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*The Lolita Complex:
A Japanese Fashion Subculture
& its Paradoxes*

“The Lolita Complex: A Japanese Fashion Subculture and its Paradoxes”

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Attestation of Authorship

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

Kathryn A. Hardy Bernal

30 May 2011

Contents

Attestation of Authorship	1
Contents	2
List of Illustrations	5
Acknowledgements	15
Abstract	17
Introduction:	19
<i>What is the Lolita Subculture?</i>	20
Literature Review	27
Methodology	37
<i>Researching from an Insider's Point of View</i>	41
Chapter One: <i>The Origins of the Lolita Movement</i>	49
1.1 <i>The Lolita Subculture</i>	50
1.2 <i>The Lolita Fashion Identity</i>	54
<i>The Classic Lolita</i>	55
<i>The Gothic Lolita</i>	57
<i>The Sweet Lolita</i>	62
1.3 <i>Mana, Malice Mizer and the Emergence of the Lolita Subculture</i>	67
1.4 <i>Japan and the Western World</i>	74
<i>Early Encounters in Art & Design Between Japan and The Western World</i>	76
<i>Japan's History and Non-history with the Outside World: 1185 – 1868</i>	77
<i>Japonisme and Gothic Revivalism</i>	79
1.5 <i>Twentieth-century Collaborations Between Japan and the Western World</i>	93

1.6 <i>Visual Kei and the Lolita Subculture</i>	107
1.7 <i>The Lolita Fashion Industry</i>	119
1.8 <i>Lolita and Popular Culture</i>	124
Chapter Two: <i>The Japanese Lolita: A Living Doll</i>	132
2.1 <i>Japanese Traditional and Psychological Relationships with Ningyō</i>	133
2.2 <i>The Significance of Ningyō Culture in Japan</i>	138
2.3 <i>Psychological Connections with Ningyō: Loss, Trauma and Bereavement</i>	145
2.4 <i>A Means to Escape the Real World</i>	156
2.5 <i>Infantilising a Nation: The Kawaii Phenomenon</i>	161
2.6 <i>A Fear of the Future</i>	165
2.7 <i>Disdain for the Lolita Look</i>	169
Chapter Three: <i>Challenging the Lolita Complex</i>	172
3.1 <i>Lolita, Sexuality and the Symbol of the Perpetual Child</i>	173
3.2 <i>Gender Relations in Japan</i>	181
3.3 <i>Confronting a Patriarchal Hegemony</i>	183
3.4 <i>Being a Woman in Japan</i>	186
<i>The Shifting Position of Woman in Contemporary Japan</i>	188
3.5 <i>The Position of Woman in Historical Japan</i>	192
3.6 <i>Lolita as a New Form of Feminist Resistance</i>	194
3.7 <i>The Victorian Cult of the Little Girl</i>	197
3.8 <i>Defying the Lolita Complex</i>	203
3.9 <i>Lolita as a Radical Subculture</i>	210
3.10 <i>Resisting the Power of Pornography</i>	214
3.11 <i>The Lolita as Princess Regnant</i>	229

3.12 <i>The Means to Shock</i>	235
Conclusion: <i>The Death of a Subculture?</i>	241
<i>Is this the Beginning or the End?</i>	242
Bibliography	255
References	273

List of Illustrations

- Figure 1: *Baby the Stars Shine Bright (BTSSB, Japanese label), Little Red Riding Hood, 2006. 100% cotton broadcloth appliqué dress and hooded cape (red).*
http://hellolace.net/wardrobe/baby/2006/op/baby_op_redhood_color.jpg 21
- Figure 2: *Baby the Stars Shine Bright (BTSSB, Japanese label), Little Red Riding Hood, 2006. 100% cotton broadcloth appliqué dress (red).*
http://hellolace.net/wardrobe/baby/2006/op/baby_op_redhood_add3.jpg 21
- Figure 3: *Baby the Stars Shine Bright (or BTSSB, Japanese label), Little Red Riding Hood, 2006. 100% cotton broadcloth appliqué dress (red) (detail).*
http://hellolace.net/wardrobe/baby/2006/op/baby_op_redhood_add4.jpg 22
- Figure 4: *Baby the Stars Shine Bright (or BTSSB, Japanese label), Little Red Riding Hood, 2006. 100% cotton broadcloth appliqué dress (red) (detail).*
http://hellolace.net/wardrobe/baby/2006/op/baby_op_redhood_add7.jpg 22
- Figure 5: Kathryn Adèle Hardy Bernal, *Hinako (age 19), Sweet Lolita (wearing Vivienne Westwood Rocking-horse Ballerina shoes), Shinjuku, Tokyo, Japan, 2007.* 23
- Figure 6: *Nicky Love and Kathy Hardy, "Cultist Images", Vogue (Australia) (November 1983), p. 53.* 47
- Figure 7: *Manifesteange Metamorphose temps de fille (Japanese label), Autumn/Winter Collection, 2004. In Rococo 1(2004): 115.* 56
- Figure 8: Kathryn Adèle Hardy Bernal, *Yuki (age 19), Gothic Lolita, Jingu Bashi, Harajuku, Tokyo, Japan, 2007.* 58

- Figure 9: Paul Michael Moon Rogers, *Kathryn Hardy Bernal, Gothic Lolita (wearing Gothic, Lolita + Punk, Japanese label), with James Percy, WE Block, AUT University, Auckland, New Zealand, 2008.* 59
- Figure 10: James George Stratton Percy, *Vivien Masters, Gothic Lolita, holding a Japanese Pullip Moon doll from Kathryn Hardy Bernal's personal collection (both wearing designs, titled Evangeline, by Angie Finn, 2007), WM Block, AUT University, Auckland, New Zealand, 2009.* 61
- Figure 11: Masayuki Yoshinaga, *Akimi (age 24) and Princess (age 21), Sweet Lolita (wearing Angelic Pretty, Japanese label).* In Masayuki Yoshinaga and Katsuhiko Ishikawa, *Gothic & Lolita* (London: Phaidon, 2007). 63
- Figure 12: Bevan K. Y. Chuang, *Yuko Kino (age 23), Country Lolita, Laforet Shopping Centre, Harajuku, Tokyo, 2007.* 64
- Figure 13: *Sweet Lolita (wearing Angelic Pretty, Japanese label).*
<http://miki-in-wonderland.tumblr.com/post/3297913708> 65
- Figure 14: *Kathryn Hardy Bernal (wearing own design, titled Amorette, constructed from Japanese textiles, 2007), WM Block, AUT University, Auckland, New Zealand, 2009. 100% cotton Sweet Labyrinth (Cosmo Textile Co., Ltd.).* 66
- Figure 15: *Malice Mizer.*
<http://isshoniodoru.blogspot.com/2010/05/my-most-listened-to-jrockers-by-marcia.html> 68
- Figure 16: *Mana modelling as a Gothic Lolita for his fashion label Moi-même-Moitié.* In *Gothic & Lolita Bible 23* (Japan) (Winter, 2006): 27. 69
- Figure 17: *Mana modelling as a Gothic Aristocrat for his fashion label Moi-même-Moitié.* In *Gothic & Lolita Bible 23* (Japan) (Winter, 2006): 26. 70

- Figure 18: James Abbott McNeil Whistler, *Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Peacock Room*, 1876 – 1877.
http://www.ginacolliasuzuki.com/japanese_prints/ 82
- Figure 19: Andō Hiroshige, *Peacock and Peonies*, c. 1840s – 1850s.
http://www.roningallery.com/japanese-prints-uvew/Hiroshige-Peacock-and-Peony-Flowers.php?srch_price=5&y=1&pid=9662&pg=1&ppp=100 82
- Figure 20: James Abbott McNeil Whistler, *Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Peacock Room* (detail), 1876 – 1877.
<http://www.1st-art-gallery.com/James-Abbott-Mcneill-Whistler/Peacock-Room.html> 82
- Figure 21: Japanese *Satsuma* faience vase and stand (published in George Ashdown Audsley's *The Ceramic Art of Japan*, 1875). In Linda Merrill, *the Peacock Room: A Cultural Biography* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998) p. 240. 83
- Figure 22: James Abbott McNeil Whistler, *Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Peacock Room* (detail), 1876 – 1877.
http://www.mariabuszek.com/kcai/Design%20History/Exam1_gallery1.htm 83
- Figure 23: James Abbott McNeil Whistler, *Rose and Silver: The Princess from the Land of Porcelain (La Princesse du Pays de la Porcelaine)*, 1863 – 1864.
http://www.hesitationwaltz.com/2009_10_01_archive.html 83
- Figure 24: Katsugawa Shunshō (orig. published 1775). In George Audsley and Thomas Cutler, *The Grammar of Japanese Ornament* (New York: Arch Cape Press, 1989), p. 117. 83
- Figure 25: Claude Monet, *La Japonaise*, 1875.
<http://educators.mfa.org/galleries/slideshow/970> 84

- Figure 26: Claude Monet, *Waterlilies and Japanese Bridge*, c. 1899.
http://www.ask.com/wiki/Armory_show 84
- Figure 27: Andō Hiroshige, *Kyobashi and the Bamboo Bank of the Samida River, One Hundred Views of Famous Places in Edo*, 1857. Woodblock print.
<http://www.hiroshige.org.uk/hiroshige/influences/whistler.htm> 84
- Figure 28: James Abbott McNeil Whistler, *Nocturne in Blue and Gold: Old Battersea Bridge*, c. 1872 – 1875.
<http://www.hiroshige.org.uk/hiroshige/influences/whistler.htm> 84
- Figure 29: Aubrey Beardsley, *How King Arthur Saw the Questing Beast*, 1893.
<http://dailyartist.blogspot.com/2011/01/aubrey-beardsley-august-21-1872-march.html> 85
- Figure 30: Aubrey Beardsley, Frontispiece to *The Wonderful History of Virgilius the Sorcerer of Rome* (published by David Nutt), 1893.
<http://xaxor.com/oil-paintings/662-aubrey-beardsley-1872-1898.html> 85
- Figure 31: John Ross, *Grey Towers*, Nunthorpe, Middlesborough, 1865 – 1867. In Susan Weber Soros, *E. W. Godwin: Aesthetic Movement Architect and Designer* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 202. 86
- Figure 32: E. W. Godwin, Wallpaper for *Grey Towers*, 1874. In Susan Weber Soros, *E. W. Godwin: Aesthetic Movement Architect and Designer* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 203. 87
- Figure 33: Japanese *Mon* crests (published in Thomas W. Cutler's *A Grammar of Japanese Ornament and Design*, London: B. T. Batsford, 1880). In George Audsley and Thomas Cutler, *The Grammar of Japanese Ornament* New York: Arch Cape Press, 1989), p. 69 87

- Figure 34: E. W. Godwin, Designs for coffee tables for *Grey Towers*, 1874. In Susan Weber Soros, *E. W. Godwin: Aesthetic Movement Architect and Designer* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 204. 88
- Figure 35: E. W. Godwin, *Anglo-Japanese cabinet*, 1877 – 1880.
<http://metaversearts.wordpress.com/2010/11/01/ekphrasis-eliza-wierwight/> 89
- Figure 36: Katsushika Hokusai, *The Great Wave off Kanagawa, Thirty-six views of Mount Fuji*, c. 1830s. Woodblock print.
<http://randomknowledge.wordpress.com/2008/05/22/the-great-wave-off-kanagawa/> 91
- Figure 37: *Malice Mizer: The Gacket Era (1995 – 1999)*.
<http://jrockrae.wordpress.com/band-profiles-m-z/malice-mizer/> 94
- Figure 38: *Adam Ant (Stuart Goddard) of Adam and the Ants (1977 – 1982)*.
<http://kajivar.tumblr.com/post/1050112920/gothiccharmschool-adam-ant-from-stand-and> 94
- Figure 39: *Kōzi, guitarist for Malice Mizer (1992 – 2001)*.
<http://clinically-cynical.com/LotusGardens/kozi.htm> 95
- Figure 40: *David Bowie in 1980*. In Pearce Marchbank, *Bowiepix* (London: Omnibus Press, 1983). 95
- Figure 41: *David Bowie as Aladdin Sane (1973)*.
<http://www.virginmedia.com/music/pictures/toptens/defining-moments-rock.php?ssid=14> 95
- Figure 42: *Ukyō (Kami) Kamimura, drummer for Malice Mizer (1993 – 1999), (b. 1 February 1973 – d. 21 June, 1999)*.
http://www.last.fm/group/Visual+kei/forum/10634/_/202264 95

- Figure 43: *Yū~Ki, bassist for Malice Mizer (1992 – 2001).*
<http://blog.goo.ne.jp/dixxxdix/e/f8250bd168ddd0394b16009347bd0d1d> 96
- Figure 44: *Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood, The Pirate Collection (Autumn/Winter 1981).*
<http://lyricsdog.eu/s/vivienne%20westwood%20pirate%20collection> 96
- Figure 45: *Kiss, dressed by Larry LeGaspi, 1972. In Mablen Jones, Getting it On: The Clothing of Rock 'n' Roll (New York: Abbeville Press, 1987), p. 124.* 97
- Figure 46: *David Bowie as Ziggy Stardust, dressed by Kansai Yamamoto, 1973.*
<http://www.5years.com/Gall10.htm> 98
- Figure 47: *David Bowie with the designer Kansai Yamamoto in 1973, wearing the Space Samurai costume for Aladdin Sane, influenced by Nob theatre and science fiction.*
<http://www.5years.com/costume2.htm> 100
- Figure 48: *Versailles Philharmonic Quintet (formed in 2007).*
<http://fvtemplates.com/oto/versailles-band-jasmine> 108
- Figure 49: *Gazette (formed in 2002).*
<http://jrockworld-leo.blogspot.com/2011/02/gazette.html> 108
- Figure 50: *Dir en Grey (formed in 2006).*
<http://dietchthrall.wordpress.com/2008/11/27/dir-en-grey-joining-mindless-self-indulgence-on-uk-ireland-tour-dates/> 109
- Figure 51: *BLOOD (formed in 2002).*
<http://jrock-utilidades.blogspot.com/2007/10/blood.html> 109
- Figure 52: *Mois Dix Mois with Mana in the foreground (formed in 2002).*
<http://tmth.webs.com/apps/photos/photo?photoid=43514297> 110
- Figure 53: *Moon Kana.*
<http://sweet6616-lolita.buzznet.com/user/photos/kana/?id=43545651> 110

- Figure 54: *Xodiack (formed in 2009).*
<http://shattered-tranquility.net/index.php/tags/xodiack/> 111
- Figure 55: *Deadly Doll (aka Layla Gordon) and Azadeh Safaei of the UK band RazorBladeKisses (formed in 2000).*
<http://www.myspace.com/deadlyd0ll> 111
- Figure 56: *Victorian Maiden (Japanese label).*
<http://xojapan.jp/portal/victorian-maiden/> 120
- Figure 57: *Baby the Stars Shine Bright (Japanese label).*
<http://www.shopplr.com/2009/12/baby-the-stars-shine-bright-japanese-lolita-fashion-in-san-francisco/> 121
- Figure 58: *Kyoko Fukada as Momoko Ryugasaki in Shimotsuma Monogatari, 2004.*
<http://torrentbutler.eu/26275-kamikaze-girls> 122
- Figure 59: *Cover of the English-language graphic-novel version of Kamikaze Girls (Shimotsuma Monogatari), 2006.* 124
- Figure 60: *Le Portrait de Petite Cossette, artwork for anime, 2004.*
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/30452583@N04/2985114685/in/photostream> 126
- Figure 61: *Le Portrait de Petite Cossette graphic-novel manga, Chap. 2, Vol. 1, 2004.*
http://www.mangafox.com/manga/note_the_real_name_is_petite_cossette_we_write_like_that_in_french/v01/c002/6.html 126
- Figure 62: *Cover of the English-language graphic-novel version of Rozen Maiden, Vol. 1, 2003.* 127
- Figure 63: *Shinku, Rozen Maiden Träumend Pullip doll, 2006.*
<http://dollsdiary.tripod.com/pullip> 127
- Figure 64: *Suigintou, Rozen Maiden Träumend Pullip doll, 2007.*
http://www.anime-oz.com/action_figures/rozen/suiginpull.html 127

- Figure 65: *Suigintou, Rozen Maiden Träumend anime still, 2004.*
<http://anime-club.mindenkilapja.hu/gallery/19814617/renderimage/7179933/> 127
- Figure 66: *Princess Resurrection anime still, Ep. 1: Princess Resurrection, 2007.*
<http://thegeereview.com/2008/06/anime-princess-resurrection/> 128
- Figure 67: *Princess Resurrection graphic-novel manga, Chap. 1: Princess Resurrection, Vol. 1, 2007.* 128
- Figure 68: *Princess Ai graphic-novel manga, Chap. 15, Vol. 3: Evolution, 2006.* 128
- Figure 69: *Princess Ai graphic novel manga, coloured insert page, 2006.*
<http://animekawaiiimages.blogspot.com/2009/06/princess-ai.html> 128
- Figure 70: Nori Tomizaki, *Strings*, digital painting, c. 2004 – 2006. In Ricorico (Yuri Okamoto and Rico Komanoya). *Gothic Lolita Punk: A Stunning Showcase of the Cutting-edge Work from the Best Gothic Lolita Artists Working Today*. Translated by Toru Moriya and Corene Cook. New York: Harper Collins, p. 141. 131
- Figure 71: Nori Tomizaki, *Kyuntai Kansetsu Shiki (ball-jointed type): Tomoe 2* (photographer Asuka Ishii, model Tomoe), digitally manipulated photograph, c. 2004 – 2006. In Ricorico (Yuri Okamoto and Rico Komanoya). *Gothic Lolita Punk: A Stunning Showcase of the Cutting-edge Work from the Best Gothic Lolita Artists Working Today*. Translated by Toru Moriya and Corene Cook. New York: Harper Collins, p. 153. 131
- Figure 72: Masayuki Yoshinaga, *Toma (age 22), Classic Lolita (wearing her own designs for herself and her Super Dollfie, for her label Domakan Mother Goose), on the overbridge above the Jingu Bashi, Harajuku, Tokyo, Japan.* In Masayuki Yoshinaga and Katsuhiko Ishikawa, *Gothic & Lolita* (London: Phaidon, 2007). 134

- Figure 73: *Hina-nagashi*. In *Wakayama-City*, Sight-seeing Guide. 147
- Figure 74: Kathryn Adèle Hardy Bernal, *Japanese Gothic & Lolita Pullip, Namu and Taeyang Dolls*, 2007. My private collection. 151
- Figure 75: *Hentai Lolicon*, <http://www.plecomi.net/Fastball-king-hentai-chokudo-kan-pr-3185.html> 184
- Figure 76: Thomas Cooper Gotch, *My Crown and Sceptre*, 1891, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Thomas_Cooper_Gotch_-_My_Crown_And_Sceptre_1891.jpg 198
- Figure 77: Thomas Cooper Gotch, *The Child Enthroned*, 1894, <http://www.goodart.org/2004/11/gotch-revived.html> 198
- Figure 78: Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, *Evelyn Hatch*, 1879. Photograph printed on emulsion on curved glass, overpainted in oil (by an unknown hand). In Stephanie Lovett Stoffel, *Lewis Carroll and Alice* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1997), p. 47. 199
- Figure 79: Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, *Alice Pleasance Liddell as a Beggar-child*, c. 1850s. In Stephanie Lovett Stoffel, *Lewis Carroll and Alice* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1997), p. 57. 200
- Figure 80: Sir John Tenniel, *The White Queen*, Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass: And What Alice Found There*, 1871. <http://quantumperspectives.blogspot.com/> 204
- Figure 81: *Angelic Pretty* (Japanese label), *Alice* collection. In *Gothic & Lolita Bible 23* (Japan) (Winter, 2006): 40. 205
- Figure 82: *Mana*, musician (*Malice Mizer* and *Moi Dix Mois*) and Fashion Designer (*Moi-même-Moitié*). In *Gothic & Lolita Bible 14* (Japan) (2004): 16. 211

- Figure 83: *Lolicon*, <http://blogs.neoseeker.com/RabidChinaGirl/314-iowa-man-faces-20-years-in-prison-for-loli-manga/> 215
- Figure 84: *Lolicon*, <http://www.sankakucomplex.com/2009/05/02/lolicon-stalks-9-year-old-before-i-knew-it-i-was-doing-it/> 216
- Figure 85: *Lolicon*, <http://cultureservedraw.blogspot.com/2010/05/chasing-lolita-sexualisation-of-child.html> 217
- Figure 86: *Lolicon*, <http://littleangelshentai.net/wiki/index.php?title=Lolikon> 217
- Figure 87: *Gothloli Lolicon*, <http://www.hentai-foundry.com/pic-16377.php> 218
- Figure 88: *Gothloli Lolicon*, <http://www.crunchyroll.com/forumtopic-142372/do-you-like-lolicons?pg=70> 218
- Figure 89: Bevan K. Y. Chuang, *Tama and Mae (both age 21), Jingu Bashu, Harajuku, Tokyo*, 2007. 223
- Figure 90: *Princess Resurrection graphic-novel manga (page detail), featuring Hime and Flandre, Chap 2: Princess Destruction, Vol. 1*, 2007. 230

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Abstract

My thesis investigates complex issues implied by and connected with the Japanese movement known generally as Gothic & Lolita (G&L), focussing specifically on the Lolita fashion-based subculture and psychological motivations behind it.

It discusses the transmigration of the movement's ideas from Eastern to Western to Eastern societies, including differing cultural interpretations of "Lolita" and their implications in terms of the Lolita phenomenon, while examining ideologies in context with conflicting connotations and paradoxes that arise from a label that combines perceptions about "Lolita" with the "Gothic". It also addresses the "Lolita Complex", a term that stems from the narrative of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* and is applied to a syndrome affecting older men and their attraction to young girls, and explores its associations with the Lolita subculture. The *Lolita Complex*, as the title of this thesis, also refers to the problematic complexities connected with and inferred by the movement.

This thesis is multi-disciplinary. Although the emphasis is related to Fashion (or Design) History and Theory, my research also spans the fields of Subcultural Theory, Gothic Studies, Gender Studies, Asian Studies and Anthropology. It leans, though, more to the "theoretical" side, while my

methodological approach relates closely to Analytic or Psychoanalytic Art History, based on my education and training as an Art and Design theorist.

As such, this study is an analysis of the Japanese Lolita subculture. It is my theory or my reading of this cultural phenomenon, supported by evidence to state the overriding argument that the Lolita movement is symbolic of and represents a generation of young women who refuse to enter adulthood and “grow up”.

Introduction

This thesis is an investigation into the Japanese movement known generally as Gothic & Lolita (G&L), focussing specifically on the fashion-based subculture of the Lolita.

The name “Lolita” is immediately synonymous with the heroine and title of Vladimir Nabokov’s 1955 novel. Whilst Nabokov’s Lolita dwells within and hangs as a spectre over this topic this thesis is not about her *per se*. It is about a movement that takes its name from this character but reflects little in intention, I argue, to either Nabokov’s narrative or to the nature of the Nabokovian Lolita. Equally significant, this project is not merely a history of the Lolita subculture.

My thesis leans more towards Theory than History. Although I visit a history of the Lolita phenomenon, in order to set up and provide background to this study; to allow for an understanding of where and how this movement has arisen; and what it actually is; this is my theory about Lolita. Essentially my thesis is a reading of the Japanese Lolita subculture through which I critically examine the complex issues implied by and connected with it, while analysing the psychology behind and motivations toward participation in this movement. In a sense it is my philosophy on the Cult of the Lolita.

What is the Lolita Subculture?

The Lolita subculture is a fashion-based movement, originating in Japan but also visible worldwide, whereby adolescent girls or young adult women dress as children or dolls. The “Lolita” or Gothloli (Jap. *Gosurori*, or Gothic Lolita) is the face of this phenomenon, which pertains to a larger Japanese movement known generally as Gothic & Lolita (or G&L).

The style of the Gothloli is influenced by clothing of the Rococo, Romantic and Victorian periods. It is based on the spirit of “Gothick”^{*} or Neo-Gothicism, associated with Neo-Romanticism, Victorian mourning garb (particularly for the little girl), and inspired by historical dolls’ dresses and children’s wear, as well as nineteenth-century depictions of young girls in fiction, especially the illustrations of Alice by Sir John Tenniel for Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*. At times garments are decorated with *Alice* characters or motifs portraying Western-Gothic fairytale figures from stories such as *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Little Red Riding Hood* (Figs 1 – 4).

^{*} “Gothick” was the term used in the nineteenth-century to distinguish between Victorian Gothic (or Neo-gothicism) and actual Gothic (from the Medieval Period).

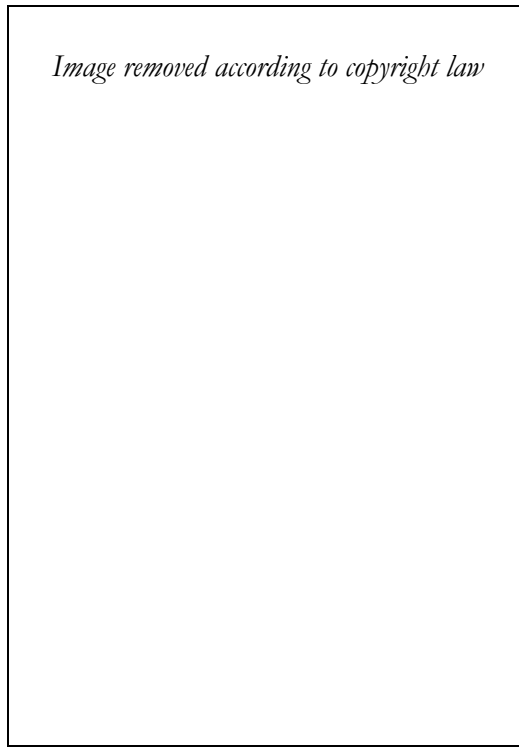


Figure 1: *Baby the Stars Shine Bright (or BTSSB, Japanese label)*
Little Red Riding Hood, appliqué dress and hooded cape (red), 2006

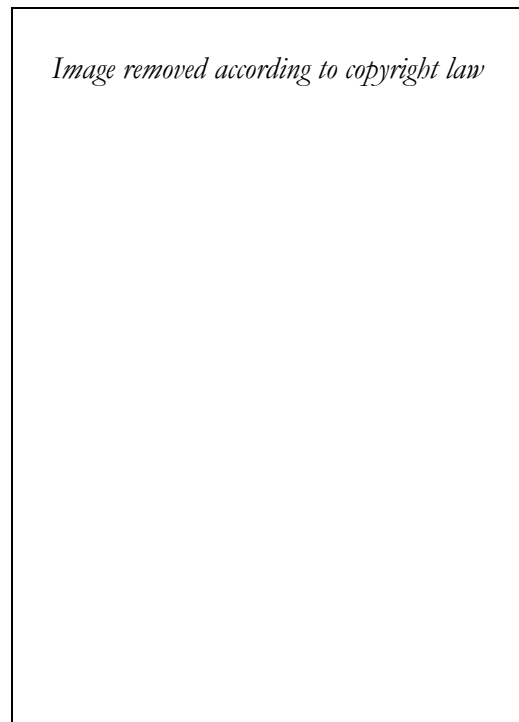


Figure 2: *Baby the Stars Shine Bright (or BTSSB, Japanese label)*
Little Red Riding Hood, appliqué dress (red), 2006



Figure 3: *Baby the Stars Shine Bright (or BTSSB, Japanese label)*

Detail: Little Red Riding Hood, appliqu  dress (red), 2006

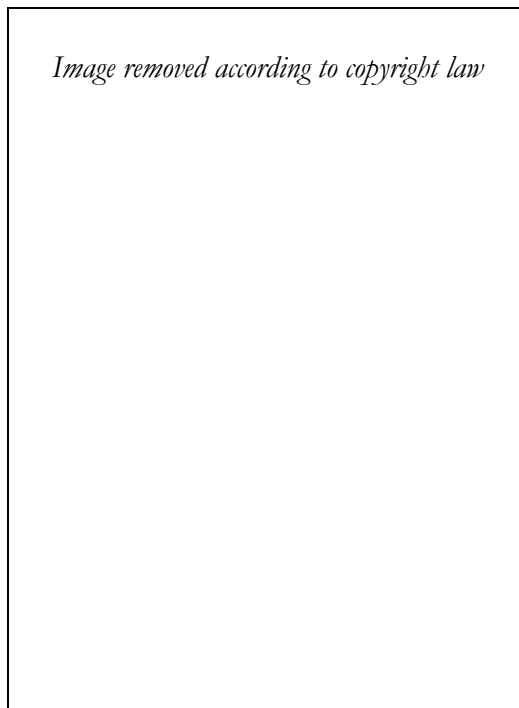


Figure 4: *Baby the Stars Shine Bright (or BTSSB, Japanese label)*

Detail: Little Red Riding Hood, appliqu  dress (red), 2006

The Gothlioli taste thus demonstrates a predilection for layers of bloomers, petticoats, panniers, aprons, pinafores and ruffles, topped with bonnets, bows, miniature hats, Victorian-style headdresses, and often completed with parasols, Mary-Jane shoes or platform boots. A particular penchant in footwear is Vivienne Westwood's Rocking-horse Ballerina style, a hybrid design that appropriates the traditional Japanese *geta*, fusing its raised sole with the ribbon-tied ballet slipper (Fig. 5). The total appearance is a confectionary of frills, lace, broderie anglaise, ribbons, bows and embroidery, combining to create an image resembling that of a child/doll.



