" in 1960.[168]

While Yanagi makes clear that she is not a proponent of the types of roles and stories that the Takarazuka theater endorses, her series does imply an interest in the potential power and agency of performativity. Though Takarazuka, for Yanagi, may represent a collection of enactments and discourses that work to reinscribe and maintain traditional gender roles, the artist's *Elevator Girls* series presents an alternative stage upon which her female subjects may enact their own conceptions of self. Perhaps in response to Takarazuka, Yanagi offers the audience a similarly all-female cast; the elevator girls' uniforms and occupation mark their status as performers enacting a conventionally feminine role. Indeed, the elevator girl stands in as a metaphor for the performer. Even in real life, the customer who interacted with an elevator girl understood that she was *acting* as an extension of the department store, rather than as "herself." And just as an actress dispenses with any personality traits or attire that may belie an internal, "true" identity in order to take on the role of another, the elevator girl wears her uniform like a costume and similarly repeats a series of memorized lines for the sake of performing her job.

Whereas an actress performs for an audience in the same way that the elevator girl performs for a collection of customers, however, Yanagi's photographs offer scenes with neither an audience nor a throng of customers; rather, she displays a moment behind the scenes. Here the elevator girl performs for herself amongst a collection of other elevator girl-cum-actresses. Unlike the Takarazuka theater, Yanagi presents a scene where the women are not engaged in performing traditional gender roles; instead the elevator girls, offstage, take a moment to reflect, and as argued

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[168] Yanagi's quote can be found in: Yanagi, Interview with Gonzalez-Foerster and Obrist, 42; the name of the original theater and further information on its origins can be found in: Robertson, *Takarazuka*, 5.

throughout this chapter, participate in a process of self-production. In Yanagi's photographs, the elevator girls stands within a liminal stage, working upon herself in a process of self-cultivation as she learns her own implicated position within an ephemeral world that is defined by a series of intersecting discourses and enactments—all performed, all produced, all illusory. This moment of realization, both in conception and actualization, represent the manifold ways in which these women are ultimately entwined within their environments and communities. Indeed, what these photographs present is an image of the elevator girl not only participating in the act of defining herself, but her environment, society, and position within the cosmos as well. Hence, this is Yanagi's response to Takarazuka: instead of presenting a scene in which all of the roles are written *for* women, Yanagi presents a stage upon which write their own roles and places in the world.

In this way Yanagi's women represent a means by which women may enact stronger and more empowered performances of self. Instead of presenting this series as a collection intent on displaying, and thereby maintaining, the victimization of contemporary Japanese women by an external amalgamation of dominating global-capitalist, patriarchal forces, Yanagi's *Elevator Girls* offers glimmers of hope for female transformation, self-empowerment, and liberation. Indeed, just as her following series *My Grandmothers* (1999 – ongoing)*, Granddaughters* (2002 – ongoing), *Fairy Tale* (2004 – 2006)*,* and *Windswept Women* (2009) were meant to evoke, *Elevator Girls* offers a means for the audience to reflect on and reconsider the current status of Japanese women and gender roles. As argued throughout this thesis, Yanagi presents her *Elevator Girls* series as a comment on a world intent on reading victimization and objectification onto the female body, and provides an alternative method for understanding these women and the complex world within which they are ultimately entwined. She presents a world in which the lack of a core self does not necessarily read as an affront to one's dignity, nor as an inevitable elimination of agency, but rather offers a

more realistic and engaging means of negotiating being. And just as the elevator girls reflect on the objects, spaces, and forms presented within their environments as a means to accessing this agency, we are intended to view the photographs in this collection as a means to triggering our own enlightened means of engaging with these women and the world at large.

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APPENDIX

Figure 1. Murakami Takashi, *Tan Tan Bo*, 2001, acrylic on canvas mounted on board, 360 x 540 x 67 centimeters. Source: Galerie Perrotin, www.perrotin.com.

Figure 2. Morimura Yasumasa, *An Inner Dialogue with Frida Kahlo (Hand Shaped Earring)*, 2001, color photograph on canvas, 148.59 x 119.38 centimeters. Source: www.artsmia.org.

Figure 3. Morimura Yasumasa, *Olympia (Futago)*, 1988, chromogenic print with acrylic paint and gel medium, 210.19 x 299.72 centimeters. Source: San Francisco Museum of Contemporary Art, www.sfmoma.org.