Figure 5: Kathryn Hardy Bernal

Hinako (age 19), Sweet Lolita (wearing Vivienne Westwood Rocking-horse Ballerina shoes)

Shinjuku, Tokyo, Japan, 2007

Taking into consideration the stylistic elements overall, the Child/Doll image of the Gothloli in its purist, classical form is determined to be modest, childlike, cute, pretty and aristocratic, and is often referred to as princess-like. To be Lolita also involves somewhat childish, “princess” behaviour in relation to activities such as playing dress-ups and attending dolly tea parties.

It is this endeavour towards innocence by most Lolita participants,* coupled with the Gothloli’s childlike habits, that leads me to read the subculture as representative of generations of young women who, for various reasons, refuse to “grow up”. This is the major statement that I make in this thesis.

These childlike aspects also suggest for many critics that the Lolita subculture is infantile and therefore trivial. However, the Lolita phenomenon should not be considered insignificant, passed off as simply an endeavour to make a fashion statement, nor investigated as just another fashion trend. As the most visible expression of most forms of resistant subculture, in terms of a revolt against institutionalised society, a symptom of cultural transition and malaise, and a reaction born of crisis, tends to be its fashion style, so it is with Lolita.

* This is the classic intention of the subculture. I have written “most” as the original, authentic motivations toward and reputation of the movement have been influenced and tainted by the sex industry, which has subsumed and debased the Gothloli image. This is explained further and investigated in Chapter Three.

Lolita fashion may appear innocent enough but it still has the capacity to shock. One reason for this is that, although the Gothloli's appearance is intended to come across as innocent, sweet and respectable, it is often viewed as fetishist and thus connected with overt sexuality (an attitude which I argue is a misinterpretation or misunderstanding of participants' motivations). Another cause is the connotation of the label "Lolita", especially in connection with Nabokovian terminology. This innocent/sexual dichotomy is one of the major paradoxes of the Lolita phenomenon.

While the focus of this thesis is an investigation into the various complexities surrounding the Cult of the Lolita, all exploration ultimately leads to asking and addressing the same question, "What motivates one towards membership of this subculture and choosing the Perpetual Child/Doll identity?".

This thesis is broken up into three main chapters: "The Origins of the Lolita Movement", "The Japanese Lolita: A Living Doll", and "Challenging the Lolita Complex". Chapter One, while it is a history of the evolution of Japanese G&L and the Lolita subcultures, tracing developments that go all the way back to traditional roots, does not represent the usual type of grand narrative. This section critically examines and analyses historical connections, interrelationships and collaborations, between Western and Japanese artists and designers, recognising the omission of Japan in

established trajectories, and rewriting the teleology to include Japan's position. This first chapter sets up a foundation for approaching Chapters Two and Three, the crux of the thesis, which investigate ideologies pertaining to the Japanese Lolita subculture.

Chapter Two looks at the phenomenon's connections to and relationships with the Doll. It examines the history and meaning of doll culture in Japan, including Japanese superstitions about dolls, the psychology behind an attachment to dolls, and motivations for collecting dolls, while analysing the doll-like image of the Lolita and what dressing as a doll in Japan implies.

Chapter Three takes these perceptions about the Lolita doll-like image further by critiquing the position of the Gothloli as a sexualised identity. This section unpacks the sexual connotations of Lolita, its connections and non-connections with Nabokovian terminology and associations with the syndrome known as the "Lolita Complex", exploring how the subculture, in fact, paradoxically deflects this sexualised position and, as such, can be observed as a new feminist movement.

The concluding chapter, "The Death of a Subculture?" raises questions about Lolita's current position and the possible future for this phenomenon.

Literature Review

The intention of this thesis is to investigate the Japanese movement known as Gothic & Lolita (G&L) while the major focus is on examining the fashion-based girls' subculture of the Lolita, an offshoot of the main movement but also a phenomenon in its own right, whereby young women dress as children/dolls.

The three overarching main areas of research, or themes, are:

1. A history of the movement as a Neo-gothic subculture:

- a. What it is;
- b. What it encompasses, incorporates;
- c. When and how it came into existence;
- d. Its evolution from historic roots;
- e. Its position as a Neo-gothic movement;
- f. Japan's place in Neo-gothic history and New-romantic origins;

2. Psychological motivations towards participation in this subculture and what the subculture reflects in regard to these aspects:

- a. Why girls choose to belong to this movement and how members perceive their involvement;

- b. How the subculture is perceived by outsiders;
- c. What participation in the movement reflects;
- d. The relationship of dolls and doll culture to the movement;
- e. Japan's traditional and historical connections with dolls;
- f. The psychological inferences of dressing as a doll;
- g. The implications of adults who collect and or play with dolls;
- h. The psychology behind *kawaii*, or *kawaisa* (cuteness) and its connections with the doll-like image of the Lolita;

3. The Lolita subculture as a new feminist movement:

- a. Its relationship to notions of "Lolita", especially in terms of the Nabokovian connection to the term and what this implies;
- b. The sexual connotations of the movement;
- c. Its connections and relationships to sexual material;
- d. How the movement determines to resist sexualised imagery and sexual connotations;
- e. The position of women in Japan and how this movement defies traditional, historical patriarchal constructs.

Original Contribution

In reviewing the literature at the outset of this research, I discovered that there was limited material on the G&L subculture and academic sources were minimal. This is still the case. However, there is a wealth of material in regard to the thematic frameworks within which I have aimed to construct my thesis. Well-established fields of research exist in relation to Gothic subculture, Neo-Gothicism, Japanese design history, doll culture, Nabokovian studies, and the position of Women in Japan.

My observation is that there are three major gaps in the literature:

1. A comprehensive academic study of the Lolita subculture;
2. An analytical approach to the motivations behind dressing as a child/doll and what it infers about the Lolita subculture in context with its terminology;
3. Japan's place in the teleological canon of Neo-gothic history including the part played by the Japanese in regard to G&L's New-romantic origins.

These three aspects formulate my original contributions to this topic and to the field of design theory in general. In addressing these anomalies, the aim of this thesis is to demonstrate the importance of this subculture to fashion history and theory, anthropology, gender studies and subcultural theory.

The Literature

As the Lolita subculture, specifically, is a relatively recent research area, published academic material is quite scarce. The Lolita movement, however, has been thriving since the time I began my research and as such the phenomenon is often discussed in mass print media (newspapers and magazines) worldwide. My reading around the movement largely concentrates, therefore, on journalistic sources. I have filtered these examples according to quality by choosing to concentrate on reports that consult anthropologists, psychologists and academics on youth and gender issues in Japan and or countries that the Lolita phenomenon has penetrated.

In regard to academic writings, only several have appeared in recent years. Yuniya Kawamura, for example, mentions the Lolita movement in two essays that discuss the overall topic of Japanese street fashions in context with the effects of Japan's socio-economic environment on youth in recent decades: "Japanese Teens as Producers of Street Fashion" (2006); and "Japanese Street Fashion: The Urge to be Seen and to be Heard" (2007). The most useful text in terms of the movement's ideologies is Isaac Gagné's "Urban Princesses" (2008), which discusses the "little-girl" paradigm in Japan, and the affected and performative nature of Japanese women who represent themselves as little girls. Gagné also discusses the reputation of the Japanese Lolita in terms of class, elevating her status and differentiating her from the more sexualised Japanese Maid.

Authors of two other academic articles also separate the Lolita movement from sexual connotations while exploring its migration into cultures outside Japan: Masafumi Monden examines the globalisation of Lolita and views the fashion in a worldwide context as a hybridisation of Western and Japanese sympathies in “Transcultural Flow... Examining Cultural Globalisation through Gothic & Lolita Fashion” (2008); and Osmud Rahman, Liu Wing-sun, Elita Lam and Chan Mong-tai observe the outgrowth of the subculture in Hong Kong in “Lolita: The Imaginative Self” (2011).

Several books on Japanese street and subcultural fashions, in general, emerged in 2007, including Tiffany Godoy’s *Style, Deficit Disorder*; Philomena Keet’s *Tokyo Look Book*; and Macias and Evers’ *Japanese Schoolgirl Inferno*; each providing sections on the Lolita subculture, although none are substantial. A magazine article titled “Turning Japanese” by Ella Mudie, published in New Zealand by *Pulp* magazine (2008), cites Godoy’s research as well; and Sheila Burgel’s “Dark and Lovely” in *Bust* (2007) highlights common perceptions and misperceptions about the movement.

Terminology connected with the title of “Lolita” and the label’s sexual evocations are investigated in Hannah J. Feldman’s “The ‘Lolita Complex’” (1992). Another useful source for understanding, historically, the syndrome known as the “Lolita Complex” is Stephanie Lovett Stoffel’s biography of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, *Lewis Carroll and Alice* (1997).

My methods for compensating for a lack of material on the Japanese Lolita subculture are highlighted in the *Methodology* section. Though, as my thesis attempts to build on this topic as a new field of research, I relish this gap in that I have the opportunity to contribute to it. The frameworks that I use as vehicles to construct my own theories and analyses about the Lolita phenomenon are areas of study that are more established.

In relation to the significance of doll culture in Japan the expert is Alan Scott Pate. His comprehensive research is represented in two major publications: *Japanese Dolls: The Fascinating World of Ningyō* (2008); and *Ningyō: The Art of the Japanese Doll* (2005). These books discuss not only the history of Japanese dolls, types of dolls and methods of manufacture, but also explain the superstitions, rituals and customs of the Japanese people in relation to the doll. Psychological relationships between the Japanese people and dolls are also explored in two sound academic journal articles: Ellen Schattschneider's "The Bloodstained Doll" (2005); and Angelika Kretschmer's "Mortuary Rites for Inanimate Objects" (2000). Another historic account of Japanese doll traditions, originally written in 1912, is F. H. Davis' *Myths and Legends of Japan* (1992). Both Pate and Davis refer to the seminal work of Lafcadio Hearn who published on the subject in 1894. For an investigation into more contemporary views about dolls, doll collections, and people's attachments to them, not only in Japan but worldwide, I consult Woodrow Pheonix's *Plastic Culture: How Japanese Toys Conquered the World* (2006); and Susan Pearce's *On Collecting* (1995).

A major paradigm connected with dolls, doll culture, and the Lolita movement, in Japan, is *kawaii*, or the notion of “cuteness” (*kawaisa*). One of the most noted writers on *kawaii* is Sharon Kinsella (1995). I also cite the following works for discussions on this topic: Aoyagi Hiroshi, “Pop Idols and Gender Contestation” (2003); Ilya Garger, “One Nation under Cute” (2007); Yuko Hasegawa, “Post-identity *Kawaii*” (2002); Christine Locher, “The Cult of Cuteness in Japan” (2002); and Donald Richie, *The Image Factory: Fads and Fashions in Japan* (2003).

Cuteness in Japan is associated most readily with girls and women. As Lolita is also a Japanese girls’ movement, an understanding of the position of women in Japan is imperative. On the place of Woman in Japanese society, both historically and in more contemporary times, in regard to traditions, gender issues, gender hierarchy and societal expectations, as well as sexuality, I mainly consult the following works: Aoyagi Hiroshi, “Pop Idols and Gender Contestation” (2003); Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1977); Mary Brinton, “Christmas Cakes and Wedding Cakes: The Social Organization of Japanese Women’s Life Course” (1992); Ian Buruma, *A Japanese Mirror* (1985); Eisenstadt’s *Japanese Civilization* (1996); The English Discussion Society’s *Japanese Women Now II* (1996); Yuko Hasegawa, “Post-identity *Kawaii*: Commerce, Gender and Contemporary Japanese Art” (2002); Iida Yumiko, *Rethinking Identity in Modern Japan* (2002); Iwao Sumiko, *The Japanese Woman* (1993); Lynne Nakano and Moeko Wagatsuma, “Mothers and their Unmarried Daughters” (2004); Mina Roces

and Louise Edwards, “Contesting Gender Narratives” (2000); Ayumi Sasagawa, “Centred Selves and Life Choices” (2004); Yoshion Sugimoto, *An Introduction to Japanese Society* (2003); Elise Tipton, “Being Women in Japan” (2000); and Ann Waswo, *Modern Japanese Society* (1996). The changing face of Woman in Japan is a large and acknowledged field of research and therefore this list does not cover all material available; it includes only the sources I consider most important. I do not cite all of these texts in the body of my thesis, however, as established facts, notions and points of view are reiterated by certain authors.

In constructing the third focus of my thesis, in terms of original contribution, specifically the roots of G&L, tracing its evolution from New-romanticism and rewriting the narrative to include Japan, not only in relation to this movement but also regarding the historical development of Neo-Gothicism, my major area of research is Art and Design History. This framework, which I reconstruct in order to develop my own angle, represents a vast field in terms of literature. However, in identifying the focus on the Anglo-Japanese transmigration of ideas, particularly a history of Gothic Revivalism, Aestheticism and *Japonisme*, I mainly refer to Alison Adburgham, *Liberty's* (1975); Victor Arwas, *The Liberty Style* (1979); Stephen Calloway, *The House of Liberty* (1998); Richard Cork, “The Great Wave” (DVD) in *The Private Life of a Masterpiece* (2007); J. Mordaunt Crook, *William Burges* (1981); Anna Jackson, “Art and Design: East Asia”, in *The Victorian Vision* (2001); Lionel Lambourne, *The Aesthetic Movement* (1996), and

Japonisme: Cultural Crossings Between Japan and the West (2005); Barbara Morris, *Liberty Design* (1989); Susan Weber Soros, *E. W. Godwin* (1999); and Siegfried Wickmann, *Japonisme: The Japanese Influence on Western Art* (1981). Moving into the twentieth century and the realm of subcultural fashions, especially the shift from Glam through New-romanticism and Goth towards Japanese Visual *Kei*, evidence to support my own analyses is sought through Dunja Brill's *Goth Culture* (2008); David Buckley's biography on Bowie, *Strange Fascination* (2005); Ian Buruma's *A Japanese Mirror* (1985); Tiffany Godoy's, *Style Deficit, Disorder* (2007); Paul Gorman's *The Look* (2006 & 2001); Paul Hodkinson's *Goth* (2002); Mablen Jones' *Getting it On: The Clothing of Rock 'n' Roll* (1987); Philomena Keet's *The Tokyo Look Book* (2007); Macias and Evers' *Japanese Schoolgirl Inferno* (2007); Dave Rimmer's *New Romantics* (2003); and Claire Wilcox's *Vivienne Westwood* (2004).

It should be noted here (as it is again footnoted in the body of the thesis), that my emphasis on the history of the G&L subculture is the transmigration of ideas from East to West to East and that the topic of androgyny, especially in relation to Glam, New Romanticism and Japanese Visual *Kei*, and its Japanese historical roots, is not fully explored in this study. Androgyny in Japan is, however, an area that I have researched and had intended to elaborate on in this thesis. Having discovered that it is a fascinating and entire topic in itself I have realised two things: that it would break the thread and focus of this current thesis if I had delved too heavily into it; and that it warrants a thesis in itself. I have therefore determined to

make it my next major research project. Therefore, there are omissions in both this literature review and in my text in regard to certain respected theorists who have written on fashion, androgyny and subculture, whom I intend to acknowledge beyond the scope of this project.

Finally, in regard to Subcultural and Post-Subcultural Theory, other well-established fields of enquiry, I cite only those earlier subcultural theorists who I believe are relevant in providing evidence to support this thesis, especially in consideration of their commentary on the position of girls within models of subculture, namely Dick Hebdige; McRobbie and Garber; and Nayak and Kehily. On youth culture in Japan (outside the discourse on G&L), I also discuss Gordon Mathews and Bruce Whites' findings.

Other sources of consultation are discussed in the following section in association with methods.

Methodology

As noted in my abstract, this thesis is multi-disciplinary. Although there is an emphasis on Fashion (or Design) History and Theory, my research also spans the fields of Subcultural Theory, Gothic Studies, Gender Studies, Asian Studies and Anthropology.

In terms of established methodologies, however, my approach is most strongly aligned with Analytic or Psychoanalytic Art History, stemming from my education and professional training in the History and Theory of Art and Design. I consider myself, as such, a Theorist with a capital “T”.

The term “theory” is multilayered and varies in interpretation, according to whether it is associated with science, philosophy or the arts. In consulting the numerous entries on the word, “theory”, I ascertained the following definition:

5. Abstract knowledge, or the formulation of it; often used as implying, more or less, unsupported hypothesis... distinguished from or opposed to *practice*... *in theory*... according to the theory, theoretically (opposed to *in practice* or *in fact*).... 6. In [a] loose or general sense: A hypothesis proposed as an explanation; hence a mere hypothesis, speculation, conjecture; an idea or set of ideas about something; an individual view or notion.¹

That is, I deal with the Abstract and abstract thought processes, or the Conceptual rather than the Scientific. This “abstract” realm in which my cognition dwells is thus supported by means of hypothesis, of which much is informed by tacit knowledge, or “just knowing” things, and an element of speculation, or conjecture.

However, in transferring the Abstract to the Academic, this intuitive form of understanding needs to be supported and clarified by researched evidence. My “theories”, which begin with hypotheses, must then be “proven” in order to become “confirmed” observations, and therefore I also relate to the following definition of “theory”:

4. a. A scheme or system of ideas or statements held as an explanation or account of a group of facts or phenomena: a hypothesis that has been confirmed or established by observation or experiment, and is propounded or accepted as accounting for the known facts; a statement of what are held to be the general laws, principles, or causes of something known or observed.²

In other words, the way that I work, and the way in which I approach this thesis, is by beginning with hypotheses, my own theories, that I set out to “prove” in order to contribute to an “established” field of knowledge on this topic. These theories are based on Analysis, which connects to my methodology.

Laurie Schneider Adams explains the methodology of Psychoanalytic Art History most succinctly:

The psychoanalytic approach to art history deals primarily with the unconscious significance of works of art. This is a complex method which involves not only the art itself but also the artist, the aesthetic response of the viewer, and the cultural context.... It is a method [that can be] partially integrated with iconographic methods, as well as with feminism... and semiotics.... Although art history and psychoanalysis are distinct disciplines... both fields are concerned with the power of images and their symbolic meaning, with the process and products of creativity, and with history.... Interpreting imagery is a significant aspect of both psychoanalysis and art history.³

Historically, this methodology has come under criticism, especially in terms of its validity, specifically because it applies the Scientific to Art.* However, while formal psychoanalysis is a science, the Psychoanalytic takes on a different dynamic when applied to Art. Considering that my background is in Art Theory, I perceive the world from an analytical viewpoint, in that it has become customary for me to not only “see” images but to “read” them according to signs and signals. In a sense, this instinct has become my science.

* See, for example, Jack Spector “The State of Psychoanalytic Research in Art History”, *The Art Bulletin* 70, no. 1 (March 1988), pp. 49 – 76.

Adams' particular definition of the psychoanalytic method of researching art history resonates with my own working processes, particularly applied to this thesis. Although the major topic of this study is not art, as such, my approach to the examination of the Japanese Lolita subculture begins and essentially deals with a reading of images. While Analytic Art Theory might perhaps be a better term, "psycho-", pertaining to the Psychological, and "analytic" are the two major adjectives to describe my methods. My theories on this movement are formulated by reading the iconography of Gothic & Lolita (G&L) and the Lolita herself (the symbols), gaining meaning through semiotics (the signs, what the symbols signify, or infer), and then analysing the psychology behind the signifiers. It is through evidence to support my readings and analyses that I return to the label of theorist, by definition of the term "theory" as "a scheme or system of ideas or statements held as an explanation or account of a group of facts or phenomena".⁴ This evidence I obtain through adopting the following methods of information retrieval.

Literature Review

The formal literature I survey in relation to this thesis has been elaborated on in the previous section, *Literature Review*. However, as stated therein, I use other types of methods for gathering support material.

Researching from an Insider's Position

While I stand “outside” the Lolita subculture and observe it from a somewhat objective standpoint, I also, as discussed earlier in this section, “read” the phenomenon from an analytical viewpoint that correlates with the Subjective. This “complex method”, as explicated by Adams, “involves not only the art itself but also the artist, the aesthetic response of the viewer, and the cultural context”, in revealing “the unconscious significance of works of art”.⁵ In other words, “the investigator intrudes into the process that he is investigating”.⁶ The Subjective, or “aesthetic response” to the Subject, is given an extra layer of meaning through participation as an “insider”, and from analysing the movement from an inside point of view. While one may acknowledge that subjectivity might interfere with an intellectual pursuit it also allows for a deeper comprehension of the Subject. Just two examples of researchers who have employed an insider method are Paul Hodkinson (2002) and Richard Griffiths (2004).

In regard to this thesis, I myself come not from one but from three insider positions: My membership of the globalised Lolita subculture; my experience as a doll collector; and my personal history in relation to New-romantic and Goth subcultures.

Online Communities

My involvement in the globalised Lolita movement and my actual position as an “insider” is explained in the conclusion to this thesis, “The Death of a Subculture?”. In regard to methods of research, however, I obtain my “insider” information from a membership which is largely achieved via the virtual world of global online communities, such as social networking sites and blogs. Although I have visited Tokyo and have experienced participation in the subculture in Japan, the UK, Sydney and New Zealand, I also apply “insider” knowledge gleaned from personal communications with likeminded Gothloli worldwide, in the real world and in virtual space.

Masafumi Monden (2008) discusses the validity of this method in the article, “Transcultural Flow of Demure Aesthetics: Examining Cultural Globalisation through Gothic & Lolita Fashion”. While global Gothloli may be physically separated from Japan and the Japanese movement, it is through online communities that they are united. Via virtual space, Gothloli, worldwide, become educated in the rules and regulations pertaining to Lolita subcultural style, manners, and behaviour, and can keep up with the latest developments, fashions, events, and practices. It is also a means of accessing the music that Gothloli listen to and even communicating with celebrity musicians, artists and designers associated with the phenomenon. This method of interaction is particularly pertinent for Gothloli who live outside major centres, whereby real-life participation and congregation is impossible.

Since 2006, I have existed online, on MySpace, as my avatar ‘botticelliangel’, the pseudonym for my “real” name, “Angelic Lolita”, a Gothic Lolita who, born in 1911, is now 100 years of age.* As Gothloli choose alternate names and change their ages, their constructed personae means they can, as Monden notes, “follow the same set of fashion aesthetics, which allows them to dress in lace and frills without seeking the objectifying male gaze”.⁷ This privacy enables them to paste up real photographs of themselves (which they do, as Lolita is all about the look, of which they are proud, and thus they desire to display their images and share them with other Gothloli), without the fear of predators discovering their real identities and actual whereabouts. They are also able to be more open and real about their personal thoughts and opinions, especially on the Lolita subculture, particularly as there is competitiveness in terms of how knowledgeable one is on the stipulations in regard to authenticity.

Throughout my years as “botticelliangel” I have gathered hundreds of MySpace Gothloli “friends” with whom I have held many discussions about Lolita, both in online “chat” and through private messaging. Some of these personal communications are cited within the body of my thesis.

* Visit http://www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz for my online Gothloli profile.

Doll Collecting

I have been a doll collector all my life. However this hobby became a more serious occupation when in my thirties I began to start replacing lost dolls from my childhood. This snowballed into my accumulation of a huge collection, which now comprises over one-hundred dolls. At this time I also set up an online shop on eBay as “botticelliangel”, whereby I was buying and selling vintage and contemporary dolls in order to acquire the funds to build my prized collection. I have applied this knowledge to my understanding of doll culture and the psychology behind the attachment to dolls, the affect of the loss of dolls, and how this informs motivations for adult collectors. My personal experiences have been enriched by communications with other online buyers and collectors who have often started their own collections for similar reasons.

My involvement with the New Romantic and Goth Subcultures

My initial interest in Japanese Gothic & Lolita came from its aesthetic, as it connects to my own childhood attachment to dolls and has also developed from the fashions and musical genres of my adolescent days of involvement with Glam, New Romanticism and early Goth.

As a teenager and young adult I was immersed in these early-eighties movements, living in London and employed at Kensington Markets which, in a similar vein to both Camden Markets and the Kings Road, was a retail

outlet for cutting-edge, underground subcultural style as well as the birthplace for young and up-and-coming designers. This indoor venue was not like a flea market as its name implies but was instead divided into separate open-fronted stalls that operated like a mall of boutiques, in a similar way that *Laforet* and *Marui Young* in Tokyo are set up to house Japanese G&L designer shops. At Kensington Markets I managed an antique clothing store that specialised not in vintage clothing but genuine Victorian second-hand garments and accessories, a hub for followers of historicist fashions, celebrity customers, new designers, and trendsetting youth alike. One notable regular, even before his real fame, was Pete Burns of *Dead or Alive*.

Besides shopping at Kensington Markets, young people would go to great lengths to dress alternatively, create unique hairstyles, and apply outrageous makeup, just to come along, meet friends and hang out, while the stallholders themselves were often the most colourful and creative. This environment was invaluable for observing and participating in the innovative youth and street-fashion based movements of the day. I was also fortunate to have frequented some of the now legendary hangouts such as *Blitz*, the *Camden Palais* and the seminal Goth club, *The Batcave*. One of the greatest occasions was attending an *Ultravox* concert at Hammersmith Odeon in 1982, for the music and the sensation of seeing the venue packed full of fans dressed in the most incredible subcultural fashions of those New Romantic times.

After moving back to Sydney temporarily in 1983 and then again in 1985, my relationship with subculture and fashion continued, in that my closest circle of friends were fashion or jewellery designers and hairdressers involved with these alternative movements. My hairdresser friend Adam Sharah, for example, with whom I am still in contact, is the cousin of Richard Sharah, famous for the makeup of New-romantic celebrities such as Steve Strange from *Visage* and for Bowie's Pierrot character.* I also shared a flat with two successful jewellery designers who sold to boutiques who stocked cutting-edge and subcultural fashions of the era. This pair also had a regular stall at Paddington bazaar, which in the eighties was, in a similar fashion to London's Kensington and Camden Markets, and *Hyper Hyper* on Kensington High Street, the birthplace for up-and-coming designers. This Sydney venue was, for example, where the partners of *Dinosaur Designs* (one of which, Liane Rossler, I attended High School with) started their now successful business. During this time, I mingled with other followers of underground movements at nightclubs such as *Stranded* and *The Exchange*, hotspots for international celebrities while they were in town, most notably David Bowie, Marilyn, *Culture Club* and *Haysi Fantayzee* (Fig. 6).

* I have mentioned only a handful of examples of celebrity connections to avoid a "name-dropping" emphasis as the point is only to demonstrate the importance of this background in contributing to my knowledge.

While these formative years have provided a wealth of memories, both visual and audible, drawing on these experiences as a method of research enriches that part of my theoretical methodology associated with “just knowing”.

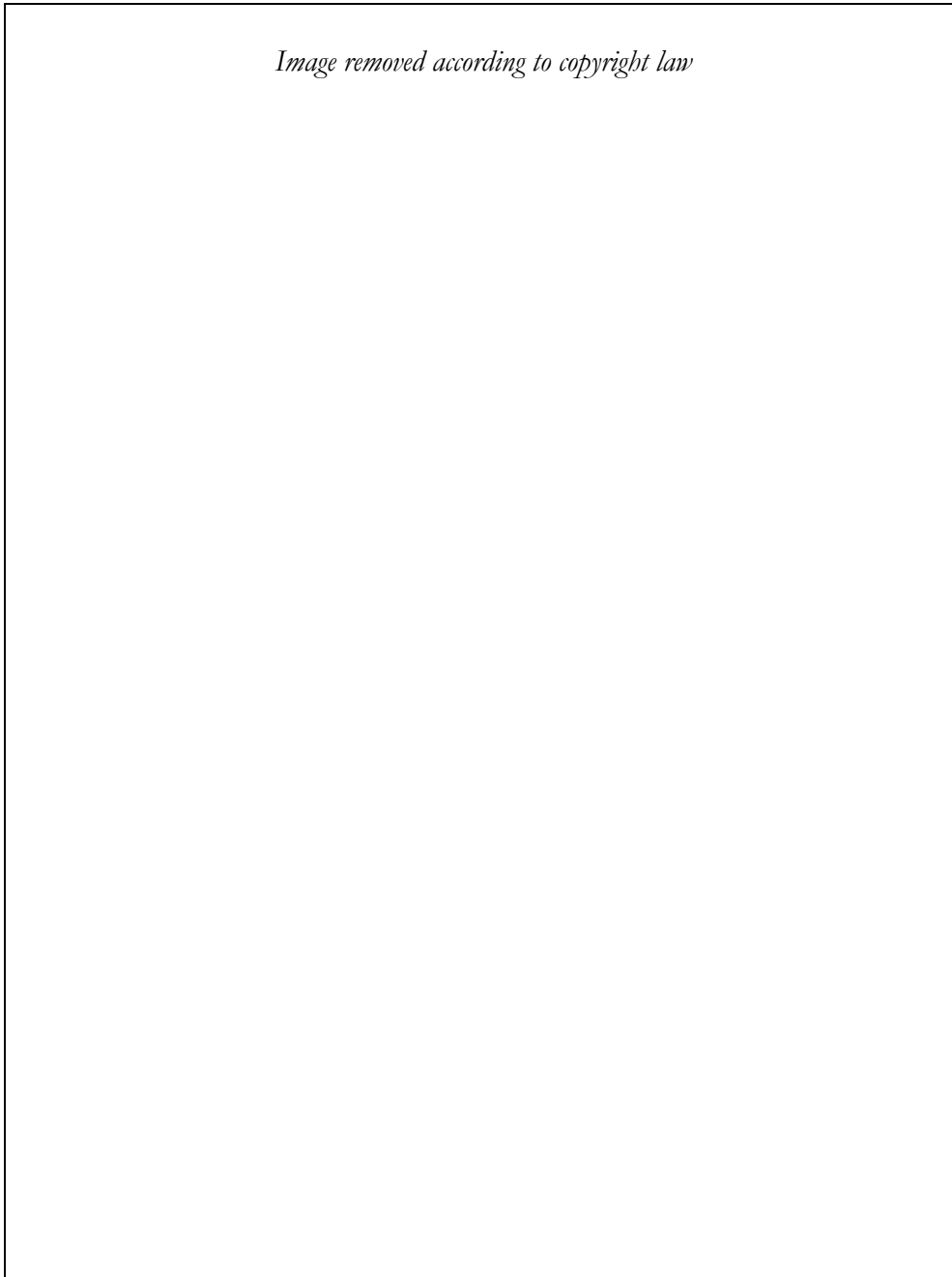


Figure 6: *Nicky Love and Kathy Hardy (bottom-left-hand corner)*

“Cultist Images”, Vogue (Australia) (November 1983)

The Lolita Complex
A Japanese Fashion Subculture
e
Its Paradoxes

Kathryn Adèle Hardy Bernal

Chapter One

The Origins of The Lolita Movement

The Lolita Subculture

So-called Lolita* (Jap. *Gosurori*, *Gosuloli* = Gothic Lolita, or Gothloli) are members of a Neo-Gothic subculture, originating in Japan, whereby adolescent girls and young women are signified by their doll-like appearances, and childlike manners and dress. This fashion-based phenomenon, an offshoot of the Japanese Gothic & Lolita (G&L) movement, arose in its recognised form around the end of the twentieth century.

Although only gaining ground in Japan over the last decade and becoming noted elsewhere in very recent years, the Cult of the Lolita is not that new to the Japanese. Ideas that have contributed to the Lolita craze have developed since the early 1970s and demonstrate an evolution from early Glam Rock through to post-Punk, the New Wave, New Romanticism and the Goth subculture. Stemming from these sensibilities, Lolita fashion itself emerged in Japan in the 1980s but it wasn't until the late 1990s that the movement really began to take hold.

* "Lolita" is used in this context as the singular and plural term, as is "Gothloli".

It was also in the nineties that Japan began to face one of its worst phases of economic instability, societal upheaval and cultural malaise. As a result, it is my argument that in a similar way to British Punk, which was also representative of a generation reacting against society and fearful for its future, the Lolita subculture demonstrates similar anxieties, and hence a reluctance to move into the uncertain adult world, a wish to escape reality a subconscious desire to remain in, or return to, the security of childhood, symbolised in the impulse to dress as a child.

It is this childlike image, however, that causes some critics to disregard the Lolita movement and to observe it as just another superficial example of the widespread Japanese attraction to cute things. Indeed it is also this “cute” element that drives some members of the subculture toward the adoption of the Lolita identity.

While the Cute paradigm is related to childhood innocence and, therefore, the Lolita look is believed, especially by participants, to project an image of modesty and purity, there is a sexual connotation in the term “Lolita”, especially connected with the heroine of Vladimir Nabokov’s novel. Ever since the release of *Lolita* in 1955, the name has been coloured by the young female protagonist, and has generally come to stand for a promiscuous or sexually provocative little girl, or “nymphet”.

Though reasons for adopting the Lolita style vary, members of the movement, whether in Japan or worldwide, are usually dismissive of the sexualised Nabokovian reference to the subculture's terminology. Tanya Godoy claims that the cute Lolita look might be considered sexy from a Western perspective, due to "fixed images that we associate with certain types" of dress, such as "a doll's outfit", but she believes that "once you re-contextualise it then it takes on a different meaning".⁸

However these two aspects, "cuteness" and "sexiness", serve to complicate the Lolita phenomenon, invalidating the general opinion that the movement is meaningless and thus beyond investigative depth. A particular ramification is the problematic "Lolita Complex", a syndrome said to be widespread in Japan that represents an obsession with little girls and cute, often sexual, little-girl imagery. The existence of this element thus contradicts and counteracts Godoy's argument about perception.

The Lolita subculture, even in the adoption of the name, provokes discourse not least in connection with the complex and paradoxical issues it raises. It also makes, both consciously and subliminally, particular statements about the culture and society from which it is conceived. This latter aspect is a major focus of this study.

But, before approaching the crux of this thesis, investigating the phenomenon's complications while critically examining the psychology behind them, this chapter builds up a background to and foundation for these analyses by providing a history of the Japanese Lolita subculture and its roots. I begin with an elaboration on the visual elements of the Lolita fashion identity, explain how it came into existence, and delve into the specifics of G&L at its inception. I then survey its context as a Neo-gothic movement via an evolution of Gothic Revivalism, by going back to the nineteenth century, the period of Victorian Neo-Gothicism and Japan's connections with that era, and returning to the late-twentieth to early-twenty-first centuries and G&L.

The Lolita Fashion Identity

Since the dawning of the Japanese Lolita phenomenon, the classic fashion style has evolved, categories and subcategories have arisen, rules have been adapted and altered and branches multiplied. These offshoots are now too numerous to highlight and tedious to read about. This is partly due to the movement's shift from an insular, somewhat elitist, underground Japanese subculture whereby participants often created their own garments, towards an increasingly worldwide, more mainstream, designer trend. This is the natural progression for any "typical" subculture made visible via fashion* and it is an issue I examine in the concluding chapter of this thesis, titled "The Death of a Subculture?". However for the purpose of this thesis, which is essentially an analysis of the Japanese Lolita phenomenon in its "authentic" subcultural state, I first describe herein the three major categories of the original fashion movement.

* Take, for example, the journey of Punk.

The Classic Lolita

The Classic Lolita style is the purist manifestation of the Gothloli and dictates quite specific rules and regulations about permissible elements of design in regard to authenticity (Fig. 7). Pertaining to the true Classic Lolita is a high neckline, a hemline no shorter than just below knee-length, layers and layers of petticoats, long sleeves and very long socks or full tights. Although long sleeves may be detachable from short puffed sleeves, shorter sleeves and shorter socks are seen as a deviation.

Strictly the classic Gothloli wears a dress, usually tied at the waistline with a bow sash, rather than a skirt and blouse. The bodice should finish at the natural waist or just above it, exaggerating the impression of the Child's physique, and the skirt of the dress will be full-circled or bell-shaped. A headdress is expected and may be in the form of a Victorian-style band, bonnet, or bow headband.

This Classic Lolita image signifies the basic Gothloli silhouette. Since the movement's inception, many Gothloli have carried parasols as well as plush teddy bears, soft-toy rabbits or (just as lavishly dressed) dolls, adding to the projection of a child's or "little girl" persona.

Image removed according to copyright law

Figure 7: *Manifesteange Metamorphose temps de fille (Japanese label)*

Autumn/Winter Collection, 2004

The Gothic Lolita

The Gothic Lolita is perhaps the most conspicuous identity of the G&L subculture, especially as she carries the title *Gosurori* (Gothloli, a contraction of “Gothic” and “Lolita”) (Fig. 8). The Gothic Lolita style is most evidently linked to Victorian-inspired and Goth fashions, in that it draws from some of the main sensibilities, in the wearing of black and the reference to Victorian mourning, heavy black eye-makeup, and an attraction to accessories such as crosses, crucifixes and rosary beads. The Gothic Lolita may also adorn her garments with genuine antique or Victorian-style mourning jewellery, such as black-silhouette cameo brooches or pendants and black beads. This look, although connected, differs from a “typical” Western Goth look as it is “sweetened” by the Child/Doll aspect.

Mariko Suzuki discusses the differences between Western Goth styles and the authentic Gothic Lolita at its inception:

In the West, bondage was a central theme to the Gothic style and sexy clothes were dominant. Japan’s Gothic style tended to the opposite. Abstinence, girlishness and virginity were prominent themes. Girls covered up so very little skin was left exposed, and wore lace and other frilly material almost to excess. They covered their legs with knee-high socks and wore *Odeko* shoes, characterized by a prominent rounded toe, rather than high heels.⁹

A true Gothic Lolita thus adheres to the modest Classic Lolita style, but every single aspect of her clothing must be black, albeit covered in frills, sashes, ribbons, roses, and or lace (also black).^{*} She therefore gives the impression of either a “ghoulish” doll or more simply a Victorian child in mourning.



Figure 8: Kathryn Hardy Bernal

Yuki (age 19), Gothic Lolita, Jingu Basbi, Harajuku, Tokyo, Japan, 2007

^{*} In keeping with mourning dress etiquette, there may be the addition of white as in the second stage of Victorian bereavement. Although this would, strictly speaking, deviate from what has been recognised as the Gothic Lolita style, the once separate black and white image is most often now identified as belonging to the Gothic Lolita category as well (Fig. 9).



Figure 9: Paul Moon Rogers

Kathryn Hardy Bernal, Gothic Lolita (wearing Gothic, Lolita + Punk, Japanese label)

with James Percy, WE Block, AUT University, Auckland, New Zealand, 2008

The Gothic Lolita will usually wear a dress but may wear a skirt and blouse and is able to choose shorter puffed sleeves or shorter black socks. Ideally she wears the classic Victorian-style band headdress but substitutes may include a miniature black top hat (cocked to one side of the head), a black bonnet, a black satin or velvet Alice band, or a large black bow attached to a headband. She will occasionally wear a short black soft-tulle/lace-net mourning veil but, as this is more an adult's accessory rather than a child's, it is not common. Her parasol will also be black with ruffles and or lace.

To accentuate the little girl persona but tending towards the macabre, the Gothic Lolita will carry, if she carries anything, a teddy bear with a gruesome element such as perhaps a chain around its neck or a morbid-looking doll (Fig. 10).



Figure 10: James Percy

Vivien Masters, Gothic Lolita

holding a Japanese Pullip Moon doll from Kathryn Hardy Bernal's personal collection

(both wearing designs, titled Evangeline, by Angie Finn, 2007)

WM Block, AUT University, Auckland, New Zealand, 2009

The Sweet Lolita

In a sense the truly Sweet Lolita (Figs 5 & 11) is the antithesis of the Gothic Lolita. In the case of the Sweet Lolita there is a pronounced concentration on the very sweetest aspects of the Lolita style, thus more of an emphasis on candy-Rococo-esque design or the prettiest Victorian doll, rather than the Gothic. Her dress which is often an explosion of frothiness, bows and frills is generally made up in either one pastel colour, often fairy-floss pink or powder/baby blue, or a combination of pastel/pretty colours, such as pale pinks, salmons, duck-egg/light blues, lemon, butter yellow, mauves or soft greens, sometimes mixed with or grounded by either white or cream, even navy, raspberry or black.

The Sweet Lolita still adheres to the silhouette of the Classic Lolita but this Gothloli will often wear a shorter-sleeved blouse or dress and may choose shorter lace-trimmed socks. The pinafore is a common addition either as a full or half apron over her dress or as a pinafore dress over a pretty blouse. Her skirt however is still full and at least knee-length.

On her head the Sweet Lolita may wear any manner of headdress from the classic Victorian band to a full bonnet or miniature top hat. She is most likely though to choose a very large bow attached to a headband.

Image removed according to copyright law

Figure 11: Masayuki Yoshinaga

Akimi (age 24) and Princess (age 21), Sweet Lolita (wearing Angelic Pretty, Japanese label), 2007

If the Sweet Lolita's dress is not monochromatic, it will be patterned with a pretty border or all-over sweet print including dainty dollhouse florals, roses, fruit (commonly strawberries and or cherries), cakes, lollies/sweets/candy, ice-cream sundaes and or *Alice*/fairytale characters, often against a background of gingham, stripes or spots. The Gothloli that wears a patterned fabric is usually categorised as a Country Lolita or a Country Sweet Lolita, a subcategory of the Sweet Lolita (Figs 12 & 14).



Figure 12: Bevan Chuang

Yuko Kino (age 23), Country Lolita, Laforet Shopping Centre, Harajuku, Tokyo, 2007

Accessories will match the Sweet Gothloli's theme. Therefore, she might have a "fruit" necklace, brooch or pendant. She will also carry a frilly parasol, a cute little handbag or pretty basket, or a soft-toy rabbit, sweet teddy bear or pretty doll.

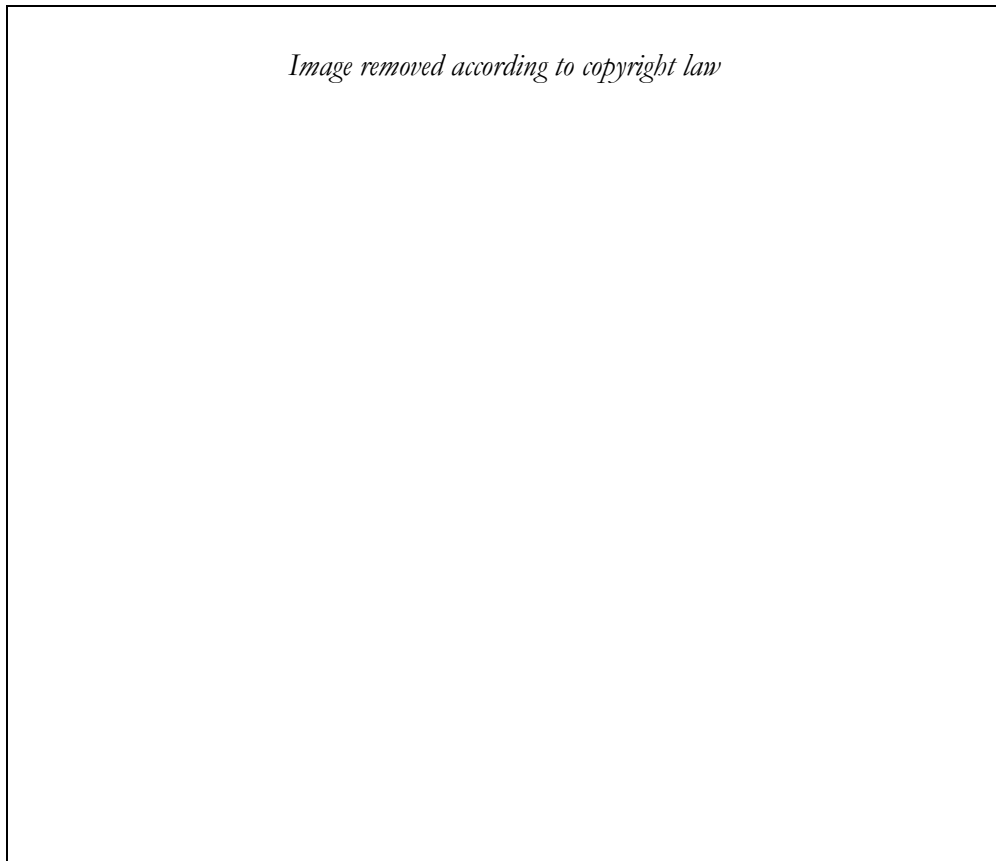


Figure 13: *Sweet Lolita (wearing Angelic Pretty, Japanese label)*

Main sources for the sweeter Lolita ranges in Japan are *Angelic Pretty* (Fig. 13), *Manifesteange Metamorphose temps de fille*,* *Victorian Maiden*, *Innocent World* and *Baby, the Stars Shine Bright (BTSSB)*.

* Often shortened to *Metamorphose temps de fille* or just *Metamorphose*. Note that titles associated with the Japanese Lolita movement are quite often French, for affectation. This is to add a romantic association with the Rococo period. Although the French grammar and or spelling is often incorrect, this, in my opinion, adds to the quirkiness and appeal.



Figure 14: *Kathryn Hardy Bernal*

(wearing own design, titled Amorette, constructed from Japanese textiles, 2007)

WM Block, AUT University, Auckland, New Zealand, 2009

Mana, Malice Mizer and The Emergence of the Lolita Subculture

The figurehead for G&L is commonly identified as Mana, a musician and now one of the foremost leading fashion designers of the G&L movement. Although not the originator of the Lolita style, he is often accredited with its instigation due to his high profile as the subculture's most recognised and prominent personality and certainly one of the most continuingly influential.

Mana gained his cult status as the guitarist for the legendary Visual-*kei*, J-rock, Goth band *Malice Mizer* (Jap. *Marisu Miseru*, 1992 – 2001).^{*} Visual *Kei* (Jap. *vijuaru kei*, or “visual style”) is a music genre less signified by a common sound than by the highly flamboyant, theatrical, heavily made-up fashion sense of band members that places an emphasis on androgyny and an effeminate, oftentimes feminine form of male dress.

Mana is the ultimate Lolita and consummate idol of Gothloli worldwide. Renowned for dressing in an overtly female manner, Mana takes on the image of the Lolita both onstage and off (Figs 15 & 16).

^{*} J-rock = Japanese rock music. *Marisu Miseru* is a Japanese phonetic translation of “malice” and “misery”.

Image removed according to copyright law

Figure 15: *Malice Mizer* (Mana is on the far right)

Image removed according to copyright law

Figure 16:

Mana modelling as a Gothic Lolita for his fashion label Moi-même-Moitié

Image removed according to copyright law

Figure 17:

Mana modelling as a Gothic Aristocrat for his fashion label Moi-même-Moitié

Mana's alternate identities, the Gothic Lolita and the Vampiric Aristocrat, are embodied in his work as a fashion designer with his two ongoing ranges, the Elegant Gothic Lolita (EGL) (Fig. 16) and Elegant Gothic Aristocrat (EGA) (Fig. 17) for his *Moi-même-Moitié* label, a successful higher-end brand with a few specialist boutiques across Japan and, more recently, a flagship store in Paris.*

Mana has taken these personae from stage to everyday life and carried them through to his own designs. While he was most often the Lolita in the *Mizer* days, he has more commonly presented himself as the androgynous Aristocrat for his more recent musical project *Moi Dix Mois*, reserving his female image usually for the purpose of modelling his EGL collections. Even in regard to performance, Mana is emphatic that his attire is never costume but his “day-to-day clothes”.¹⁰

* Note that Elegant Gothic Lolita (EGL) is often used to describe the entire Lolita movement. However this term should only be used in reference to the creative output of Mana who has since 1999 applied EGL and its male or unisex variant EGA (Elegant Gothic Aristocrat) to his ranges for *Moi-même-Moitié*. Also note that the collections for these ranges are newly designed for each season and only the titles remain unchanged.

Given that Mana branded his collections with the titles EGL and EGA quite early on in regard to the subculture's evolution, he may well have been the one to coin the label "Gothic Lolita", or at least one of the first to use the words "Gothic" and "Lolita" conjointly. It is not even clear whether the "Lolita" terminology preceded him, although the look was already around.*

According to anthropologist Philomena Keet:

Mana recalls there was a [sweeter] Lolita style in Tokyo but he wanted to adapt this to make a new fashion genre. "I added a dark element to the cuteness of Lolita", in other words a Gothic element, resulting in a mix that combines the frills, lace and puffy skirts of Lolita with the Gothic black and adds lots of Gothic motifs such as crosses, candlestick holders and daggers.¹¹

Without further evidence to ascertain or deny the theory, it may be said therefore that Mana created the notion of a Gothic Lolita, the term contracted to *Gosurori* or *Gosuloli*, the Japanese phoneticisation of Gothloli, which has come to stand for the classic Japanese Lolita identity overall, whether Gothic or Sweet.

Furthermore, Mariko Suzuki states that "although this Japanese look is now known as Gothloli, that term did not become popular until around the end of 1999 or 2000".¹² She says "it's not clear who came up with this monika [but] perhaps it began... [as a description for] this new look as Gothic and Lolita-like".¹³ In that Mana set up his company *Moi-même-Moitié*

* The earlier fashion labels that promoted this look will be discussed later in this chapter.

and formalised the Gothic and Lolita-like image, as well as the Gothic Lolita title with his EGL range in 1999, it could be deduced that he was the originator of both the term and the style. In any case, even if not the inventor of Lolita fashion, Mana, as the first celebrity to embody the Gothloli image, can be identified as the motivator of the Lolita movement as a subculture.

Considering that “Gothic Lolita fashion has been one of the most popular looks in the Harajuku area since 1999”,¹⁴ the same year that Mana created his fashion label, he may be implicated in the momentum of its popularity but certainly he is responsible for the actual following which goes back further to the early-nineties *Mizex* years. While Mana took advantage of his popularity by commercialising, marketing and capitalising on his own image through his company *Moitié*, the inception of Lolita as a craze was the adoption of his style by fanatical young women supporters.

Says Suzuki, “not only did fans copy his clothes, they mimicked his every word and gesture, adopting his gentility. Mana was the Gothloli fashion world’s leader”.¹⁵ By the culmination of *Malice Mizex*’s success and eventual disbanding in 2001, the Gothloli identity was fully formulated and Mana had largely if not absolutely created the impetus for a fully-fledged subcultural movement.

Japan and the Western World

Critics of the G&L subculture, including the Lolita phenomenon especially if observing the movement in regard to surface values and aesthetics, might judge it as a distilled version of Gothic sensibilities and as merely mimicking Western notions and motivations. Certainly there is a strong element of Western Gothic in the Japanese movement. For example, Mana formally proscribes the profiles of what Lolita and male Aristocrats “should be” as such:

The company literature states that the ideal Elegant Gothic Lolita should be slender with empty, seductive eyes and five feet four. She should like listening to French Gothic music and reading European children’s literature, live in a manor and enjoy going for walks, shopping, visiting galleries and listening to classical concerts. The Elegant Gothic Aristocrat should be slim, five feet eight with slit eyes in whose sad pupils insanity sleeps. He should live in an old castle, listen to symphonic gothic black metal, read children’s gothic horror mysteries, enjoy going for walks in the night and painting.¹⁶

In regard to appearance, while Mana’s specifications are relevant to a generally smaller Asian physique, the wider connections to notions of European Gothic are evident.

However, the opinion that G&L is just a poor cousin of the European tradition underrates the uniquely Japanese proclivities of the movement as well as Japan's historical contributions to Neo-Gothicism overall.

My argument is that there is a long tradition of collaboration and transmigration of ideas between Japan and the West and back that has contributed to the essence of the Neo-Gothic. This perspective demonstrates that Japan is and has been implicated in the evolution of new Gothic movements, and that the Japanese involvement has not been peripheral or outside but has been at key historical moments integral to the development of these genres.

Early Encounters in Art & Design Between Japan & the Western World

Historians mark the “introduction” of Japanese art and design to Western society as occurring in the 1850s – 1860s. Until that point Japan had essentially been shut off from the rest of the world and Japanese culture was largely unknown of in the West. It was in the 1850s that objects of Japanese art and design were “discovered” and from that moment began to make an impact on Western aesthetics. It is also recognised that until 1867 Japan had continued to exist as a feudal, “medieval” state. This aspect is important in understanding the Japanese influence on Gothic Revivalism, and on Western Neo-Gothic artists, craftspeople, designers and architects, from the nineteenth century onwards.

However, it was, too, at this time that the West began to influence Japan. As the West opened their eyes to Japan, Japan opened up to the West. The intention of this section, therefore, is to demonstrate that this history is also Japan’s history and, as such, it also provides a background for the evolution of Japanese Gothic.

Japan's History & Non-history with the Outside World: 1185 - 1868

Between 1185 and 1867 (the Shogun Dynastic Period) Japan was ruled by a series of Shogunate warrior dynasties supported by *daimyo* or feudal landowning barons who had the power to progress to the position of Shogun and carry forward new dynastic reigns.* The most powerful and longest ruling dynasty was that of the Tokugawa family (1603 – 1867) who controlled the nation during the Edo Period (1600 – 1868).†

Under the instigation of the Shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu (r. 1623 – 1641) Japan became isolated under a closed-country edict, which was issued and enforced in 1635 and continued to operate primarily as an unbroken law until 1854. This meant that for more than two-hundred years the borders of Japan were sealed off and controlled by defenses; entry into Japanese ports was denied to incoming visitors and trade, and inaccessible to outgoing citizens.