Figure 4. Mori Mariko, *Mirror of Water*, 1996-1998, color photograph mounted with glass in five parts, overall dimensions 305 x 610 x 1.9 centimeters. Source: Phillips de Pury & Company, www.phillipsdepury.com.

Figure 5. Teraoka Masami, *Hanging Rock*, 1990, watercolor on paper, 83.2 x 118.7 centimeters. Source: Allen Memorial Art Museum of Oberlin College, www.oberlin.edu/amam/.

Figure 6. Yanagi Miwa, *Looking for the Next Story I*, 1996, chromogenic print, 180 x 720 centimeters. Source: www.yanagimiwa.net.

Figure 7. Kobayashi Kiyoshi, "A Modern Girl's Belongings," in *Manga Mangun*, 1928. Source: Barbara Sato, *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2003), 52.
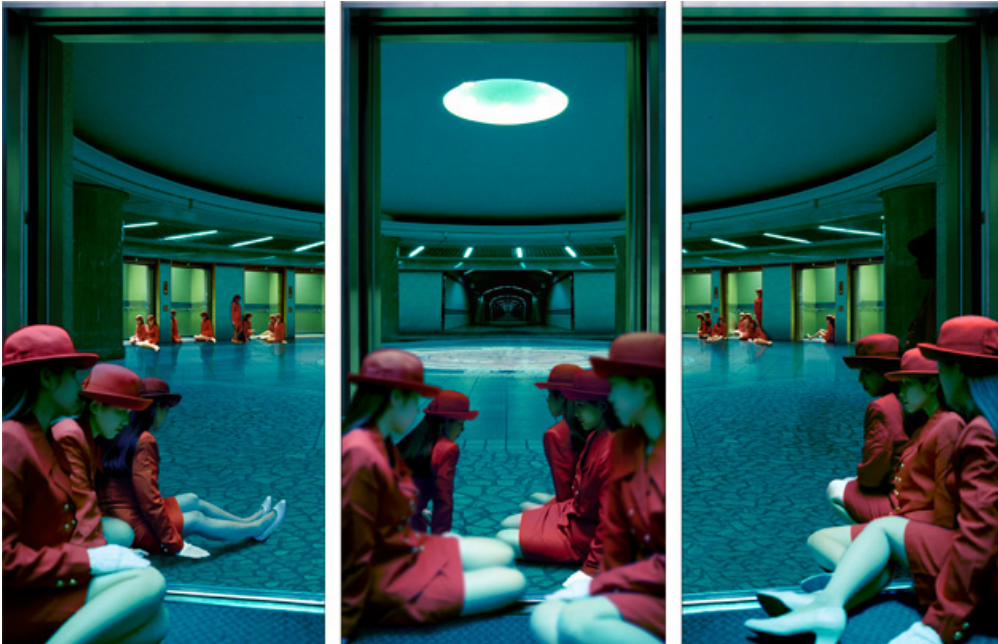

Figure 8. "Elevator girl in an office building," 1932. Source: Barbara Sato, *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2003), 122.

Figure 9. "Elevator girl in a department store," mid-1920s. Source: Barbara Sato, *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2003), 122.

Figure 10. Yanagi Miwa, *Aquajenne in Paradise II*, 1995, chromogenic print, overall dimensions 600 x 300 centimeters (200 x 100 centimeters each). Source: www.yanagimiwa.net.

Figure 11. Yanagi Miwa, *Information City: Fountain Garden / Woods of Shine / Elevator*, 1996, chromogenic print, overall dimensions 180 x 900 centimeters. Source: www.yanagimiwa.net.

Figure 12. Yanagi Miwa, *Before and After a Dream* (triptych), 1997, chromogenic print, dimensions unknown. Source: www.yanagimiwa.net.

Figure 13. Yanagi Miwa, *Midnight Awakening Dream*, 1999, chromogenic print, 180 x 1877.4 centi-meters. Source: Miwa Yanagi, *Elevator Girls: Miwa Yanagi*, Seigensha Art Publishing, 2007, 18-24.

Figure 14. Yanagi Miwa, *Looking for the Next Story II*, 1994, chromogenic print, dimensions un-known. Source: www.yanagimiwa.net.

Figure 15. Yanagi Miwa, *Aquajenne in Paradise I*, 1994, chromogenic print, dimensions unknown. Source: www.yanagimiwa.net.

Figure 16. Yanagi Miwa, *Elevator Girl House B3*, 1997 chromogenic print, 180 x 450 centimeters. Source: www.yanagimiwa.net.