* Prior to the Shogunate takeover, Japan was ruled by an Imperial government.

† This era is known as the Edo Period as, during this time, the Tokugawa were seated in Edo (since renamed Tokyo), after moving the traditional site of the ruling classes from Kyoto.

The shift in these dynamics occurred in 1853 when the American Colonel Matthew Calbraith Perry forced his United States fleet into Yedo (or Edo) Bay, demanding that the Japanese reopen their ports to trade and re-establish a relationship with the greater world. Negotiations ensued, resulting initially in the Treaty of Kanegawa (1854), which allowed for fewer limitations on trade with the West, and later in the Treaty of Edo (signed on 26 August, 1858), establishing full trading rights between Japan, the US, Great Britain, France and Russia.*

In 1867, the Tokugawa Dynasty was toppled after a series of unfortunate events that occurred as fallout from these arrangements. Having been ultimately blamed by agreeing to the Treaty conditions, the Shogun was replaced by the Emperor Meiji and the Imperial state was restored, with the Imperial residence moving from Kyoto to Edo, the former Tokugawa capital, which was renamed Tokyo in 1868. Thus began the early Modern phase of Japan's history, known as the *Meiji* Period (1868 – 1912).

* The agreements were made, and treaties signed, without a call to arms. This is due to several reasons. Most importantly, the Japanese were aware of the recent Opium Wars, instigated by trade disagreements between China and Britain (waged 1839 – 1860). The Chinese had suffered huge casualties and devastating defeats, including the loss of Hong Kong, which was ceded in perpetuity to Great Britain in 1841 (and not returned to China until 1997). The Japanese were therefore fearful of the possible repercussions of resisting trade agreements. This concern was exacerbated by the sheer magnitude of the US forces; for a country that had remained in a medieval, unindustrialised state for centuries, the mere sight of the US fleet was terrifying. However, the Japanese were also in awe: the introduction to these mighty, threatening steamships highlighted Japan's weaknesses and "primitiveness", and therefore the need to industrialise and the desire to modernise. Thus began the rapid industrialisation of Japan, commencing in the *Meiji* Period.

Japanisme and Gothic Revivalism

Between the 1630s and 1850s there had been only sporadic trade, through the Dutch East India Company, between Japan and the Western World. Due to this very limited contact, the West had remained almost completely ignorant of Japanese society and culture, while Japan had developed in an insular fashion without significant interference or outside influence, and therefore had existed largely unchanged for centuries.

In 1854, after the initial trade negotiations, the West was formally introduced to the wares of Japan when around 600 objects were exhibited in London at the Old Watercolour Society. This show, although successful in inspiring a small group of British artists and designers, was however visited by only a select élite part of society. It wasn't until 1862 at the *International Exhibition of Arts and Industry* that Japanese art, design and crafts were first displayed on a comprehensive scale to mainstream public.

In 1851 during the *Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations* it had been the Gothic Revivalist A. W. N. Pugin's Mediaeval Court that had attracted blockbuster crowds. In 1862 at the world's second exposition, housed at the resituated Crystal Palace at Sydenham Hill,* the Japanese

* The Crystal Palace, designed by Joseph Paxton for the inaugural international exposition at London's Hyde Park, was intended to be employed as a temporary structure for the 1851 show, after which it was dismantled. However, due to public petition to preserve it, it was repositioned as a permanent building at Sydenham Hill in 1854 only to be destroyed by fire in 1936.

Court superseded Pugin's stall as the event's showstopper. Ironically, it was the Mediaevalist designers that were most in awe.

Says Anna Jackson, "the Japanese Court made the greatest impact on Gothic Revivalists such as the architect and designer William Burges... who believed that in contemporary, feudal Japan could be found the ideal society of the Middle Ages".¹⁷ Burges is to have said that:

If the visitor wishes to realise the real Middle Ages he must visit the Japanese Court for at the present day the arts of the Middle Ages have deserted Europe and are only to be found in the East.... Truly the Japanese Court is the real Mediaeval Court of the Exhibition.... [For] the student of our reviving arts of the thirteenth century... an hour... spent in the Japanese department will by no means be lost time, for these hitherto [so-called] unknown barbarians appear not only to know all that the Middle Ages knew but in some respects are beyond them and us as well.... In fact... [they] are... much in advance of us....¹⁸

For the Gothic Revivalists, who reflected, in their motivation towards all things medieval, their idealisation of an imagined utopian, pre-industrial past, Japan represented and satisfied that craving for a long-lost, long-sought-after idyll.

There were varying reasons why Neo-Gothicists yearned to return to the Middle Ages – many demonstrated their resistance to industrialisation and reaction against the Industrial Revolution's effects on society and the environment, while some British designers just wanted to revive all that had been lost from their once rich Gothic heritage during the iconoclastic

Reformation period – but all Mediaevalists mourned for the beauty and integrity they felt had been present in Gothic art and architecture that was now missing from contemporary Western design. Japan in its untainted, medieval state represented the Gothic Ideal both philosophically and in regard to the aesthetics and quality of production of their art and crafts. As noted by Victorian artist and designer Walter Crane:

The opening of Japanese ports to Western commerce... had an enormous influence on European and American art. Japan [was]... a country... as regards its arts and handcrafts... in the condition of the Middle Ages with wonderfully skilled craftsmen.... What wonder that it took Western artists by storm and that its effects have become so patent.¹⁹

The extent of influence that the introduction of Japanese aesthetics, art, crafts, design, and methods of manufacture to the West had on Western artists, designers and craftspeople cannot be underestimated. The collecting of Japanese wares, or Japonaiserie, became an absolute craze, and the Western phenomenon known as *Japonisme* (or Japonism) in art, design, and the performing arts was widespread and long-lasting. Some of the most noted figures of this movement were J. A. M. Whistler (Figs 18, 20, 22, 23 & 28), Claude Monet (Figs 25 & 26), D. G. Rossetti, Walter Crane, Vincent van Gogh, Henri de Toulouse Lautrec, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Margaret Macdonald, Christopher Dresser, William Moorcroft, Arthur Silver, Tissot, Degas, Renoir, Mucha, Klimt and Frank Lloyd Wright.

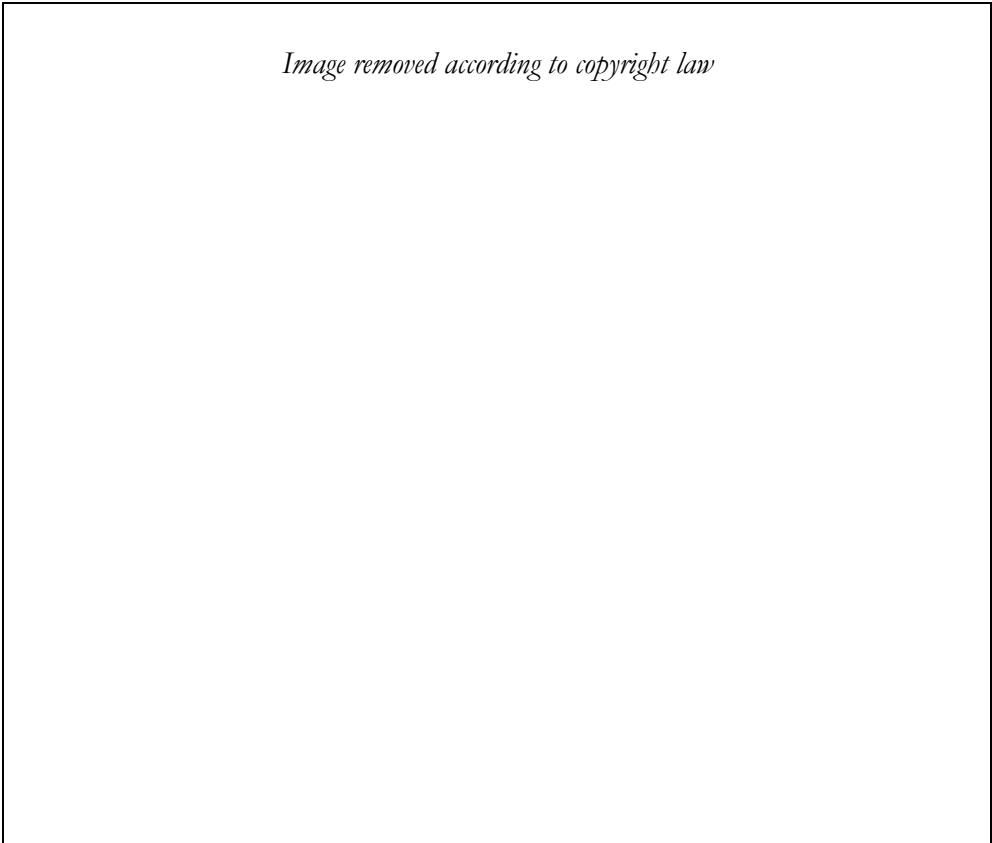


Figure 18: James Abbott McNeil Whistler

Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Peacock Room, 1876 – 1877

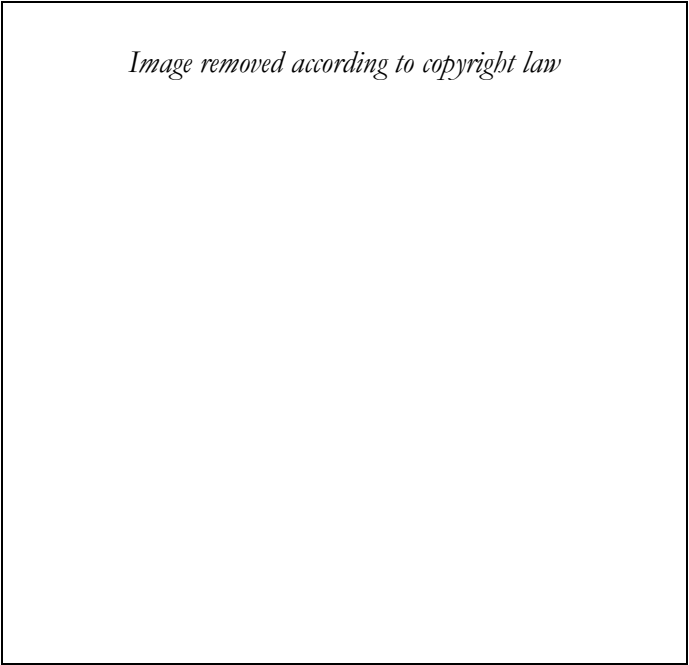
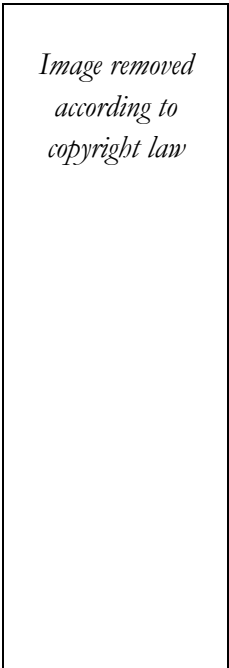


Figure 19: Andō Hiroshige, *Peacock and Peonies*, c. 1840s – 1850s

Figure 20: James Abbott McNeil Whistler, *The Peacock Room* (detail), 1876 – 1877

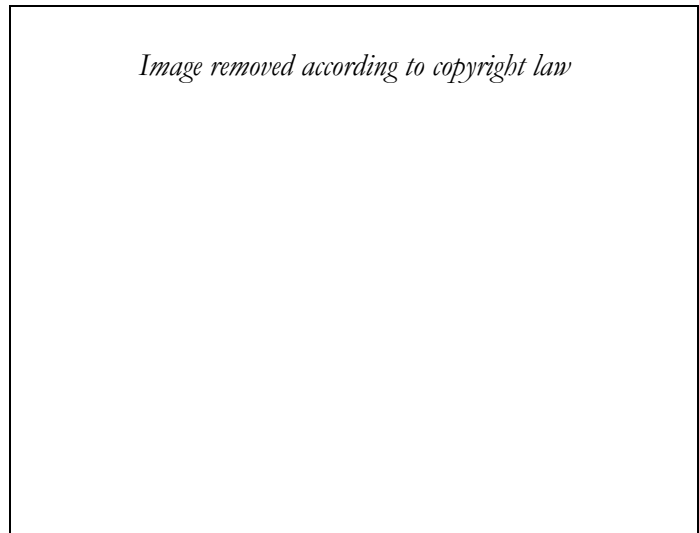
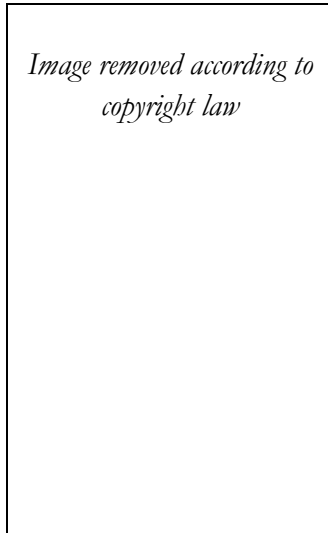


Figure 21: Japanese *Satsuma* faience vase and stand

(Published in G. A. Audsley's *The Ceramic Art of Japan*, 1875)

Figure 22: James Abbott McNeil Whistler, *The Peacock Room* (detail), 1876 – 1877

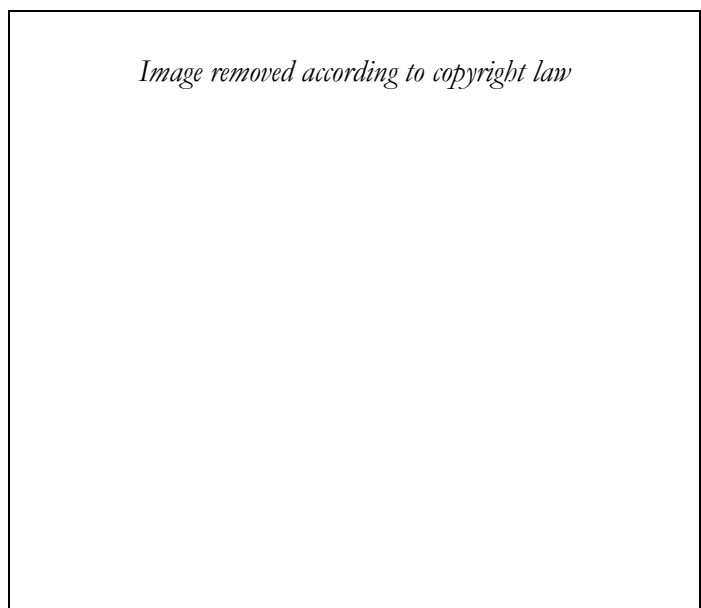
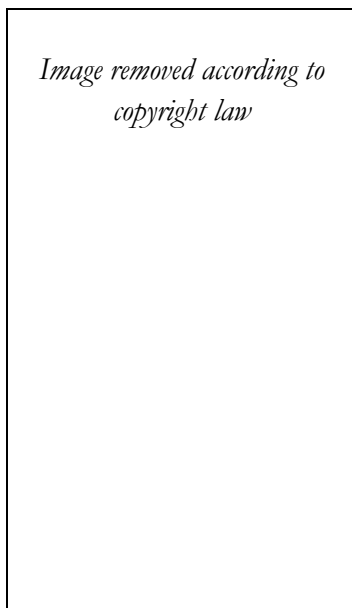


Figure 23: James Abbott McNeil Whistler, *La Princesse du Pays de la Porcelaine*

(*Rose and Silver: The Princess from the Land of Porcelain*), 1863 – 1864

Figure 24: Katsugawa Shunshō, c. 1775

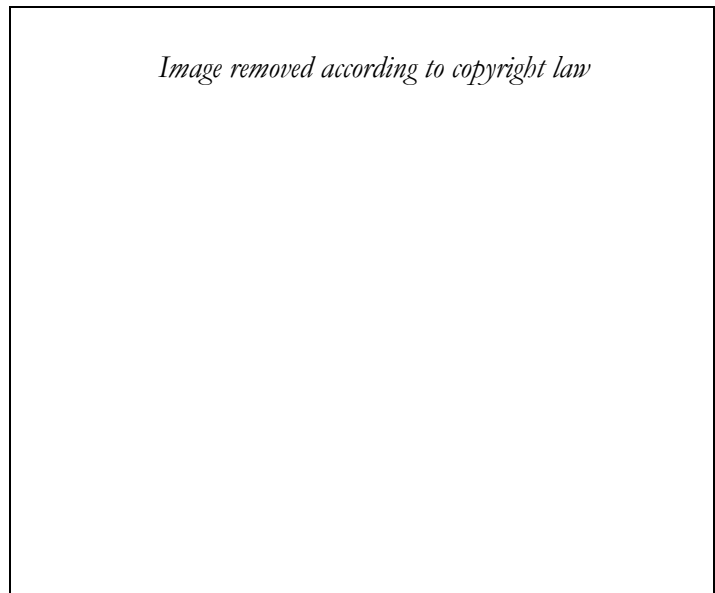
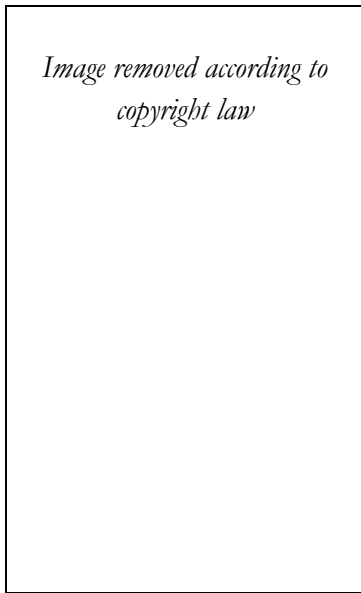


Figure 25: Claude Monet, *La Japonaise*

(Portrait of Camille Monet, the artist's wife), 1875

Figure 26: Claude Monet, *Waterlilies and Japanese Bridge*, c. 1899

(The Japanese gardens at the artist's house in Giverny)

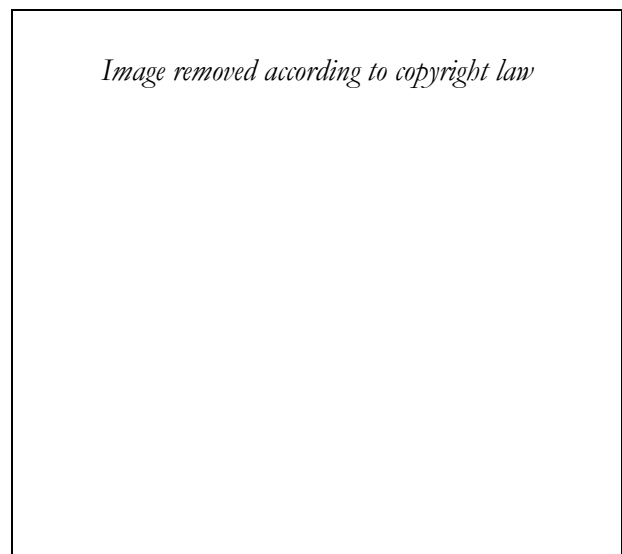
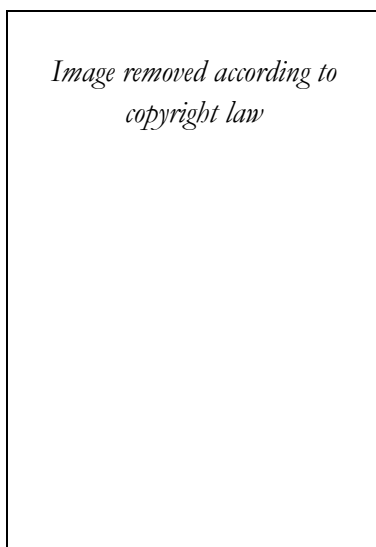


Figure 27: Andō Hiroshige, *Kyobashi and the Bamboo Bank of the Samida River*

(From the *One Hundred Views of Famous Places in Edo* series, 1857)

Figure 28: James Abbott McNeil Whistler

Nocturne in Blue and Gold: Old Battersea Bridge, c. 1872 – 1875

For many artists and designers the Japanese influence became intertwined with various major movements of the nineteenth century, particularly Aestheticism, Impressionism and *Art Nouveau*. However, some of the most interesting forms of expression are to be found in the fusion of *Japonisme* with the Gothic, especially in much of the work by Aubrey Beardsley (also inspired by the Medievalist Edward Burne-Jones and Aesthete J. A. M. Whistler, Figs 29 & 30), in which we see both the adoption of Japanese techniques applied to the woodblock print and a Japanese style. Another notable figure in regard to this aspiration was Edward William Godwin.

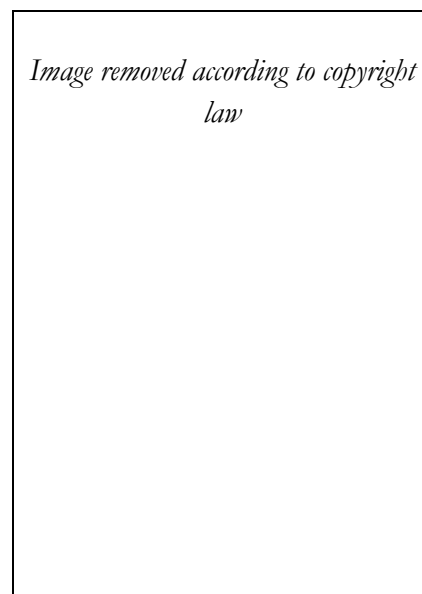
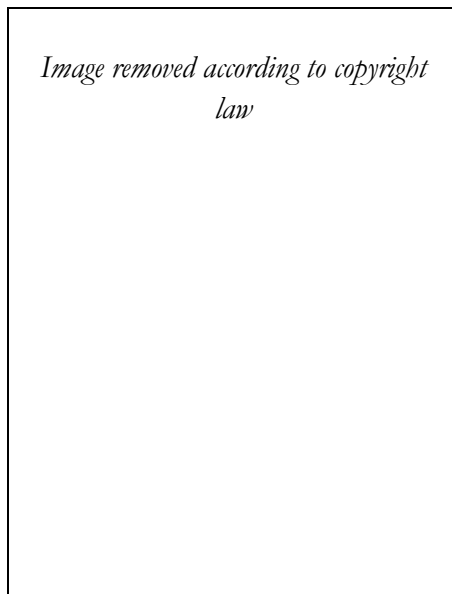


Figure 29: Aubrey Beardsley, *How King Arthur Saw the Questing Beast*, 1893

Figure 30: Aubrey Beardsley

Frontispiece to *The Wonderful History of Virgilius the Sorcerer of Rome*

(Published by David Nutt), 1893

One of the finest examples of Anglo-Japanese Gothick is *Grey Towers*, designed by the architect John Ross for William Randolph Inns Hopkins (built 1865 – 1867) and decorated and furnished by E. W. Godwin for Collinson and Lock between April 1873 and July 1874 (Fig. 31). Although it exists in a ruinous state, inventories describe and illustrate the original furniture and fittings, while remnants of interior décor indicate its original splendour. Says Susan Weber Soros:

Decoration is comprised of a stenciled pattern... featuring a stylized bamboo leaf... a stencilled dado... with circular [Japanese] *mon* crests... [and] roundels with gilded peacocks... within a gilded lattice design... [Figs 32 & 33]. To relate to the Anglo-Japanese wall decoration... Godwin designed furniture of Japanese inspiration [Fig 34].

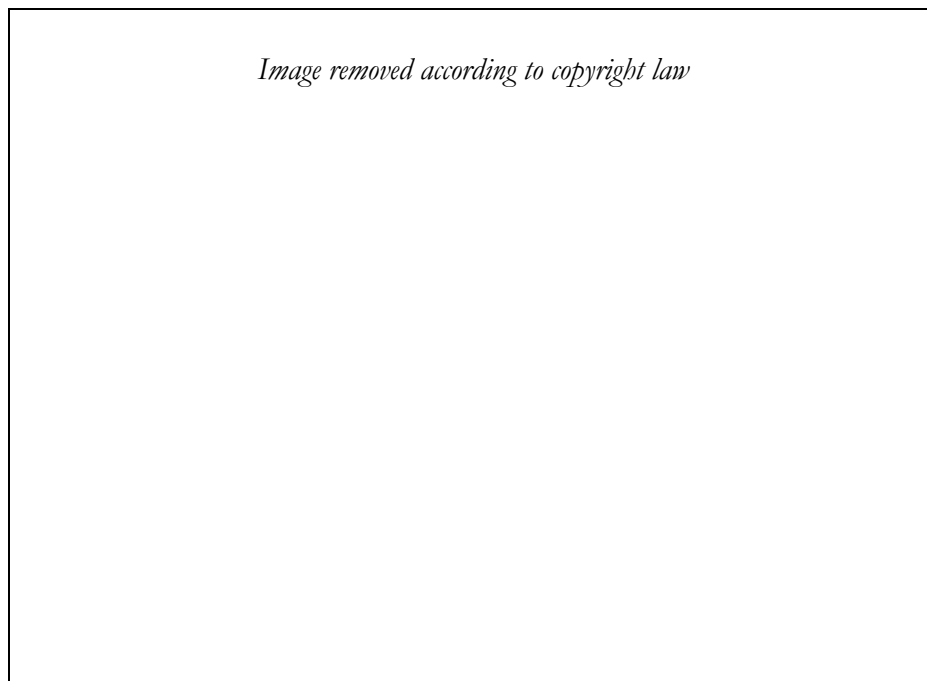


Figure 31: John Ross, *Grey Towers*, Nunthorpe, Middlesborough, 1865 – 1867

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Figure 32: E. W. Godwin, Wallpaper for *Grey Towers*, 1874

Image removed according to copyright law

Figure 33: Japanese *Mon* crests (Published in 1880)

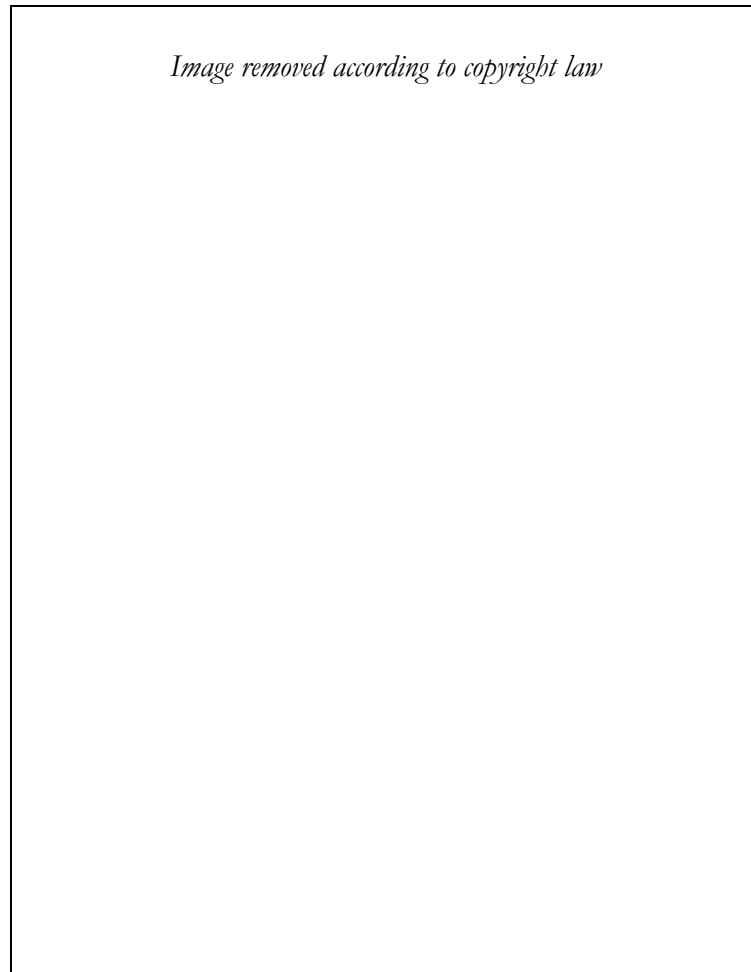


Figure 34: E. W. Godwin, Designs for coffee tables for *Grey Towers*, 1874

In regard to Godwin's Anglo-Japoniste tendencies, however, the most exemplary object he designed was the cabinet pictured below (Fig. 35). Paradoxically, although it was expounded that "with the Japanese we take a step backward some ten centuries to live over again the feudal days",²⁰ Godwin's furniture looks forward to a sense of postmodern hybridism as much as it looks back. While this cabinet is a product of Neo-Gothicism, which in its context signifies a rejection of the modern industrial world, it is also truly modernist, pre-empting twentieth-century Modernism by several decades.

Whether the Anglo-Japanese style reflected Gothic temperament or not, it must be remembered, in any case, that in all things Japanese the Western eye perceived the Medieval. Therefore in the Japanesque, for the nineteenth-century mindset, there tended to be an association with the Gothic. Moreover, this admiration was a two-way, mutual affair. It was, after all, during this period of European Gothicism that Japan's eyes were also opened to the West and with it European art and design.

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Figure 35: E. W. Godwin, *Anglo-Japanese cabinet*, 1877 – 1880

In 1888, the renowned department-store retailer and importer of Asian wares, Arthur Lasenby Liberty (of Liberty & Co., The House of Liberty, Liberty's of London), visited Japan accompanied by the designer, Christopher Dresser; and Charles Holme, Dresser's business partner at Dresser & Holme, importers of Japanese manufactures. During this trip in 1889, Liberty gave a lecture at the Tokyo National Museum of Japan, titled *Art Productions of Japan*, which demonstrated the impact that Japanese art and design had had on, particularly, European decorative arts and crafts, textiles, ceramics and printing, and highlighted the recent cross-cultural interrelations between Japan and the West. This was followed up on his return to London in 1890 with an historic presentation at the Society of Arts on *The Industrial Arts and Manufactures of Japan* for which he was awarded a Silver Medal.

There is evidence to show, however, that Japanese artists and designers had been influenced by Western art even prior to the opening of their ports in the 1850s. For example, Shiba Kōkan (c. 1738 – 1818)* is said to have been a Japanese “pioneer in Western-style oil painting”.²¹ Having also “introduced many aspects of Western culture” to the Japanese people, he was “the first to produce copperplate etching[s]” as well.²² This contradicts the still widely held belief that until the later 1800s the medieval woodblock method had been the only tool for printing in Japan.

* Also known as Shiba Shun and by the pseudonym Kungaku. Often simply referred to as Kōkan, his actual name was Andō Katsusaburō.

“In 1799 he [Kōkan] wrote *Seiyō-gadan* (*Dissertation on Western Painting*) in which he explained fundamental principles of [Western] realism.”²³ Kōkan had gained access to a limited amount of European art that had filtered into Japan via the Dutch East India Company through the port of Nagasaki, the only gap in Japan’s defenses before 1853. His hybrid style of art, which combined traditional Japanese subject matter with Western notions of space and shading, was subsequently studied by some of the great Japanese artists of the period, including Katsushika Hokusai (1760 – 1849). In fact Hokusai’s absolute masterpiece, and perhaps the most iconic historical work by any Japanese artist, *The Great Wave*, followed many examples of beach landscapes by Kōkan also featuring unusual tidal waves (Fig. 36).^{* 24}

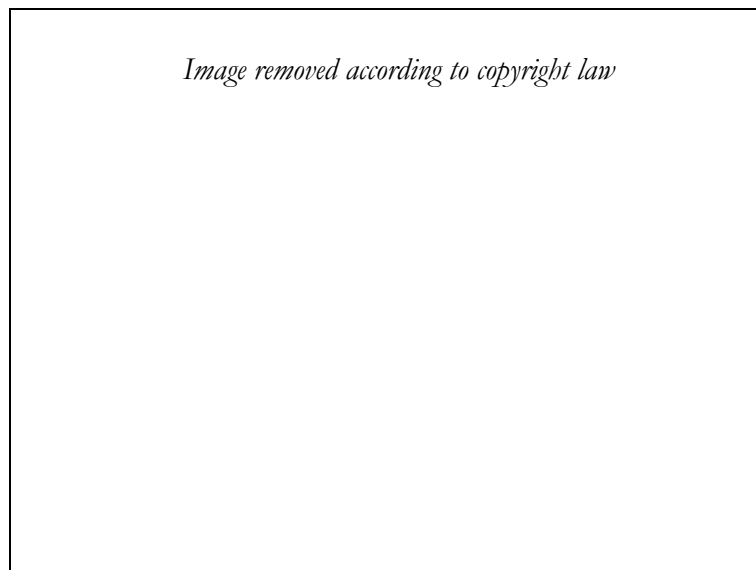


Figure 36: Katsushika Hokusai, *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*

(From the *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* series, c. 1830s)

* The presenters of the BBC Worldwide documentary, *The Great Wave, Hokusai* (2007), suggest that this woodblock print likely depicts an historical *tsunami*.

According to Richard Cork and the makers of the BBC documentary *The Great Wave* (2007), this image is not typically Japanese.²⁵ Although Hokusai's picture became one of the most popular works, for its Japanese qualities, for nineteenth-century Western Japanophiles and Mediaevalists alike – in that it demonstrates a mastery of Eastern principles in art, such as the use of negative space and sense of harmonic balance through asymmetrical composition and is also a fine example of medieval techniques in woodblock printing – it actually fuses the Japanese traditions with Western notions of depth and perspective. To our modern eye it appears to be very Japanese but even the subject matter was apparently unusual for its time and medium. In its menacing claw-like waves, there is also something essentially Gothic about it.

However, while there is evidence to show that European principles impacted on Japanese production as much as the Japanesque inspired some of the greatest Western artists and designers of the period, the influence of the art of Japan in actually instigating and formulating the major movements of Aestheticism (of course, *Japonisme*) and *Art Nouveau* cannot be overlooked and far outweighs the balance. That Japan was indeed the flavour of the times is emphasised in the movement's transition into the performing arts, exemplified with the two operas *The Mikado* by Gilbert and Sullivan (1885) and Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* (1898). These cultural crossings found their culmination around the *fin-de-siècle*, continuing into the twentieth century and existing beyond it to this present day.

Twentieth-century Collaborations between Japan and the Western World

In viewing the exchange of cultural expression between Japan and the West as a one-way avenue whereby the West is seen, in a Saidian sense, as the dominating creative force over the “Other”, is to regard it from a purely Eurocentric, Orientalist, colonial perspective. In returning to G&L, one can address this imbalance by examining its evolution and tracing cross-references which demonstrate that major ideas behind this Japanese subculture did not emerge recently or even begin with Mana and *Malice Mizer*. An observation of the visual identities of Mana’s band members, shown in images of the group from the mid-to-late-nineties (Figs 37, 39, 42 & 43), highlights multiple historical Western precedents (Figs 38, 40, 41 & 44). Besides these twentieth-century associations, there are of course further allusions to historical Western fashions of, especially, the Rococo, Directoire, Empire and Regency Periods.

However, again, these references do not entirely signify a one-way passage of influence from West to East. The Japanese Visual *Kei* phenomenon finds its roots most visibly in the New-romantic movement which, in turn, was a development from 1970s Glam. Glam itself, particularly the Glam look, demonstrates a significant relationship with Japan and Japanese inspiration.

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Figure 37: *Malice Mizer, the Gackt Era (1995 – 1999)*

From left to right: (back row) Mana, Kami, Közi; (front row) Gackt, Yu~ki

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Figure 38: *Adam Ant (Stuart Goddard) of Adam and the Ants (1977 – 1982)*

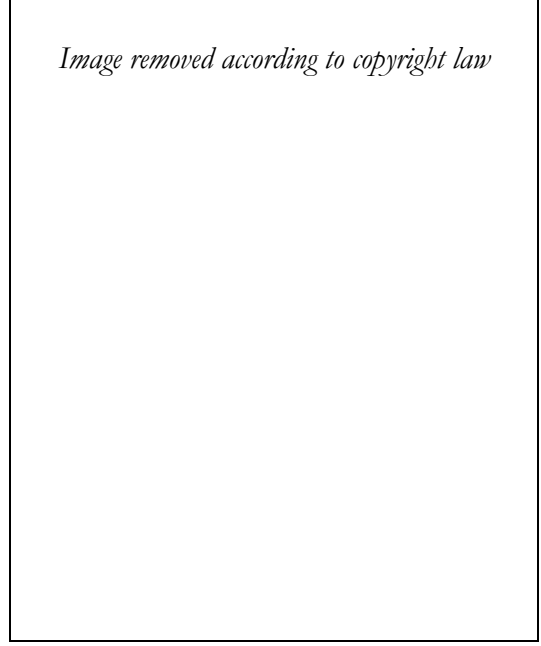
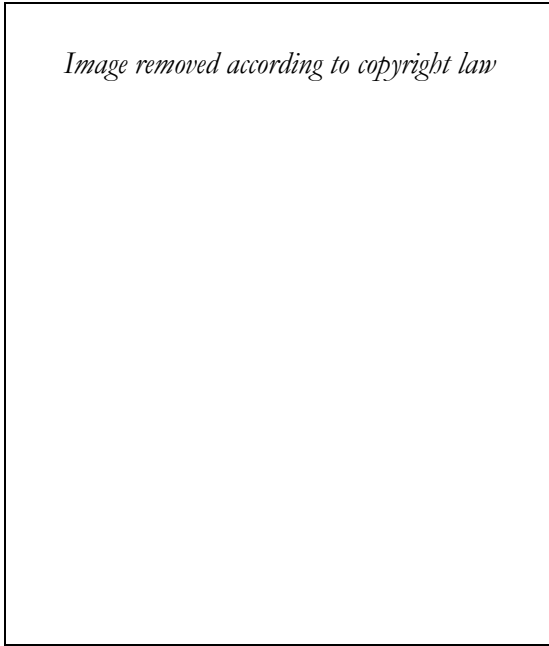


Figure 39: *Közi*, guitarist for *Malice Mizer* (1992 – 2001)

Figure 40: *David Bowie* in 1980

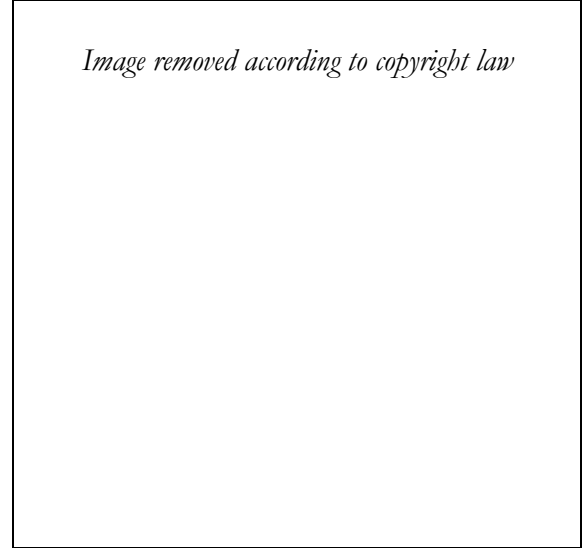
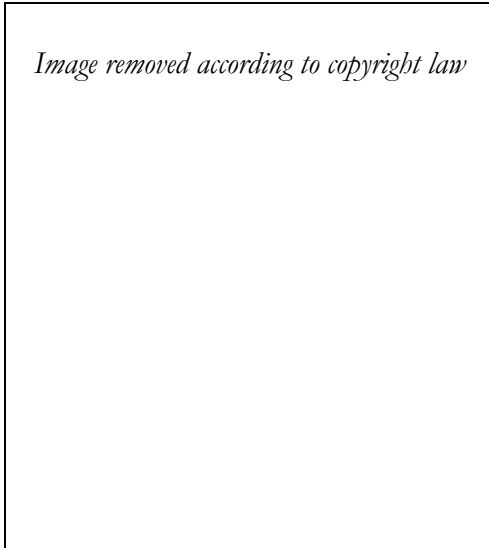


Figure 41: *David Bowie* as *Aladdin Sane* (1973)

Figure 42: *Ukyō (Kami) Kamimura*, drummer for *Malice Mizer* (1993 – 1999)

(b. 1 February 1973 – d. 21 June, 1999)

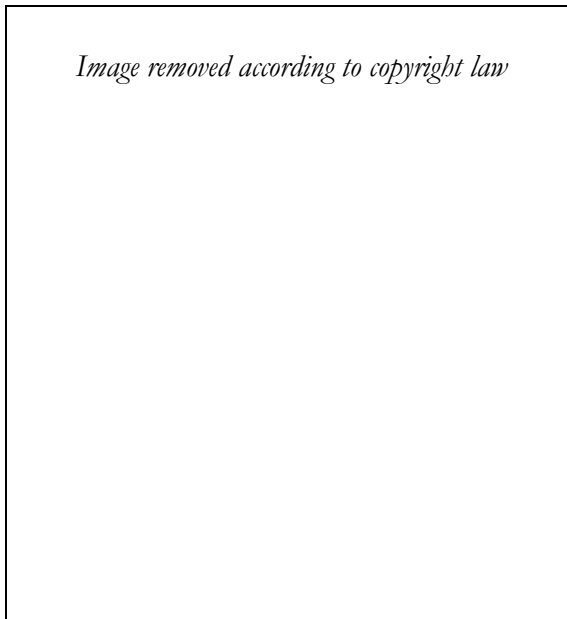


Figure 43: *Yu~ki*, bassist for *Malice Mizer* (1992 – 2001)

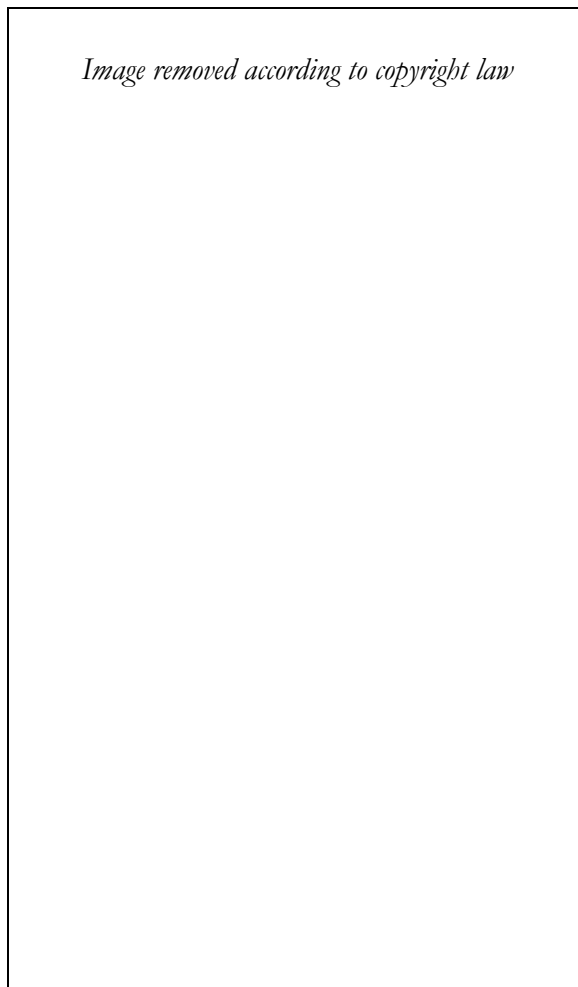


Figure 44: *Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood*

The Pirate Collection (Autumn/Winter 1981)

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Figure 45: *Kiss, dressed by Larry LeGaspi, 1972*

One of the earliest Glam Rock bands to reference Japanese culture in regard to image was *Kiss* (Fig. 45). Their theatrical look, created by American costume designer Larry LeGaspi, combines a science-fiction aesthetic with total-face traditional *kabuki*-mask makeup to create characters based on space-alien and animal/reptilian creatures.

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Figure 46: *David Bowie as Ziggy Stardust, dressed by Kansai Yamamoto, 1972*

This platform-booted space-age style also found expression in David Bowie's alter ego Ziggy Stardust (Fig. 46), an identity that exemplifies the Japanesque but also establishes the Japanese position in the canon of "visual style" in that the fashion designer Kansai Yamamoto was the creator of this visual persona, as well as the costume designer for Bowie's subsequent role as Aladdin Sane. As Bowie was one of the most inspirational figures in regard to Glam and then New Romanticism, but certainly is still in terms of G&L's ancestry, Kansai's part in this evolution is of great importance.

David Buckley states:

The biggest influence [on Bowie] came not from rock music at all but from Japanese culture. First[ly], Bowie has said that Japanese designer Kansai Yamamoto was “one-hundred percent responsible for the Ziggy haircut and colour”. Second[ly], Japan’s influence on Ziggy came from its peculiarly stylised theatre. Bowie was fascinated by *kabuki* and *nob*... and appropriated their essence.... And Bowie’s fascination with all things Japanese was [also] crucial in defining the Aladdin Sane era.²⁶

Kansai’s impact on Bowie began even before the two had met, beginning with the famous Ziggy haircut, a concept of Kansai’s that Bowie discovered in a magazine. Paul Gorman claims that:

In January 1972, during recording sessions for the album [*The Rise and Fall of*] *Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*, Bowie decided to cut off his flowing blond locks [and adopt the Ziggy hairstyle], inspired by a spiky-haired model featured in a *Honey* shoot for the *kabuki*/sci-fi designer Kansai Yamamoto’s first London show in late 1971.²⁷

The narrative continues that Bowie had been an admirer of Kansai’s work and a regular customer at his London boutique, purchasing off-the-rack garments which he began to wear in his 1972 performances. Bowie then asked to be introduced to Kansai by executives at the Japanese division of his recording company, RCA, and decided to commission him as his costume designer, starting a partnership that lasted for several years (Fig. 47). By April 1973 when Bowie toured Japan as Aladdin Sane he had an

entire wardrobe of Kansai designs. On this tour he even wore *sumo*-wrestler's pants and learned new makeup techniques from one of Japan's most popular *kabuki* stars, Tomasu Boro.

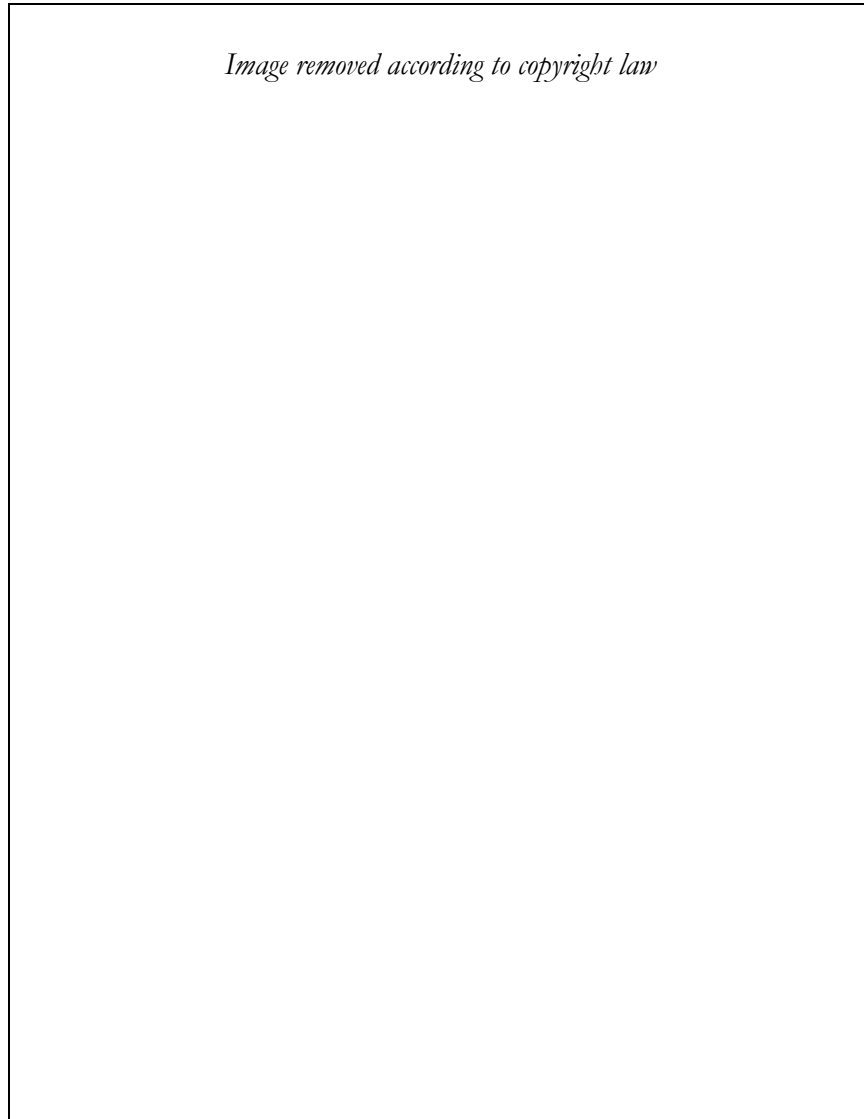


Figure 47: *David Bowie with the designer Kansai Yamamoto in 1973 wearing the Space Samurai costume for Aladdin Sane, influenced by Nob theatre and science fiction*

The meshing of rock performance with Japanese theatrical style was an innovation in itself. But Bowie also did much to break down the societal divide between notions of East and West. Says Buckley:

In the West, Japan was traditionally viewed as an “alien” culture, at least in the way that it was represented in the tabloids. It was often crudely caricatured as an incomprehensible, rule-bound society in which ritual humiliation was the order of the day for its citizens. Bowie’s Ziggy dignified Japanese culture and showed him open to ideas outside Anglo-American rock. Bowie helped internationalise pop, starting a long-running fascination with the East. He later became one of Japan’s biggest idols, and has retained an interest in the Far East.... The result, sartorially, of this *kabuki* appropriation was a... [juxtaposition of] the rock gig (connection and camaraderie) and that of *kabuki* theatre (stately, though garish, formality).²⁸

In 1983, David Bowie and Kansai Yamamoto were again involved in a collaborative project between their two cultures, a motion picture that referenced this perception of Japan “as an incomprehensible, rule bound society” founded in “ritual humiliation”. *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence* (Jap. *Senjō no Meri Kurisumasu*) was adapted by screenwriter and director Nagisa Ōshima from Laurens Van der Post’s novels, *The Seed and the Sower* (1963) and *The Night of the Moon* (1970). It starred Bowie as Major Jack “Strafer” Celliers and, while he was not credited for the role, Kansai was the film’s concept designer. Based on real-life experiences of the original author as a WWII POW in Japan, this story is notable for its brutal honesty in portraying the torturous treatment and harrowing ordeals suffered by British allied forces under internment while simultaneously showing a compassionate side to individual Japanese officers who had occupied difficult and imposed positions.

Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence is known for its sensitive rendering of Van der Post's reflections connected with "painful and poignant human encounters with 'the enemy', the burden of shame" and "the magic of tenderness in the midst of... terror wrought by man's inhumanity to man".²⁹ But it is also memorable for bringing together the musicians David Bowie, David Sylvian of British band *Japan* (1974 – 1982), and Ryûichi Sakamoto of the Japanese *Yellow Magic Orchestra* (or YMO, 1978 – 1984). Sakamoto, who acted in a major role as Captain Yonoi, also wrote the movie's score and theme track, *Forbidden Colours*, for which Sylvian provided the vocal. The presence of these iconic figures helped to establish this project as a cult film, bringing to it a younger, fanatical audience, a type of following that would be otherwise expected.

Bowie, Sylvian and Sakamoto, were at their peak in 1983 and were equally popular in Japan as they were worldwide. All three artists had also been instrumental in pre-empting and then formulating the Glam and New-romantic movements in both the West and Japan. This marriage of minds demonstrates a key relationship in regard to the Anglo-Japanese transmigration of ideas that would eventually lead to the genre known as Visual *Kei*. In this regard, although the Japanese visual movement has strong links to Glam and New Romanticism, I argue that Visual *Kei* should not be perceived as simply a Japanese copy of Western ideas. This progression was also Japan's own.

As demonstrated previously, David Bowie was, especially in his earlier days, very much a Japanophile. David Sylvian, who was a decade younger, had followed in Bowie's footsteps, admiring and sharing his obsession with Japanese culture. His early enamour for the nation is evident in the naming of *Japan* in 1974 when he was only sixteen. *Japan* began its days as a Glam production, in emulation of Sylvian's hero Bowie, and in the vein of other Glam Rock bands like *T-Rex* and *Roxy Music*. However, as the group matured, the music of Sylvian and his band gradually transformed to represent a Japanesque vibe, shifting from Glam Rock influences to an adoption of Japanese instrumental sounds. Their two final albums are remembered for their exquisite melding of the Oriental with the Occidental, and the traditional with the *avant-garde*.

Towards the end of *Japan's* career, the band members began to work quite closely with Ryûichi Sakamoto. Before Sakamoto and Sylvian joined forces on *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence*, for which Sakamoto won a BAFTA (British Academy of Film and Television Arts) Award, the pair released their own single, *Bamboo Houses*, in collaboration with drummer/percussionist Jansen who had, along with bassist Mick Karn, been prominent in creating *Japan's* innovative Japanesque accents. Sakamoto later went on to win an Oscar, a Golden Globe, a Grammy and a LAFCA (Los Angeles Film Critics Award) for the original score of Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor* (1987), a film which he also starred in as an actor, establishing a prolific and an illustrious career.

It was, though, with the *Yellow Magic Orchestra* that Sakamoto first made an impact on the contemporary music scene, particularly in Britain and Japan. This band was one of the very earliest to introduce an electro-synthesised sound to the industry that would become pivotal in pioneering the post-Punk, New-wave and New-romantic genres. David Sylvian, too, even prior to his days with Sakamoto, was a major inspiration and has been popularly referred to as the godfather of New Romanticism. Although he, personally, has always maintained a reluctance to accept this association, seeing his and his band's work as distinguishable from this type of categorisation, there is no doubt that *Japan's* Oriental soundscape can be heard throughout the early-eighties period, especially in *Tears for Fears'* track *The Sound of the Breakdown* (1982), as just one of a multitude of examples.

In terms of the New-romantic look, Sylvian's predecessors Marc Bolan of *T-Rex*, Brian Ferry of *Roxy Music* and his idol Bowie had set the bar for his dandified aristocratic persona which became a staple image for many subsequent Romantics. Also responsible for establishing some of the movement's major styles were Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren. According to Gorman:

Deeply under the influence of early Bowie in terms of look... they [the Romantics] were originally known as the "cult with no name".... The scene was eventually dubbed New Romantic, not least because Westwood and McLaren had turned to notions of pirates and eighteenth-century [models]....³⁰

While Bowie had represented the ultimate dandy, especially as the Thin White Duke (1976), and later encompassed French Romanticism in his guise as Pierrot for his *Ashes to Ashes* character (1980) (Fig. 40), Westwood and McLaren took historicist precedents further with their transformation of Stuart Goddard into the swashbuckling Adam Ant (1980) (Fig. 38), and their fashion collection, *Pirates* (1981) (Fig. 44). This flamboyant eighteenth-century image became the flavour for many more New-romantic identities, including *Visage*, *Duran Duran* and *Spandau Ballet*.

However, in regard to fashion, again the influence of Japan cannot be overlooked. While Kansai's contributions have been discussed, and the significance of *kabuki* performance as a backdrop to Glam theatricality established, Japanese high-fashion design is another element that played a role in Glam's transition to New Romanticism. An extra layer to this development was the introduction of Japanese designers to both the Western fashion industry and leaders of the British movement. Says Gorman, "the triumvirate of *Comme des Garçons*' Rei Kawakubo, Yohji Yamamoto and Issey Miyake... complemented the synthetic and crisp production values of the era typified by acts such as *Eurythmics* and *Japan*".