Figure 17. Yanagi Miwa, *Elevator Girl House B4*, 1998, chromogenic print, 200 x 240 centimeters. Source: www.yanagimiwa.net.

Figure 18. Yanagi Miwa, *Elevator Girl House*, 1995, chromogenic print, 71 x 179.5 centimeters. Source: www.yanagimiwa.net.

Figure 19. Yanagi Miwa, *Eternal City I*, 1998, chromogenic print, 180 x 360 centimeters. Source: www.yanagimiwa.net.

Figure 20. Yanagi Miwa, *A Street with Maps*, 1997, chromogenic print, 180 x 375.6 centimeters. Source: www.yanagimiwa.net.

Figure 21. Yanagi Miwa, *Eternal City II*, 1998, chromogenic print, dimensions unknown. Source: www.yanagimiwa.net.

Figure 22. Yanagi Miwa, *Elevator Girl House 3F*, 1998, chromogenic print, 180 x 213 centimeters. Source: www.yanagimiwa.net.
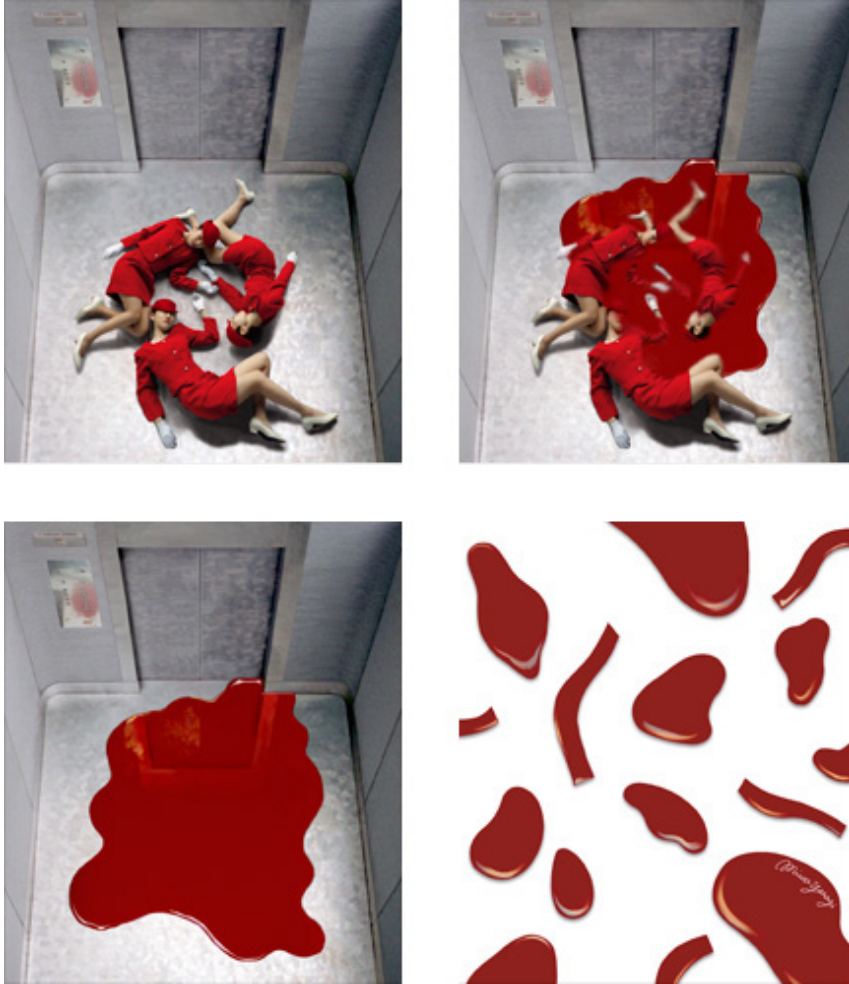
Figure 23. Yanagi Miwa, *White Casket*, 1994, chromogenic print, overall dimentions 360 x 308 centimeters (90 x 77 centimeters each). Source: www.yanagimiwa.net.

Figure 24. Mitsukoshi department store wrapping paper. Source: http://blogs.yahoo.co.jp/sakainaoki1947/55514433.html.

Figure 25. Yanagi Miwa, *Paradise Trespasser II*, 1998, chromogenic print, 180 centimeters in diameter. Source: www.yanagimiwa.net.