These designers, especially Kawakubo and Yamamoto who had each first shown in Paris in 1981, were also inspirational to Vivienne Westwood. Claims Claire Wilcox, “their impact was being felt in Western fashion, despite [an]... initial hostility to their asymmetrical forms, sombre colours and flat shoes. Westwood’s unfitted look... was in sympathy with the Japanese aesthetic”.³¹

In turn, Westwood has ever since been hugely successful in Japan. This was signified in the inclusion of Tokyo as a site for her 30-year retrospective exhibition (2004 – 2007). It is also measured by the fact that she not only continues to sell her higher-end collections in that country but that she is still popular with and creates fashions for Japanese street and subcultural groups. As noted previously, one of her markets is G&L (Fig. 5).

Visual Kei & the Lolita Subculture

In returning to the topic of G&L, especially in regard to Visual *Kei*, one can observe that not only has it evolved from New Romanticism it is also part of New Romanticism albeit in a latent but fresh and contemporary state. However, I must again stress that Visual *Kei* does not represent the mimicking by the Japanese of a Western movement. I have endeavoured to show that New Romanticism and its predecessor Glam took considerable inspiration Japan in its formulation as much as the Japanese movement has evolved from essentially Western roots. Furthermore, the transference of Western ideas into Japan, especially in regard to Visual *kei*, represents translation rather than imitation. In discussing this notion, Masafumi Monden cites anthropologist Jonathan Friedman's contention that "the things and symbols of Western culture have diffused into the daily lives of many of the world's people... yet still their mode of appropriating these things is vastly different from our own".³² The result is a hybridisation which, in this case, counts for sound as well as image.

In regard to visual identities, the members of the most prominent Visual-*kei* bands, especially those followed by Lolita worldwide (Figs 37, 39, 42, 43 & 48 – 53), display their associations with a Glam, post-Punk, New-wave, New-romantic heritage (Figs 38, 40, 41 & 44 – 47).

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Figure 48: *Versailles Philharmonic Quintet (formed in 2007)*

Image removed according to copyright law

Figure 49: *Gazette (formed in 2002)*

Image removed according to copyright law

Figure 50: *Dir en Grey* (formed in 2006)

Image removed according to copyright law

Figure 51: *BLOOD*, 2002 (formed in 2002)

Image removed according to copyright law

Figure 52: *Mois Dix Mois with Mana in the foreground (formed in 2002)*

Image removed according to copyright law

Figure 53: *Moon Kana*

Image removed according to copyright law

Figure 54: *XodiacK (formed in 2009)*

Image removed according to copyright law

Figure 55: *Deadly Doll (aka Layla Gordon) and Azadeh Safaei*

UK band RazorBladeKisses (formed in 2000).

In observing these images it is apparent that influences of the 1970s and '80s are thriving in Japan; one can note the historicist elements of New Romanticism, the appropriation of Rococo, Directoire, Empire and Regency fashions; inspiration from McLaren and Westwood, Bowie, Sylvian, *Adam and the Ants*, *Duran Duran* and *Spandau Ballet*, not to mention post-Punk and New-wave bands that would come to be labelled by many as Goth, such as *Siouxsie and the Banshees* and *The Cure*. There is also a strong element of Victorian Gothic as well as the darkness of Baroque.

However, just as there are Western aspects, there is as much a deep sense of Japaneseness embedded in this movement, especially in terms of Japan's own theatre history. Just as the medieval art of *kabuki* had influenced Glam, its essence is also represented here. As Buckley highlighted in his discussion on Bowie, *kabuki* is "by its very nature... a 'gender-bending' theatrical form... [whereby] all parts, both men and women, are played by men".³³ It is important to note in this regard that all the band members pictured in this section, except for Moon Kana and the *RazorBladeKisses* girls (Figs 53 & 55), are men. This element signifies a point of difference from the West: many Japanese musicians of the *Visual-kei* movement choose to dress as women as well as dandified effeminated aristocrats, yet the maleness of the men who represent themselves as female is almost undetectable. This demonstrates that, for the Japanese, it is not so much about androgyny as it might be for Western musicians of a similar genre.

In Japan, the notion of female impersonation, and the effort one makes to achieve it, is perceived and received on a much higher level than in the West. As Ian Buruma claims, “an important point [about this craft]... is that it rarely becomes caricature; it is never a send-up”.³⁴ He writes that “sexual confusion was an integral part of the earliest *kabuki* theatre... helped by the fact that after 1629 female players were [actually] banned by the government” creating an environment for “perhaps the highest art of female impersonation in the world: the *onnagata*”.³⁵ The *onnagata* does not resemble or behave in the manner of a drag queen. There is no equivalent element of camp in the idea of Japanese transvestism or a general desire for physical transexuality. Buruma maintains that, even if an *onnagata* lives his daily life as his female persona, “he still remains a man” and is never called “she”.³⁶

In regard to Visual-*kei*, it is the precise theatrical, “gender-bending” presence of the *onnagata* that gives the movement its particular Japanese persuasion. Therefore, just as Monden observes that “it is too narrow to describe a Japanese street fashion as homogenised on the basis of... Western... style as its inspiration”, it is ignorant to claim that Visual *kei* merely copies Western ideas, based on surface values such as dress, “since localisation and interaction with local cultural elements such as aesthetics, preferences or sociality are [also]... reflected in Japanese” fashion-based music genres.³⁷ The most visible example shown here of this fusion of East and West can be seen in the image of *Xodiack* (Fig. 54).

As discussed, Visual *kei* is the music genre followed by many Gothloli, especially Gothic Lolita, due to the impetus created by Mana's adoption of the Lolita look during his *Mizer* days. As Monden writes, the Japanese Lolita movement has itself "undoubtedly emerged from European and Japanese cultural interactions and hybridisations".³⁸ But, in referring to Okamura Keiko's theory of "format" and "product", Monden explains that:

Historical European fashion styles (the "format")... [become, in general] transnational, and then "localised" in Japanese culture. [In regard to Lolita, when] the "format" is then hybridised with the local [Japanese] aesthetic notion of cute, it engenders a fashion form peculiar to Japan. The "product" of this transcultural flow reflects the emphasis on the fusion of elaborated sweetness and cuteness, a quality unknown in Western Goth subculture.³⁹

The psychology behind "cuteness" in Japan is complex especially in its significance to Lolita, and as such is an important aspect that I discuss in greater detail in the following chapters. However, at this point, it is relevant to note that the cute and sweet elements of the Gothloli style are what make the fashion quintessentially Japanese but, when fused with the Gothic, as Monden says, the look "is neither European nor Japanese, but at the same time both European and Japanese".⁴⁰

It is this hybrid nature that allows the Lolita subculture to become accessible to fans outside Japan. While the movement shares ideas with the West, it combines them with local paradigms, transforms them into unique proclivities, and in turn creates Western counter currents. This pattern can

be seen not only in regard to Lolita fashions but also in influences on the music industry.

A notable homage to the Lolita movement is seen, for example, in the work of American singer and fashion designer Gwen Stefani of *No Doubt*. With her breakaway solo album, *Love, Angel, Music, Baby* (2004), Stefani made lyrical references to Harajuku in her lyrics;* was supported by four “Harajuku girl” dancers; released a video in which she starred as a Lolita-like Alice; and has since launched *Harajuku Lovers*, a range of perfumes for her fashion label, L.A.M.B.

The musician Courtney Love, lead singer/songwriter and guitarist of *Hole*, has also demonstrated her fascination with the subculture through the medium of *manga*. As the author of the graphic novel series, *Princess Ai* (Figs 68 & 69), she caricatures herself as the leading Lolita-styled protagonist, *Ai* (“*ai*” being Japanese for “love”), while the princess’ lover is based on *Nirvana*’s Kurt Cobain (Love’s deceased husband). In a poignant episode, the characters embrace, accompanied by the caption, “Even apart, we’ll always be together” (Fig. 68).

* Harajuku, Tokyo is where Lolita first appeared on the streets, *en masse*.

However, the authentic Gothic Lolita image is itself also represented in the music industry by genuine female Gothloli performers. The most popular musicians, and bands who include Gothloli girl members, supported by worldwide Gothloli communities, are Japanese artists Moon Kana (Fig. 53), *Lolita Complex*, *Aural Vampire* and Kanon Wakashima; and outside Japan, the German *Lolita Komplex*; Estonian-born American singer, Kerli; and the Persian/English group, *RazorBladeKisses* (Fig. 55).

All three movements, G&L, Visual *Kei* and the Lolita subculture, reflect cycles of fashion and inspiration that have travelled, and continue to travel, not just from East to West to East and back but also through time. Throughout this entire trajectory, however, it can be noted that there is a gap in the narrative, in that it leaps forward from the *fin-de-siècle* era to the 1970s. The reason for this is plain; the Western enamour for Japan and Japan's reciprocal relationship with the West, especially in regard to cultural crossings between the creative industries, was tainted periodically due to war and mutual fear. While Japan was viewed in the earlier-twentieth century as part of the "yellow peril" and stories coming out of POW camps in Japan brought home the horrors of WWII, the consequences of the bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima instilled the same terror in the minds of the Japanese toward people of Western nations. While it was the West, and ironically America, that immediately took up the task to help rebuild post-war Japan, it was not until widespread anti-war sentiments toward the American and Allied Forces' occupation of Vietnam (1964 – 1975) led the

counterculture to look to philosophies, religions and cultural traditions of the “Other”, as a way of “finding answers” to the atrocities being committed by mainstream societies, that an accommodating environment was created which again allowed for a Western acceptance of ideas and peoples of other nations. Prior to *Kiss*’ Japanesque look and Bowie’s *kabuki*-influenced era, bands such as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones were looking to the East for inspiration. By the early ‘70s, therefore, the time was ripe for the collaborations between East and West which were to come.

It is unsurprising that at this point the Japanese related to artists such as Bowie, but how did the Gothic find its place in Japan? Patrick Macias and Izumi Evers agree that “the roots of the Japanese Goth, and Gothloli (Gothic Lolita), scene go all the way back to pioneering late-1970s post-Punk UK bands like *Bauhaus*, *Sisters of Mercy* and *Siouxsie and the Banshees*” but, according to them, “the first wave of Goth bewitched only a handful of Japanese music fans”, and state that, as it has been shown, “the clothes proved to have more impact than the music”.⁴¹ The authors believe that this is due to the fact that the Japanese people do not share the same heritage of vampires, bats, castles, crucifixes and rosary beads, and that “Goth would have to connect with uniquely Japanese notions of darkness and doom first before it could gain momentum as a movement”.⁴² They claim that this connection, or “missing link”, came from Japan’s own pre-war history:

During the *Taishō* era (1912 – 1926) when the country was madly racing to play catch-up with the industrialized Western world after centuries of isolation, the bizarre and unbalanced mood of the times was captured in a series of obsessive and fetishistic mystery stories by author Edogawa Rampo (a pseudonym constructed to sound like “Edgar Allan Poe”). His works, among them *The Human Chair* and *The Blind Beast*, helped carve out a new genre known as *ero-guro*, an abbreviation of the words “erotic” and “grotesque”.⁴³

It was in the 1980s, around the same time that the Western Goth scene was making itself known internationally, that *ero-guro* sensibilities were revived in Japan. Rampo-like imagery started surfacing in underground comics and magazines and artists began to adopt “harrowing depictions of *Taishō*-era sex and death” in their work.⁴⁴ This development was the backdrop to a burgeoning Goth music and fashion industry, which became the Japanese ancestor of Visual *Kei* and the G&L movement. It was out of this landscape that *Malice Mizer* and Mana rose to fame, spawning the Cult of the Lolita and the Gothloli fashion movement.

The Lolita Fashion Industry

According to Mariko Suzuki, Gothic & Lolita first appeared in the “creative environment around Osaka” in the 1990s.⁴⁵ The most notable of the earliest labels from this region are *Marble*, *Visible* and *Victorian Maiden* (Fig. 56), all successful producers of Lolita garments still to this day. However, Macias and Evers claim that the look originally came off the streets, with the forerunner being the *Nagomo-gal* trend. These *Nagomo* girls, who followed the music of the *Nagomo Records* label,* “liked to make their own clothes, constructing strange fashions that toyed with a surreal vision of childhood not too far away from *Alice in Wonderland*”.⁴⁶ This childlike do-it-yourself style, which was often combined with vintage clothing to create an eclectic, quaint, old-world, sweet little-girl image, was formally marketed in the 1980s by *Pink House* (founded in 1973), *Milk*, and *Emily Temple Cute*, and has become known as *Dolly Kei*. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Mana acknowledges that Lolita-like clothing was indeed around, albeit unnamed, before he took it to the stage in the early 1990s and transformed the sweeter aspects to give it a Gothic edge.

* This recording label folded in 1987.

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Figure 56: *Victorian Maiden* (Japanese label)

Prior to the impetus created by Mana, the greatest influence on the movement, especially in regard to what would become the Sweet Lolita style, was the brand *Baby the Stars Shine Bright* (BTSSB, or *Baby*) (Fig. 57). The designer Akinori Isobe launched his flagship store in Shibuya, Tokyo, with his wife and business partner, Fumiyo, in 1988. Godoy claims that:

Isobe started *Baby*... after working at Atsuki Ohnishi's design office. Ohnishi, *Baby* and the Lolita movement were influenced by designer Isao Kaneko [for *Pink House* and *Wonderful World*]... and his romantic Victorian-meets-*Little-House-on-the-Prairie*-style outfits that were lovely, pink and ruffled. In the early days, Isobe explains, they struggled to find a brand identity.... A quick fix was discovered in the addition of lace and ribbons. Lots of them.⁴⁷

While Isao's Dolly-*kei* image was certainly a forerunner, there is no doubt that *Baby* refined and codified the Classic Lolita silhouette. And although Isobe credits Ohnishi as "the true pioneer of today's Lolita fashion in Japan",⁴⁸ the *Baby* brand typifies but also exemplifies the authentic, fully-formulated Sweet Lolita image in demonstrating the key elements, rules and regulations of the style that pertain to modesty, sweetness, and innocence.



Figure 57: *Baby the Stars Shine Bright* (Japanese label)

Both *Baby* and Isobe are immortalised in Novala Takemoto's novel *Shimotsuma Monogatari* (*Shimotsuma Story*, 2002) and Tetsuya Nakashima's film adaptation, released in Japan in 2004 and then rereleased as *Kamikaze Girls*

with English subtitles in 2006. While the book itself has been translated into English by Akemi Wegmüller (2006), it has also spawned both Japanese and English-language *manga*-graphic-novel versions, illustrated by Yukio Kanesada, and published in 2005 and 2006, respectively (Fig. 59). *Shimotsuma Monogatari* is an example of *shōjo* (teenage girls’) fiction that weaves together the stories of two unlikely companions, Ichigo (“Ichiko”) Shirayuri, a *yanki* (or delinquent biker-punk, and member of a rough all-girl *bōsōzoku*, or motorcycle gang); and Momoko Ryugasaki, a Sweet Lolita obsessed with *Baby the Stars Shine Bright* (Fig. 58). This cult film has helped to push not only the Lolita subculture into the limelight but has enabled *Baby* to become so popular with worldwide Gothloli that Isobe has since expanded into France and the US, opening stores in Paris’ Bastille district (2007) and San Francisco (2009).

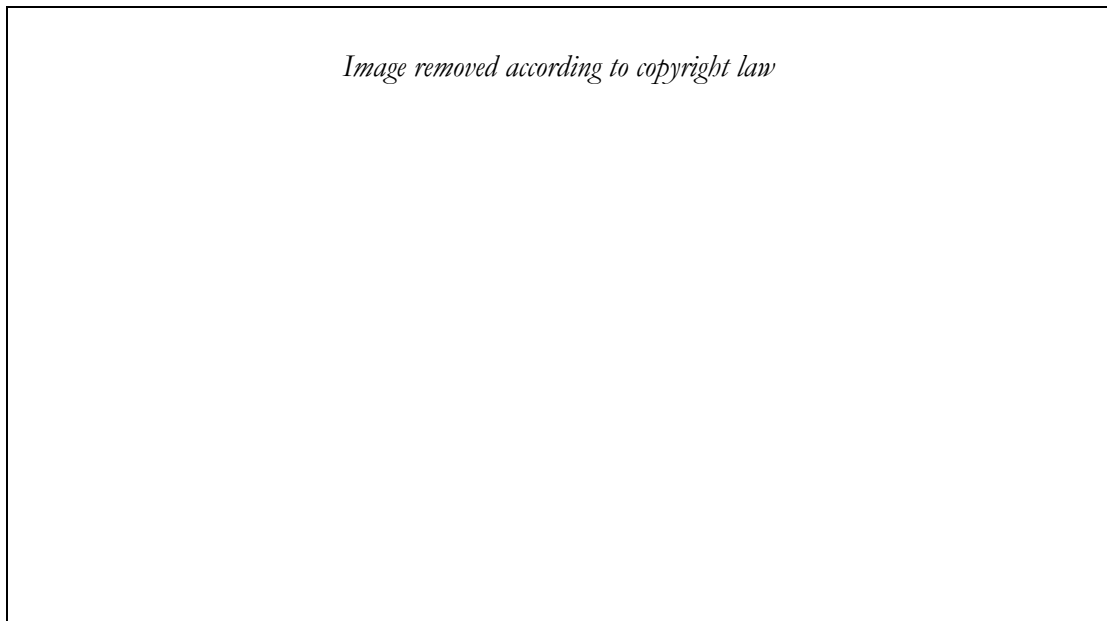


Figure 58: *Kyoko Fukada as Momoko Ryugasaki in Shimotsuma Monogatari, 2004*

Macias and Evers argue that the “tipping point for the rise of the Gothloli scene” was in fact Takemoto’s *Shimotsuma Monogatari* and state that, after the film’s release, “the Gothloli entered mass consciousness in Japan”.⁴⁹ It was certainly the English-language version that opened up the rest of the world’s eyes to the subculture as the media began to get hold of the craze. The fashion movement itself has also moved from a largely do-it-yourself enterprise, with just a handful of labels to support it, to a completely designer-led industry. While Mana’s *Moi-même-Moitié* still holds rank as the most prestigious Gothic Lolita brand and *Baby the Stars Shine Bright* is the leading force for the Sweet Lolita look, there is now a cornucopia of major brands to choose from.

As mentioned previously in this chapter, leading ranges for the sweeter style are *Angelic Pretty* and *Metamorphose temps de fille*. Others are *Innocent World*, *Victorian Maiden*, *Mary Magdalene*, *Chocochip Cookie*, *Juliette et Justine*, *Millefleurs*, *Marchenmerry* and *MAM*. In regard to Gothic Lolita fashions, choices include *Visible*, *Marble*, *Atelier-Pierrot*, *h.naoto*, and *Black Peace Now*. In regard to shopping in Tokyo, most of these brands are available in Harajuku and or Shinjuku, with the two main shopping malls being *Laforet* and *Marui Young*.

However, as with any true subculture made visible via fashion, the Japanese Lolita movement is not just about fashion.

Lolita and Popular Culture

Besides fashion, the Japanese Lolita subculture incorporates music, art, film, animation, literature and a doll industry. As highlighted in the case of *Shimotsuma Monogatari*, the movement often overlaps several forms of media and popular culture: this example encompasses Lolita fashion; Takemoto's novel; Nakashima's film; graphic-art literature (Fig. 59); and music, with the soundtrack, successful in its own right, incorporating tracks by the two leading actresses, Kyoko Fukada (Fig. 58) and Anna Tsuchiya, who are also both J-Pop, or Japanese pop, stars.

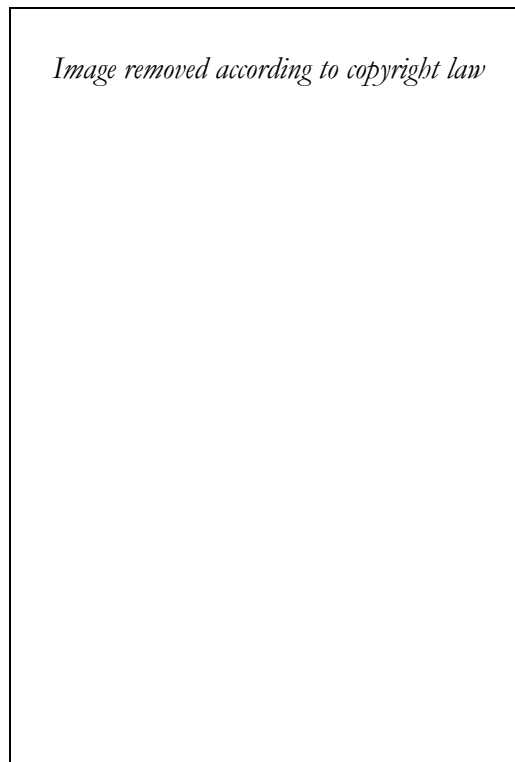


Figure 59: Cover of the English-language graphic-novel version of *Kamikaze Girls (Shimotsuma Monogatari)*, 2006

In regard to the music genre, so far the visual identities of leading musicians and bands associated with the movement have been discussed, but not the sound. One may be surprised to learn that such demurely dressed young women as Gothloli would favour listening to heavy music. However, just as Mana helped inspire women to dress like little girls, his bands have also encouraged them to be open to the Japanese Gothic and Industrial genre that most *Visual-kei* groups adhere to. While the sound of groups such as *Malice Mizer* (Fig. 15), *Moi Dix Mois* (Fig. 52), *Versailles Philharmonic Quintet* (Fig. 48) and *BLOOD* (Fig. 51) might remind us of Western Metal and Goth Industrialism, it is also distinctively Japanese. In a way that is hard to describe, one knows when they are listening to Japanese industrial music, and not just because the lyrics are often sung in Japanese: it is orchestral, dramatic, technically skilful, layered, complex and absolutely mesmerising, it is often fast, frenetic, dark and very, very loud; and most members of the Lolita movement are enthralled by it. This dichotomy is just one of the many paradoxes of the Lolita subculture. Chapters Two and Three of this thesis, which is the thesis *per se*, investigate and analyse more.

The following chapter also examines in greater detail the association of the Japanese Lolita with the Doll and the significance of doll culture in Japan, as well as psychological connections to and inferences of dressing as a doll-like child. However, doll culture is further connected to the subculture in the forms of *anime* and *manga*. *Manga*, which is two-dimensional

illustration, is closely related to *anime*, which is literally animated, or moving-image, *manga*.

There are many popular *manga*-graphic novels and *anime* series belonging to the Lolita subculture that feature Gothloli/doll characters. The most notable are *Le Portrait de Petite Cossette* (Figs 60 & 61), *Rozen Maiden* (Figs 62 – 65), *Princess Resurrection* (Figs 66 & 67), and *Princess Ai* (Figs 68 & 69). The first three of these narratives are available in both graphic-novel and animated-film formats, while the characters of *Rozen Maiden Träumend* and *Princess Ai* have been marketed as collectible dolls.

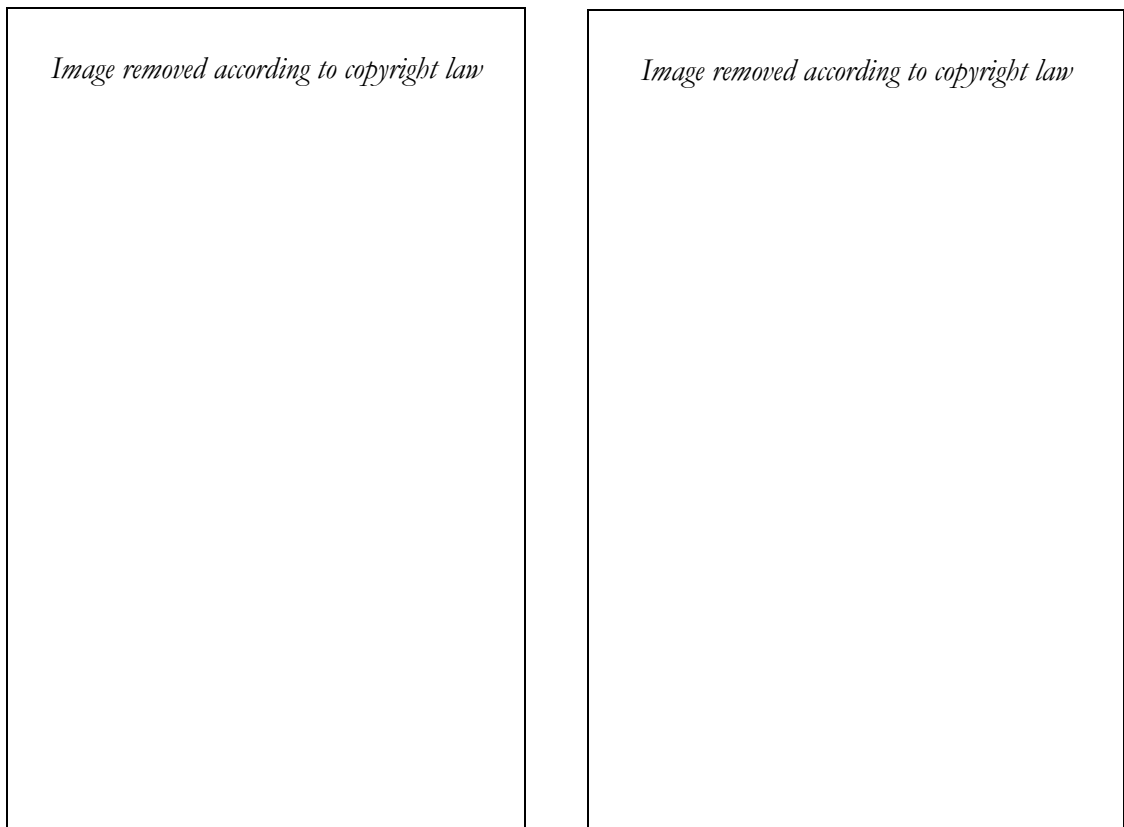


Figure 60: *Le Portrait de Petite Cossette*, artwork for anime, 2004

Figure 61: *Le Portrait de Petite Cossette* graphic-novel manga, Chap. 2, Vol. 1, 2004

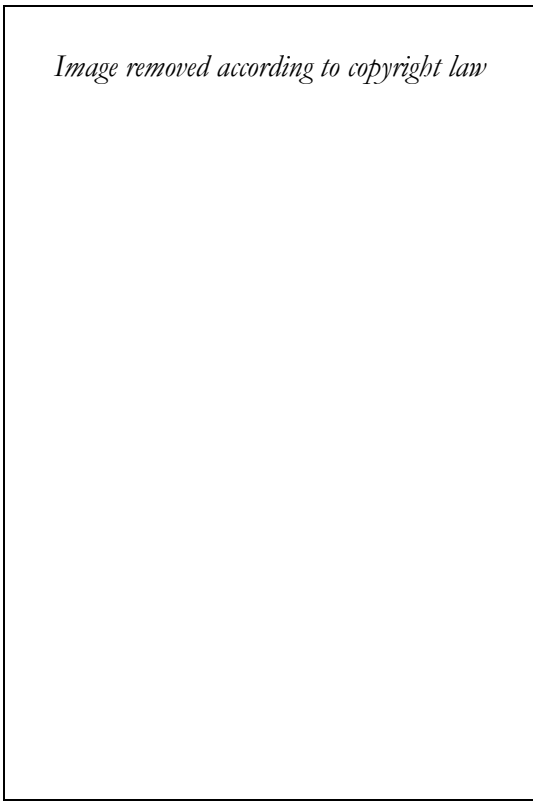


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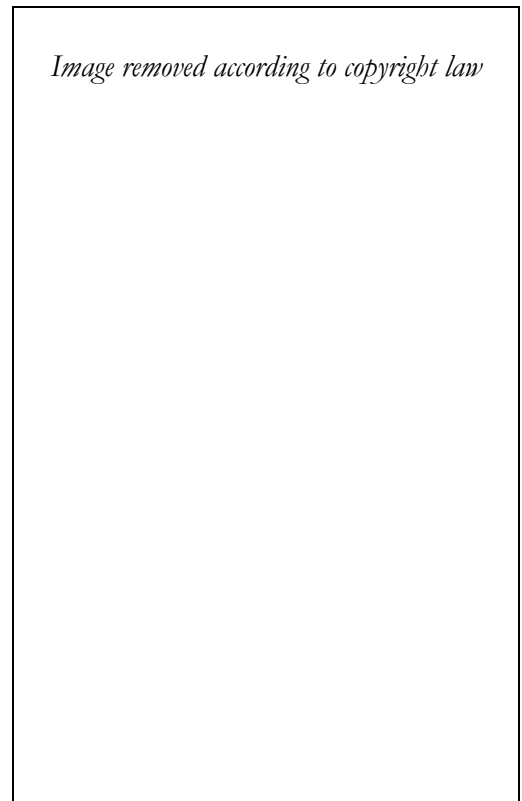


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Figure 62: *Cover of the English-language graphic-novel version of Rozen Maiden, Vol. 1, 2003*

Figure 63: *Shinku, Rozen Maiden Träumend Pullip doll, 2006*

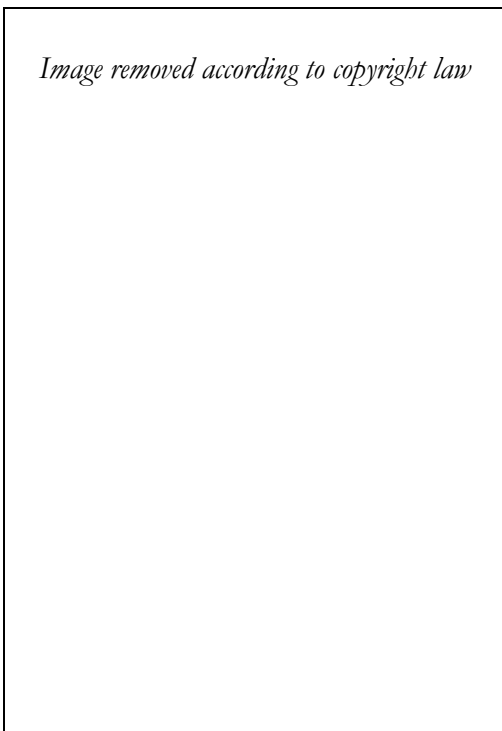


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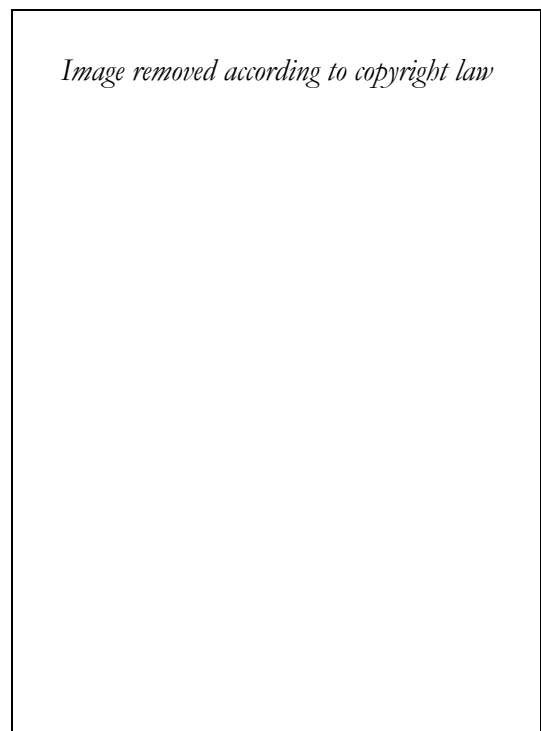


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Figure 64: *Suigintou, Rozen Maiden Träumend Pullip doll, 2007*

Figure 65: *Rozen Maiden Träumend anime still, 2004*

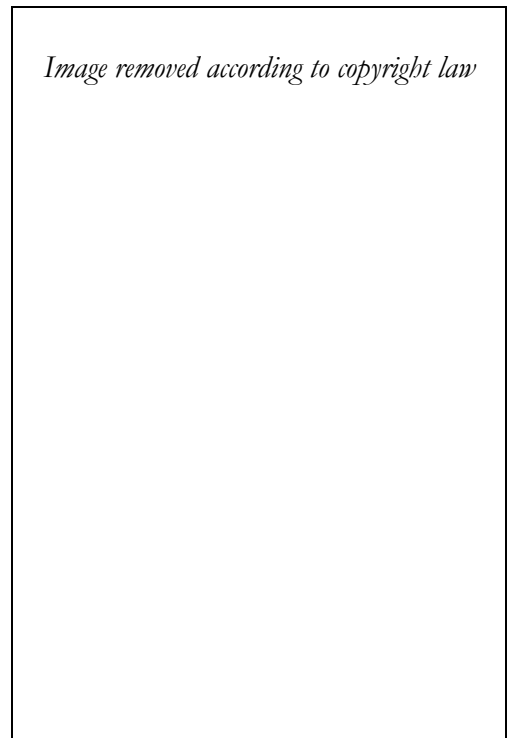


Figure 66: *Princess Resurrection anime still, Ep. 1: Princess Resurrection, 2007*

Figure 67: *Princess Resurrection graphic-novel manga, Chap. 1: Princess Resurrection, Vol. 1, 2007*

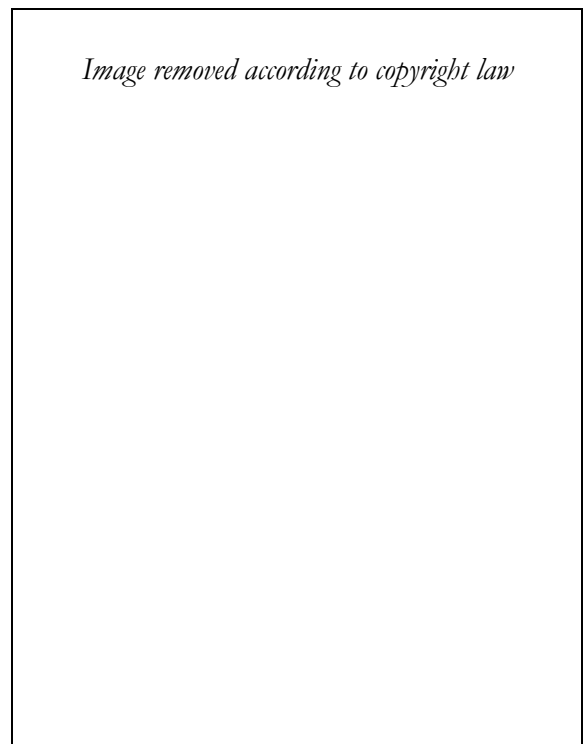
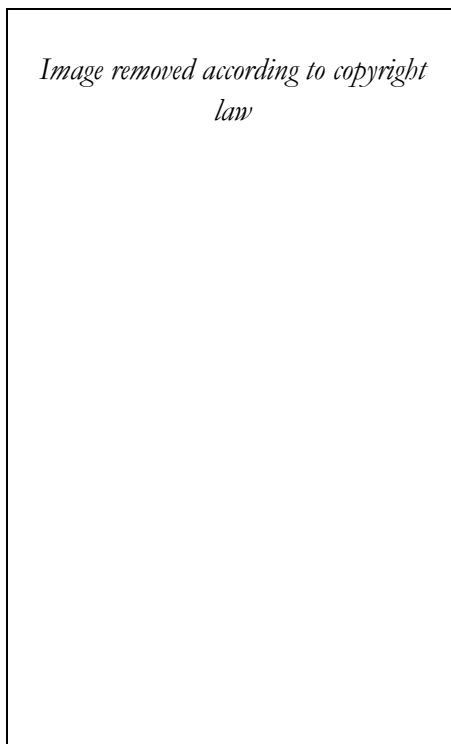


Figure 68: *Princess Ai graphic-novel manga, Chap. 15, Vol. 3: Evolution, 2006*

Figure 69: *Princess Ai, graphic-novel manga, coloured insert page, 2006*

The leading companies that cater to Lolita doll collectors are *Groove Inc.* (Korea); *Takara* (Japan); and *Volks, Inc.* (Japan). The most popular Gothloli dolls are produced in certain ranges of types known as *Pullip* (Figs 10, 63, 64 & 74), *Dal*, *Byul* and *Isul*; and as male counterparts, “boyfriends” to *Pullip* and fashioned in a Gothic Visual-*kei* style, called *Namu* and *Taeyang* (Fig. 74); now made by *Groove Inc.* since 2009, and distributed by *Jun Planning (USA), Inc.*, but previously, between 2003 and 2008, created by South Korean manufacturers *Cheonsang Cheonba* and *Jun Planning, Inc.* (Japan). The dolls released between 2003 and 2008, before this original collaboration went under, were limited to very small quantities of about 300 – 500 and, as such, are now very valuable.

The competition for *Pullip* is *Blythe*, and collectors can be quite specific about their preference for either type. *Blythe*, who with the tug of a string, can be made to change eye colours from blue to pink, to orange or green, was first sold in 1972 by US brand *Kenner* for just one year. This vintage toy has become a desired collectible worldwide, especially due to her limited production, but particularly so in Japan, where there is a great attraction to wide-eyed imagery of cute little girls and to “big-eye” dolls, of which both *Pullip* and *Blythe* are categorised. Like the earlier *Pullip* dolls, a 1972 *Blythe* can fetch thousands of dollars on the internet trade market. The reasoning for this and the psychology behind it is not really something I have investigated, but it can be linked, I would argue, to the growing trend for young Japanese women to go to the lengths of seeking plastic surgery in order to create

wider, “European” eyes, as well as the popular fashion for coloured contact lenses. In any case, due to this demand for vintage *Blythe* dolls, the Japanese toy company *Takara* gained the rights to reproduce them, refashioned in contemporary dress styles, from 2001 onwards. Both *Pullip* and *Blythe* dolls are available in Gothloli-style versions. For the Gothloli collector, the most sought after are limited editions devised by Japanese Lolita fashion brands and designers, such as *Angelic Pretty* and Naoto Hirooka of *h.naoto*.

However, the most valuable and expensive types connected with the Lolita subculture, overall, are *Super Dollfie*s (Fig. 72). These two-foot tall dolls are manufactured by *Volks, Inc.* of Kyoto. While *Super Dollfie*s are not all representative of the Gothloli identity, as neither *Pullip* nor *Blythe* are, exclusively, they have also been made to depict *Rozen Maiden* characters, and *Volks* often collaborates with the designers of leading Lolita labels, including *h.naoto*, *Black Peace Now*, *Atelier-Pierrot*, and *Baby the Stars Shine Bright*.

Finally, the figure of Lolita also finds herself depicted in fine art. While the little-girl image is prolific in Japan, the most recognised of all Japanese artists, by Gothloli worldwide, is Nori Tamizaki. In Nori’s work, which concentrates on the portrayal of either doll-like Lolita or lifelike dolls, the notions of both “Lolita” and the “Gothic” are juxtaposed to represent the ultimate “sweet but scary little girl” image; she is simultaneously Alice, the Sweet Lolita; and Wednesday Addams, the epitome of the creepy, cute Gothic Doll-child/Woman-child, or the Living Doll.

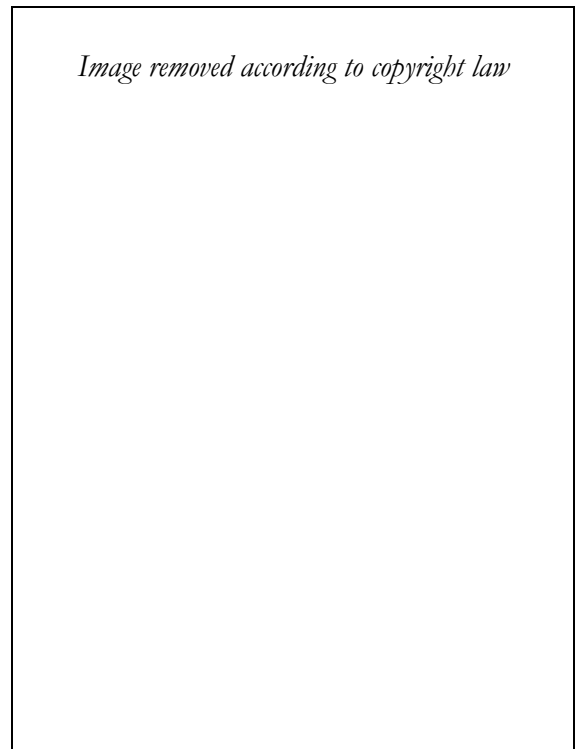
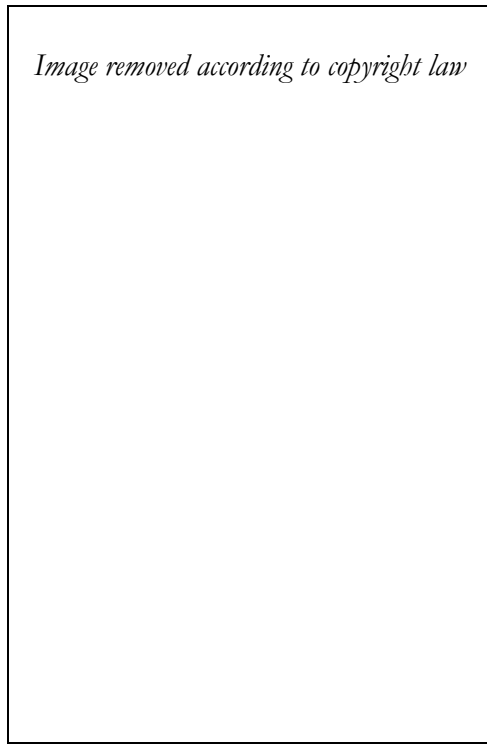


Figure 70: Nori Tomizaki, *Strings*, digital painting, c. 2004 – 2006

Figure 71 Nori Tomizaki, *Kyutai Kansetsu Shiki (ball-jointed type): Tomoe 2*

(Photographer Asuka Ishii, model Tomoe)

Digitally manipulated photograph, c. 2004 – 2006

But why is there this widespread attraction to dolls in Japan? And why do women choose to represent themselves as doll-like Lolita? What does the Cult of the Lolita mean? And what is the significance? These questions will be addressed in the following chapters, the emphasis of this thesis, which is, essentially, a critique of the Japanese Lolita subculture and an analysis of the psychology and motivations behind it.

Chapter Two

The Japanese Lolita: A Living Doll

Japanese Traditional and Psychological Relationships with Ningyo

*I asked a charming Japanese girl, “How can a doll live?”; “Why”, she answered, “if you love it enough, it will live!”*⁵⁰ Lafcadio Hearn.*

The Japanese Lolita or Gothloli is an adolescent girl or young (occasionally not so young)[†] woman who displays an intense relationship with the Doll (Jap. *Ningyō*, or “human shape”). She resembles a doll, regularly collects and plays with dolls and designs and makes dolls’ clothing. She is even sighted, especially around the streets of Harajuku and Shinjuku, the most popular hotspots for the subculture in Japan, parading with a doll, often a miniature version of and dressed identically to herself (Fig. 72). Her very favourite pastime is to meet up with other doll-like Lolita and their dolly friends to partake in tea and pretty cakes. In fact the dolls’ tea party quite often takes the place of other “usual” forms of teenage behaviour.

* Patrick Lafcadio Hearn (1850 – 1904), also known as Koizumi Yakumo, was a writer of Greek/Irish descent, born in the Greek island of Lefkada. After travelling around Japan in the 1890s with his close companion and guide, Kinjuro, he published *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* (1894), amongst other books, which included insight into Japanese doll culture, traditions, superstitions, legends, rituals, practices and aspects of everyday life in Japan.

† The usual age bracket for Lolita membership is around 13 – 26 years of age. However, during my 2007 research trip to Tokyo, I met some Gothloli that were older. I am also in contact with Gothloli worldwide through MySpace, and some of these participants are in their thirties or more (such as myself). See my friends list at www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz.

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Figure 72: Masayuki Yoshinaga, *Toma* (age 22), *Classic Lolita*

(wearing her own designs for herself and her Super Dollfie, for her label Dowakan Mother Goose)

on the overbridge above the Jingu Bashi, Harajuku, Tokyo, Japan, 2007

Many international Gothlooli demonstrate a synergy with Japanese Lolita in regard to their attachment to dolls. Says 22-year-old “Kasutei” from Scotland:

I have an old doll, pale blue porcelain and soft bodied, called Massao. I used to make clothing for her.... I also have a... *Momoko* fashion doll.... I tried to make a dress (inspired by *Angelic Pretty*) for her, but it was difficult for her scale/size. Also, I have one... male ball-jointed doll, Sakuya.... I made Sakuya an *Innocent World* inspired blouse, as well as a blue haori, deep green striped kimono and light blue bubble looking print nagajuban.*

As to whether she considers this as playing with dolls, she asks, “What is considered playing these days?”[†] She replies:

I might pose the dolls, sort their hair/wig, take photos, make clothes, dress them, [sometimes but] rarely take one out shopping with me. In a way I guess I might be playing. Yet it’s not the same as the way a child might play with a doll in an imaginative way, possibly with a storyline and talking.[‡]

To “Kasutei”, “dolls are an art form” rather than mere playthings.[§]

However, although she claims that she does not talk to them, she also sees “them in a Shinto way, believing they might have souls”.** This is a

* Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “Kasutei” (Kirkcaldy, Scotland) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 17 January, 2010.

† Ibid.

‡ Ibid.

§ Ibid.

** Ibid.

commonly held sensibility not only amongst doll lovers in Japan but also for followers of the Japanese movement.

This notion that dolls may possess souls is a major point of discussion in this chapter. It is an extra layer which emphasises that there is more psychologically to one's motivation towards dolls, including the doll-like Lolita identity and, for the Gothloli particularly, behind the obsession with playing with dolls or playing at dress-ups, than sheer interest. These activities should not be interpreted as just everyday hobbies, or even the attraction to them as simply a reflection of taste and desire.

Symbolically, in choosing this inanimate identity, there also seems for me to be a general sense of loss and mourning. For Gothic Lolita there is a literal relationship to bereavement in the wearing of black and mourning dress but there is also an overall pervasion and or projection of a feeling of loss which, in consideration of the Gothloli's doll-like appearance and childish habits, I read as a mourning for the loss of childhood or connected with childhood memories and or the loss of, or desire to retain, childhood sensibilities.

The animation or reanimation of this inanimate identity I relate and extend to the memory of the childhood doll itself and a wish to replace the doll (often a lost possession) or a desire to hang on to it. I go even further to suggest that this represents an overall sense of *being* lost.

I will return to analysing these connections between the Gothloli and the Doll and explain my reasoning for these theories after the next section and continuing on to the next chapter. But before examining potential relationships between the loss of the childhood doll, trauma and bereavement, reading into the psychological links between these aspects and how they relate to one's place in the world, it is important to discuss the role that dolls play in historical Japan.

While the Doll is pertinent to and resonates with the Gothloli, it is evident that a powerful relationship with *ningyō* is also traditionally Japanese. According to Alan Scott Pate:

Ningyō have played a far more important role in Japanese culture than one might initially imagine. From the dawn of Japanese history right down to the present day *ningyō* have been woven into the very fabric of Japanese society serving a multitude of roles from talismanic to onanistic, from high art to child's play and nearly every conceivable shade in between.... *Ningyō* represent a category of objects that goes far beyond our limited concept of Doll.⁵¹

This connection supports my opinion that the image of the Japanese Lolita, while it is partially drawn aesthetically from Western design elements and relates to a particular notion of Western Gothic, is loaded with meanings that are also inherently Japanese and belies strong Japanese affinities and influences.

The Significance of Ningyo Culture in Japan

Hina-Matsuri

The importance of doll culture in Japan can be observed in the prominence of *ningyō* festivals. One of the most notable occasions is the centuries-old *Hina-matsuri*. Held annually on the 3rd of March, also known as Girls' Day, *Hina-matsuri* comprises the exhibition of *ningyō* which depict historical figures from Japan's noble Heian past (794 – 1185), and features the imperial couple, or *dairi-bina*, presiding over attendants such as ladies-in-waiting, entertainers and ministers, surrounded by an abundance of offerings, including rice cakes and *sake*, to keep the dolls' "spirits" satiated. These *bina* dolls are displayed in formal settings as well as households all over Japan for the purpose of bringing good health and growth to families raising girl children.

What is striking about the event, in context with this current discussion, is that Girls' Day is both a celebration of dolls *and* girls. That Japan has held a special day for over three-hundred years specifically for little girls demonstrates that a fascination with the little-girl identity and love for little girls is not something new.

However, as Pate has highlighted, what is significant is that *Hina-matsuri* is not just “for the amusement of little girls [but]... a serious ceremonial”.⁵² Adding to this tone is the element of belief that, to the Japanese people, *hina-ningyō* are not merely dolls but solemn entities with souls:

Traditionally *hina-ningyō* were seen as *yorishiro* (temporary lodging places) for spirits to come down and bless the home. Literally inhabiting the bodies of these dolls for the duration of the festival, these spirits were entertained and welcomed into the home in order to secure blessings and protection for the coming year. The focus of these early rites rested squarely on the central doll pair... (lord and lady from the inner palace) combined with offerings, libations, and lacquered accessories (*dōgu*) providing for all of the spirits’ needs, ensuring their contentment and goodwill.⁵³

From the early-seventeenth century when this ritual began as an almost exclusive practice for the benefit of the élite, through to the eighteenth hundreds as it was opened up to people from all walks of life as a seasonal festival, on to the present day, these dolls have been believed to be talismanic spirits with the power to purify the home and protect children.

However, it is not only *hina-ningyō* that are said to contain spiritual power. According to Ellen Schattschneider, there exists a “widely reported sensibility in Japan that [all] *ningyō* (dolls) have a kind of soul (*tamashii*) and that they may carry the identity, motivation or essence of a person who has made, given or owned them”.⁵⁴

Bunraku

Another tradition, *bunraku* theatre, has helped to enrich the *ningyō* heritage in Japan and reinforce the notion that dolls possess souls.

The theatrical world is, of course, a strong feature of Japanese cultural heritage. *Kabuki*, the most renowned form of Japanese theatre, developed from a much earlier seventeenth-century phenomenon originally referred to as *ningyō jōruri*. Now known as *bunraku*,* these performances employ life-size puppets (*ningyō*) that “come to life” via the skills of on-stage puppeteers (*ningyōtsukai* or *ningyōzukai*), chanters (*tayū*) and musicians. Musical accompaniment is provided by the playing of *shamisen*, three-stringed instruments plucked with a plectrum (*bachi*), which (as an action) is termed *jōruri* (thus *ningyō* + *jōruri* = *ningyō jōruri*), and sometimes drums (*taikō*).

Again, these *ningyō* command a real presence. As Pate writes, “manipulated by shadowy puppeteers who are frequently clad all in black, these puppets shed their inanimate nature and virtually breathe the stories they re-enact”.⁵⁵ For some it is not hard to believe that these figures are imbued with spirits.

* According to Alan Scott Pate (2008), “the term *bunraku* is a nineteenth-century innovation and derives from the performer and impresario Uemura Bunraku-ken (Masai Kahei, 1737 – 1810) whose lineage reintroduced a new vitality and freshness” to this art form (p. 213).

Says Pate:

Their depth and mystery comes from the way that these dolls are used, how... they are magically transformed from inert assemblages to living beings filled with emotion and power.... Such is their extraordinary sense of vivacity on stage that to see them... inert after a performance it is difficult to believe that they are actually inanimate.⁵⁶

Part of this powerful transformation stems from the profoundly emotional stories that the *ningyō* bring to life. Said to have been the backbone behind *kabuki* performance “with its fantastic costuming, outrageous plots and magical stage effects.... The stories that these [*bunraku*] dolls tell, the heroes and heroines, villains and evildoers, so vividly portrayed by these stunning figures, are [also] woven into the warp and weft of Japanese society”.⁵⁷

It is *bunraku*, or *ningyō jōruri*, that has laid a foundation for Japanese tragic theatre and literature as well as a particular understanding of archetypal tragedy for the people of Japan.*

* As Ian Buruma (1985) has stated, “the clearest case of life and theatre overlapping is the greatest doll-woman of all time... the *geisha*” (p. 72). Also referred to as a “living doll” the *geisha* is an important factor in regard to Japanese relationships with dolls. Furthermore, in relation to “little-girl” culture and theatre, there is the *Takarazuka Young Girls’ Opera Company*, established in 1914, whereby young girls are cloistered, protected from the outside world and raised to perform in an all-girls’ theatre. In a similar fashion to *geisha*, *Takarazuka* members are taught etiquette and traditional accomplishments such as flower arrangement, tea ceremony ritual, singing, dancing and playing of musical instruments. However, I have chosen not to elaborate on these two subjects as they become topics in themselves and this would break the thread of the discussion, especially as they deviate from the themes of this section, namely superstition, tragedy, pathos, memory, loss, trauma and bereavement.

Kitano's Dolls

Three tragedies, based on traditional *bunraku* plays but reset in contemporary times, are poetically expressed, interwoven throughout, and overlap in Takeshi Kitano's film *Dolls* (2002)* whereby live actors move through tales of undying but catastrophic love, carrying with them the heartbreaking poignancy of *bunraku-ningyō* legacy.

To set the tone the movie opens with a *bunraku* performance and then switches to the first “real-life” narrative of star-crossed lovers. Eventually the three tales unfold simultaneously, with the figures from each physically crossing the others' paths but mostly oblivious to those characters' existence and unaware of their alternate plights.

The six main characters (three pairs of lovers) poignantly reanimate the harrowing nature of *bunraku* love and death stories as well as the mesmerising essence of *bunraku-ningyō*. Such is the level of expression that, like “silent” *bunraku* dolls with still faces, the actors, especially the leading two, Hidetoshi Nishijima and Miho Kanni, sincerely elicit, almost without

* Takeshi Kitano (born 1947) is a celebrated writer, director and actor. He wrote and directed *Dolls*, a film nominated for eight national and international awards, and winning two: Kitano took away the Golden Award at the Damascus Film Festival and Miho Kanno won Best Supporting Actress at the Hochi Film Awards. Note that Takeshi Kitano also starred in the 1983 film, *Merry Christmas*, *Mr Lawrence* (see Chapter One) as Sergeant Gengo Hara.

any dialogue, the “pathos, agony, heroism and loss”^{* 58} inherent in Japanese theatrical tragedies in a heartbreakingly moving, quiet and dignified way.

The “Bloodstained Doll”

Perhaps the most profound demonstration of the significance of dolls in Japan, reflecting the connection with pathos, agony, heroism and loss that is so ingrained in Japanese culture, is investigated by Schattschneider in her discussion of one of the most traumatic episodes in Japan’s history, World War II, and the deep relationship between Japanese people and dolls, particularly during this time.

Schattschneider writes that, from the 1930s, hundreds of thousands, maybe millions, of *ningyō* “known variously as *imon-ningyō* (companion or safeguarding dolls), *migawari-ningyō* (sacrificial or substitute dolls) or *masukotto* (mascot dolls)” were given or sent to Japanese servicemen so that the soldiers’ loved ones, wives, lovers, sisters, mothers and daughters, believed to be spiritually present in these effigies, could be by their sides at all times.⁵⁹

The author explains that “during the war’s early phases the dolls functioned primarily as amulets (*onamori*) evoking reassuring links” to back home:

* Pate uses these keywords in regard to *bunraku* theatre. He does not refer to Kitano’s *Dolls*. I have borrowed this terminology as it aptly describes, for me, the essence of this film.

[They] became especially popular during 1944 – 45 when many *tokkōtai* (Special Attack Corps members, known as “kamikaze” in the West) carried them on missions of no return.... During the war these dolls were celebrated in home-front publications, in soldiers’ letters and in death poetry.... They have become the objects of intensely nostalgic longing and diverse memorial undertakings.⁶⁰

Worn on the body, strapped to belts or parachute harnesses, hanging visibly from cords around the neck, hidden under uniforms or placed near the body, under the pilot’s seat, on the dashboard, instrument panel or cockpit clock, these dolls were for the purpose of easing “apprehension and suffering of... soon-to-be-martyred male compatriots”:⁶¹

[They] were meant to keep them safe long enough to fulfil their missions and die honorably and were not expected to bring their bearers safely home.... The dolls were given not to prevent physical injuries but rather to keep the pilots company during their terribly lonely final journeys. In some cases... mothers, sisters and lovers wanted to “be with” the pilot during his final moments, and the dolls allowed this special closeness.... They might absorb or ease some of the pilot’s terror and anxiety.⁶²

It is heartrending to imagine the scene of many pilots who, apparently seeing “the faces of their mothers, their sisters, their wives, their girlfriends” in these effigies, often talked to them in flight, looked into their eyes and held them as they approached their deaths.⁶³ “For many”, says Schattschneider, “these treasured objects evoked... longing and solace, fragmentation and redemption, transience and eternity.”⁶⁴

Psychological Connections with Ningyo: Loss, Trauma & Bereavement

Dolls in Japan have been, and are often, inextricably tied to trajectories of trauma, bereavement and loss. There is a further indication, I believe, that for some Japanese people the loss of a doll, itself, for whatever reason can represent a traumatic experience. This is largely due to the customary superstition that a *ningyō* possesses a soul.

This trauma, though, is not always connected with grief and can often be associated with fear, especially if the departed has displayed a forceful or determined personality in life. Writes Pate:

In traditional Japanese belief systems, the spirits of departed heroes or individuals of strong character could affect daily life long after their deaths. These spirits could be invoked to help protect and defend. The animating strength which gave these heroes an uncommon life, helping them to accomplish their goals or to die with great bravery and self-sacrifice, did not die with their passing.⁶⁵

This same strength of spirit could easily be manifested as negative or harmful energy as much as positive or protective.

That these beliefs are still pertinent in Japan is emphasised in the continuing existence of ritual practices, or “rites of separation” (*kenyō*), considered appropriate in the separation of an owner from his/her doll.⁶⁶ “A doll that has been played with by a child [for example] is widely held to

have taken on certain attributes of that child and cannot be safely discarded until the object's 'spirit' has been separated from it through ritual action."⁶⁷ In the case of a departed owner, these procedures are often performed out of terror should the doll's soul come back to haunt.

According to Angelika Kretschmer:

A person might have a latent fear that an[y] object is endowed with a spirit. If such an object is casually thrown away, the spirit might be offended and even curse the human. Therefore, the spirit must be pacified before the object can be discarded.... The chief priest of Awashima Kada Shrine who performs *keyō* rites for... dolls expresses this sentiment: "[People] come to... dispose of dolls that might bring evil upon them.... It [also] seems very cruel to treat [the dolls]... as mere garbage".⁶⁸

The method of disposal is sometimes burial but usually dolls are destroyed by burning as, says Kretschmer, this "symbolically eliminates impurities and... mimics human cremation".⁶⁹

Schattschneider discusses this phenomenon in regard to yet another purification rite in connection with *nagashi bina* ("floating dolls"), whereby *ningyō* who are "understood as capable of absorbing evils or impurities that afflict persons"⁷⁰ are floated downstream and out to sea in boats from the Awashima Jinja Shrine during the *Hina-nagashi* festival every March 3rd (Girls' Day),* ⁷¹ "carrying away [with them] these forms of pollution" (Fig. 73).⁷² She also highlights that this "relatively recent practice of *ningyō keyō*

* *Hina-nagashi* is held on the same day as *Hina-matsuri*.

(doll memorialization) in which old dolls are burned, floated away, or otherwise disposed of after formal religious memorial services” exists due to the belief that *ningyō* “cannot be safely discarded until the object’s ‘spirit’ has been separated from it through ritual action”.⁷³

Image removed according to copyright law

Figure 73: *Hina-nagashi*

The extent to which dolls may be considered dangerous and can elicit terror in the hearts of the Japanese people is apparent in the following historical account given by Schattschneider of a 1943 Ministry of Education campaign to destroy more than 12,000 American *aoi me no ningyō* (blue-eyed

dolls) that had been delivered to Japanese schoolchildren during the International Friendship Doll Exchange in 1927: *

These Western-style female dolls, many of which mechanically uttered the word “mama”, were denounced as “ambassadors with terrible [deceptively friendly] faces”. The public was exhorted to “never forgive the enemy dolls!” and to expunge their foreign pollution.... Nearly all of the dolls were destroyed, many by being publicly burned, decapitated or stabbed with bamboo spears.... Only about 300 blue-eyed dolls nationwide survived, usually [saved] by sympathetic teachers and headmasters.⁷⁴

In analysing these superstitions and actions I would argue that they demonstrate a respect for and treatment of the doll that may be borne of fear but also represent a deep love for a more “real” relationship with *ningyō*, or this human shape. The ritual of cremation especially emphasises this, in the desire to both free the soul and to mourn the loss of the physical body as one would for any mortal relation. As with universal reactions to human death, there may be the fear that the spirit will bring evil upon others but also, as indicated by the Awashima Kada Shrine priest, the wish to avoid cruelty is equally considered in methods of disposal.

* The fear of dolls and the belief that they can come alive and harm humans is not just a Japanese phenomenon. For example, 22-year-old Auckland Gothloli “Mental Tart” states: “Dolls creep me out. My imagination runs wild and I can’t help but feel like they’re watching me and are evil and might come alive at night. Seriously” (personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “Mental Tart” on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 14 April, 2010).

Whereas in other cultures a doll is usually perceived as merely an inanimate object, for the Japanese people the doll is generally connected spiritually, psychologically and fundamentally on a deeper level. Says Pate:

By most Western definitions, the word “doll” implies an object that is intended to be played with.... Webster defines “doll” as “a small model of a human figure... used as a child’s toy”. It is this basic and almost intrinsic ludic function embedded in the word that makes the English word “doll” such an unsatisfactory translation for the Japanese word “*ningyō*”.⁷⁵

The attitude in Japan towards dolls differs, and has traditionally differed, from the Western notion of the Toy, made all the more significant in terms of treatment.

The impulse to treat dolls as real children rather than mere toys is and was reinforced by the uncanny realism, historically, of Japanese dolls, especially those created not for display but to be held, known as *ichimatsu-ningyō*. Up until perhaps the later twentieth century, when Western dolls also began to take the shape of hyper-realistic babies, this aspect between life-like *ichimatsu-ningyō* and Western dolls was incomparable.

Hearn explained the affect of *ichimatsu-ningyō* in 1894:

The beautiful life-size dolls representing children of two or three years; real toy babies... become under the handling of a Japanese girl infinitely more interesting. Such dolls are... so life-like... that... the best eyes might be deceived by them.⁷⁶

Acknowledging this observation, Pate says that:

Hearn was struck by the realism and size of... Japanese *ichimatsu-ningyō*, particularly when compared with Western play dolls of the period. These dolls were of a size which allowed them to be treated like real children, carried around on the back in the Japanese style, and provided with multiple changes of clothing. Their faces were so sensitively rendered that they could easily have been mistaken for real children.⁷⁷

Frederick Hadland Davis, writing in 1912, offered a similar perspective, adding that dolls are “actually said to become alive, to take to their small bodies a human soul”.⁷⁸

Hearn and Davis were observing this phenomenon at least one-hundred years ago and highlighting an age-old perception. However, as discussed earlier, the superstition that a doll may possess a human spirit is an instinct still embedded in the Japanese psyche. Thus the relationships between designers, makers, sellers and owners of dolls become complex and convoluted, and the doll becomes more than just a childhood toy.

Woodrow Phoenix in his examination of toys and their affect on human beings has claimed that:

The power of toys is not about regression or infantilism.... Toys are symbols that have a figurative power to embody thoughts and emotions that may have their origins in childhood but are not childish.

We recognize parts of ourselves – our secret wishing selves – in toys.... When a toy is played with it becomes more “charged”, more filled with the personality of the owner.... It becomes an essential part of the owner, both carrier

of and link back to intense personal experience. To be suddenly reminded of an old toy, or to discover one that has long been lost, frequently triggers a cascade of forgotten or inaccessible memories.... As companions on the emotional voyage from childhood to adulthood... [they] have for their owners an emotional value.⁷⁹

As a doll collector myself, I believe that the emotional relationship between owner and toy is magnified in the case of owner and doll, particularly when one considers the natural bond between “like” things. In any case, Phoenix states that the collection itself intensifies this connection:



Figure 74: Kathryn Hardy Bernal

*My Japanese Gothic & Lolita Pullip, Namu and Taeyang Dolls, 2007**

* This is only a small section of the many dolls that I own, which includes more of the type shown.

The impulse to collect... makes sense when you see many examples of the same character together, or an array of similar characters that are variations on a theme. Multiples reinforce each other and create a contextual universe. One action figure is just a toy; ten figures are a collection. A hundred can be another world [Fig. 74].⁸⁰

Susan Pearce, in regard to the accumulation of dolls by adult collectors, has also stated that there is “a tendency to treat the material as if it were human”.⁸¹ She cites a “typical” example of a collection gathered by Angela Kellie of Strathpeffer in Northern Scotland, which became the foundation for the Museum of the Social History of Childhood in 1992:

By the time the material was donated to the new museum it included over 300 dolls... but the original dolls came to Angela from her mother and grandmother. Angela seems to have treated the dolls like real children, giving them names and talking to them.⁸²

I would say that for many owners, whether adult collectors or children, this type of attachment to dolls emphasises that relationships do not simply mimic parent-daughter connections; they are akin to it. This is apparent especially in Japan where the belief that dolls contain human spirits is more common.

Davis stated that traditionally “in Japan... the doll [was]... not merely a plaything by which little children may [have] become make-believe mothers but... a means to make a[n adult]... a [real] mother”.⁸³ Citing Hearn, Davis emphasised just how real the doll could be to the adult woman in this context:

If you see... a doll... being made by a Japanese mother to reach out its hands, to move its little bare feet, and to turn its head, you would be almost afraid to venture a heavy wager that it was only a doll.⁸⁴

Pate also refers to Hearn on the same topic, relaying that “in fact in the *Meiji* era it was not uncommon for unmarried and childless women... to keep an *ichimatsu-ningyō* as a substitute child... treated in all respects as an actual child”.⁸⁵

In such situations I deem that the attachments between owners and dolls, or “mothers” and “children”, are so strong that the potential loss, damage or destruction of a doll, i.e. the substitute child, would result in trauma and a sense of grief almost equivalent to the loss of a real child that could very likely feel like a loss of part of one’s self.

To support this argument it is shown that, even without this humanising aspect and, subsequently, the extreme case of bonding that can accompany this type of relationship, the eventual loss of a doll, even as a prized object, a possession, can have the same affect. William James, in discussing one’s connections to lost objects, claimed that:

Although it is true that part of our depression at the loss of possessions is due to our feeling that we must now go without certain goods... in every case there remains over and above this a sense of the shrinkage of our personality, a partial conversion of ourselves to nothingness.⁸⁶

Pearce reiterates this notion of loss in relation to possessions as accumulated collections:

Attention to a collection is matched, as we ought to expect, by suffering caused by its loss. Such possessions are part of the self and therefore their loss is felt as a lessening of self.... It becomes clear that for collectors collections are... the extended self. We feel about our collections as if they were part of our physical selves and we identify with them: loss of collections brings the same grief and the same sense of deprivation which accompanies other bereavements.⁸⁷

The humanisation of dolls, therefore, exacerbates this sense of extraordinary attachment to possessions and the grief felt for lost dolls is consequently increased.

Furthermore, in my experience, it is highly usual that an adult collector will accumulate the dolls of her childhood. Sometimes it may be that she retains her childhood doll and, because of her love for it, wishes to accentuate that joy by adding companions. Alternatively, a collection will begin with the desire to replace a doll that has been lost or given away over the years, eventuating in an attempt to not only recover that one memorable object but to overcompensate for its loss by acquiring every doll in the original range, dolls that were desired but never before possessed.*

* This is why I began my own collections, replacing my lost childhood dolls and then accumulating many more. My largest collection, therefore, comprises dolls from the 1960s and 1970s. For a while, in order to raise the capital I needed to buy all that I wanted, I bought and sold dolls to many other collectors who professed to collecting dolls for the same reason.

In contemplating the Gothloli within this framework of the Lost Doll and bereavement, and measuring up her image against the historical and psychological backdrops discussed, the motivation towards participation in the Lolita subculture is profound. Not only does the Gothloli want to replace the Lost Doll, she *is* the Doll of her childhood memories. She may also be the doll that she never had, that she was deprived of. Moreover, in choosing the Doll identity, the *ningyō* is reanimated but the Doll, in turn, replaces the Real in the effort to return to childhood, and thus to escape reality.

A Means to Escape the Real World

I analyse the need for the Gothloli to “mother” dolls, to replace the Lost Doll or become the Doll, as a desire to return to a safer, more familiar or comforting haven and to find oneself or one’s place in the unsettling world of adulthood, adult responsibilities and anxieties. To escape or return to childhood is thus symbolic of an intention to reject society’s immense pressures and a sign of disconnection from, disillusion with and subconscious reaction to the real world and the Unknown.

According to Gordon Mathews and Bruce White, “young people [in Japan] have long chafed at the demands of the adult social order”.⁸⁸ The authors have investigated and identified an increasing trend with each new generation to buck the system, noting that “many Japanese young people are choosing not to enter ‘the adult social order’, not to hold stable jobs... or to marry and have families... but to follow paths of their own”.⁸⁹ The authors explain the reasoning behind this:

Socialization into adulthood in Japan has been a grueling process: from the demands in secondary school for constant study for examinations, to the [extent to which]... career-track workers devote their lives... to the demands that mothers [should] abandon their own pursuits to devote themselves to their children.⁹⁰

Joseph Dela Peña has written something similar:

Young adult[s]... in their late teens and early twenties face a bevy of social pressures. There is an overwhelming pressure to succeed academically.... And then there's also the fact that the "1990s witnessed a multiple breakdown of political, economic, and socio-cultural orders and induced a visible shift in the mood of society reflecting an end to the glorious age of Japanese economic success on the global stage".... Young Japanese have extreme pressure to succeed... and this pressure is perpetuated, not relieved, by... family and society in general.⁹¹

The result of this environment is that:

A growing number of Japanese youth categorised as NEET ("Not in Employment, Education or Training") (Kelts 2007:12). The NEET in Japan are commonly between fifteen and thirty-four years old, among whom more than sixty percent are aged above twenty five (Nakamura 2004), with smaller numbers either consciously refusing to work, seek work, or gain education that would increase their chances of obtaining work (as opposed to those in similar situations where this condition may be largely circumstantial or imposed).⁹²

The Japanese government is naturally concerned about these so-called "post-bubble kids" who no longer want to work as "salary men", office workers or OLs ("office ladies"), often due to a fear of early death from overwork (*karoshi*).⁹³ Some "find it hard to achieve the extremely high standards of academic benchmarks",⁹⁴ and others "are unable to procure suitable employment in the current economic environment".⁹⁵

These pressures, combined with the effects of an ever-shifting and in recent decades relatively unstable economy, have caused young people to fear growing up and to prolong the adolescent stage.

Their values are also different to those of their parents in that “traditional Japanese beliefs, such as selfless devotion to employers, respect for seniors and perseverance, are collapsing”. All of this combines to contribute to a generation of young people that is increasingly removed, intentionally or not, from what is perceived as a ‘normal’ progression into adult life.⁹⁶

Says Dela Peña, “it seems clear that for this youth, entrance into what can be considered ‘normal’ Japanese society is impossible and unacceptable”.⁹⁷

Although this phenomenon is widespread in Japan, it is particularly pertinent to Gothloli who appear to take the escapism from adult reality one step further by returning to a childish existence and the realm of dolls. As Pate has written, the “particular love of the Japanese for the *ningyō* reflects an appreciation [for]... the innocence of childhood and an attempt to continue to view the world through the child’s eye long after the eye has matured into adulthood”.⁹⁸

For many reasons Gothloli attempt to extend this child’s view on life for as long as they can. “Hine”, a 30-year-old Auckland Lolita, has said:

I have recently purchased my first two Pullip dolls (as a cheap alternative to *Dollfies* which I aspire to one day own...)* I have made Lolita clothes for my friends' *Dollfies* and I intend to make clothing for my own dolls. I do this because it's fun, it offers a sense of escapism and in a small sense my doll is my alter ego made manifest... so I would desire to dress it up in outfits that would appeal to me in real life.†

Extending the childhood phase by collecting and playing with dolls can be, as “Hine” has claimed, a manner of escaping the real world but also a means of creating or regaining a sense of control. Pearce, in her discussion of collecting miniature examples of real things, multiple versions of oneself or, as “Hine” has put it, one’s “alter ego”, sheds more light on this impulse:

A characteristic expression of the urge to manipulate the world through collecting is the decision to concentrate... upon miniature things.... The collecting of miniatures, in the sense of things represented by much smaller copies of themselves, is... common.... The collection is clearly... [an] attempt to create a world in miniature in which the collector has ultimate control.⁹⁹

She also suggests that collectors “construct a special private world which they can [escape to and] control directly”.¹⁰⁰

* Pullip dolls are also the ones I collect (Fig. 74). The alternative, *Dollfies*, cost thousands of dollars each.

† Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “Hine” (Auckland, New Zealand) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 19 January, 2010.

For the Gothloli, this special private world is that of childhood, her childhood, either the one she had or the one she desired, but one that she is now in charge of. Whether she collects actual dolls or not, she is a collector of dolly things as she accumulates her own doll-like wardrobe and accessories. You could even say that the seeking out and befriending of other Gothloli is a form of collecting dolls, albeit living ones.

Although Susan Pearce does not discuss Lolita behaviour specifically, the Gothloli's gathering of dolls or doll-like things, in her terms, "is the kind of collecting which supports the role of woman as little girl and is linked with qualities like innocence, trust and a certain kind of charm".¹⁰¹ Indeed she contends that there is "a clear link between childlike collecting and childhood itself".¹⁰² These keywords are also apt in describing the Gothloli's little-girl/woman-child image, or style, as one of immense charm and intentionally innocent, connected with the notion of safety in relation to the desire to escape to a childhood haven, an area of trust.

Infantilising a Nation: The Kawaii Phenomenon

The Gotholi's childlike countenance, combined with her preoccupation with dolls and what is deemed as outwardly childish or frivolous behaviour, has led critics to dismiss the subculture as superficial and to disregard it as merely another development stemming from Japan's obsession with all things *kawaii* ("cute"), identified by a widespread attraction to miniature and or cute things from *netsuke*, *bonsai*, *haiku* and *sushi*, to Hello Kitty and Pokémon.¹⁰³ Based on surface readings of this overarching Japanese motivation towards the Cute one might agree with this stance. Yet I maintain that this dismissive attitude overlooks more complex psychological and sociological issues behind the Lolita movement. Moreover, as Yuko Hasegawa claims, the *kawaii* phenomenon reflects a "postponement of maturity" but it also suggests a more positive "potential for transformation"¹⁰⁴ and thus it is too simplistic to just write this preoccupation off as naïvety.

To begin with, the term *kawaii* itself is complicated in meaning and connections. According to Masafumi Monden:

The application of the word *kawaii* is immensely diverse.... Yomoto Inuhiko... argues that the word *kawaii* can... describe, for example, an elderly man or a hot spring, which in other languages... would sound strange if grammatically correct. This illustrates [that the]... definition is almost impossible to grasp.¹⁰⁵

Kawaii does not, therefore, translate easily or literally into a Western understanding of the word, “cute”. Donald Richie adds:

Cute (*kawaii*) is variously defined. Webster’s says it means “attractive by reason of daintiness or picturesqueness in manners of appearance, as a child or small animal”, and the *Oxford English Reference Dictionary* offers “affectedly attractive”. Certainly, *kawaii* means all this. But in Japan it means more.¹⁰⁶

Hence *Kawaii* as a paradigm, although understood outside Japan, is also intrinsically Japanese and stems from the pre-*Meiji* past. Hiroshi Aoyagi emphasises this, stating that it is “by no means a recent... invention but has clear historical roots”.¹⁰⁷ “The Japanese word for cute, ‘*kawaii*’”, he says, “can be traced back to its classical form, ‘*kawayushi*’, which appears in poetry and stories from the pre-Modern era”.¹⁰⁸ *Kawaisa* however, although not exclusively, is inextricably bound to the little-girl image and notions of the young female adult or the Woman-child:

The “cuteness” observed today [in young girl identities]... closely resembles “sweet little girls” (*otome*), or “cute Japanese women” (*yumato nadeshiko*), [popular] images from the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In fact, “cuteness” was [traditionally] considered to be the main feature of *shōjo*, the term coined... to signify the “not-quite-adult” femaleness of unmarried girls.¹⁰⁹

In that there is this connection between cuteness and the Woman-child image, *kawaisa* is a strong underlying subtext to the Lolita subculture. Cuteness is also a reason why many young women are motivated toward the movement and often the very reason why many choose the Gothloli

identity. My experiences with Gothloli, whether Japanese or of another nationality, via personal or online discussions, is that they invariably include the word “cute”, or “*kawaii*”, when explaining what they like about and or how they perceive the Lolita style. For example, 15-year-old “Tempest Paige” from New York says that she is attracted to the Gothloli image because “it’s cute and sweet”.* Even when contemplating why it may have been termed Lolita, she suggests that “it was a cute name, maybe”.†

But there is more to the Gothloli identity than being cute. As Yuko Hasegawa writes:

The concept of *kawaii* includes elements such as “cute”, “pretty” and “lovely” but is not restricted to these. It also implies something precious, something that we are drawn towards... which stimulates one’s feeling of wanting to protect something that is pure and innocent.¹¹⁰

And the term “*kawaisa*” also means more than “cuteness”. Aoyagi claims that it derives from an understanding of something “pitiable” and connotes a “vulnerability of the subject”.¹¹¹

The “pure and innocent” Gothloli persona is related to all of these aspects, in the wish to protect and prolong the precious childhood state to which she is drawn; the subsequent attachment to pure and innocent

* Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “Tempest Paige” (New York, New York) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 17 January, 2010.

† Ibid.

childish objects; and the idea that, because she is vulnerable, she endeavours to return to the safety of childhood through these things.

As Richie highlights:

In the West we are admonished by the highest authority to “put away childish things”. In Japan, however, as a newspaper editorial recently stated, “experts consistently point to the importance of cuteness in the Japanese value system. Cuteness is considered to be good and a virtue. Unlike their counterparts in the United States or Europe, youth in Japan feels less pressure to grow out of childhood and rush into adulthood”.¹¹²

This wish to return to or hang on to childhood, combined with the need for security via familiarity with infantile things, becomes especially important, I argue, when one considers the Gothloli’s motivation to represent herself, visibly, as an innocent child or not-quite-adult female. This notion is further supported by Japanese psychiatrist Rika Kayama who has claimed that, “by dressing up like [frilly] babies, the Lolitas [*sic*] are attempting to hang on to the carefree days of childhood”,¹¹³ a time that, for many, feels safe.

A Fear of the Future

Essentially, the Gothloli identity, especially the Gothic Lolita, fuses the Japanese affection for *kawaisa* with the Gothic. In its nostalgic, historicist and revivalist aspects the Lolita phenomenon also demonstrates sympathies with Victorian Gothic Revivalism, particularly in the languishing for an idyllic past. It should be noted that Gothic revivals, of which the overall Japanese Gothic & Lolita movement is one, tend to coincide with periods of societal confusion, transition and cultural malaise. As with the early years of the twentieth-century Goth subculture – when, stemming from New-Wave, post-Punk and New-Romantic ideals, notions of the New-Gothic were being formulated, alternative culture and especially fashion looked back to Revolutionary France and Dickensian Britain, reflected in Westwood and MacLaren's collections, the Recession Dress movement, and Goth attire which borrowed from Victorian Gothic – the Lolita subculture represents nostalgic impulses born out of political and economic crises. As with the Victorian Gothic Revivalists and twentieth-century Goths, Gothloli indicate a yearning for a utopian ideal, a wariness of the Unknown, and thus a fear of the future, especially in terms of the regression into childhood.

A potential explanation for the seeming refusal to grow up observed in the Gothloli's attraction to cute, innocent and childlike things is illuminated when one begins to examine some of the societal issues in Japan, the birthplace of the Lolita movement, a nation that has been described by journalist Yuri Kageyama as having an "infantile mentality".¹¹⁴ Kageyama has expressed her concerns for the future of Japan in connection with the marketing of the *kawaii* phenomenon, claiming that as the world's second-largest economy it will contribute to the demise of Japanese culture.¹¹⁵ She has cited Hiroto Mirusawa who supports her anxiety, agreeing with the opinion "that cute proves the Japanese simply don't want to grow up".¹¹⁶

As discussed earlier in relation to Mathews and Whites' studies on Japanese youth, this resistance to growing up is pertinent to, but not confined to, the Gothloli and represents wider concerns, especially as the *kawaii* phenomenon can be seen as an effect as well as a cause. The attraction to cute things reflects a general malaise and may or may not be the cause of Japan's cultural downfall but as a form of escapism from society's pressures it equally reflects a rejection of societal expectations. As Ilya Garger has pointed out, the *kawaii* image "is an appealing anodyne in a country marked by... the rigidity of its social hierarchy".¹¹⁷

In 2007, Yuniya Kawamura highlighted that “since the early 1990s” Japan had been facing “the longest and worst economic recession in history”.¹¹⁸ She cited John Nathan (2004) in maintaining that:

[Japanese society was] fracturing under the strain of economic stagnation. Fathers [were]... losing their jobs for the first time... mothers who used to be full-time homemakers now [had]... to look for part-time jobs to supplement their household income and children [were] find[ing] no hope in future Japan.¹¹⁹

Added to this problem was the shift by youth away from the typical careers of their parents, and even the refusal to seek employment at all. According to Kawamura, the “entire... value system, especially that of teens... [was] going through a major transition”.¹²⁰ In relation to this rejection of traditional responsibilities, discourse claims connections to Japan’s economic crises.

The simultaneous rise of the Lolita movement at this time reinforces my theory that the Gothloli phenomenon at least began as emblematic of a generation who, daunted by their future, were fearful of embracing adulthood. This view is also reflected by Ginny Parker who, writing at the same time as Nathan, quoted Kayama in agreeing that “some Japanese students of youth culture [saw]... the Lolita look as a sign of anxieties resulting from growing up in a nation beset by economic insecurities” and that this reflected “a society that [didn’t]... feel too hopeful about its future”.¹²¹

Masanobu Sugatsuke, editor of *Composite*, a Japanese fashion-and-lifestyle magazine, is yet another commentator who has declared that, due to this socio-economic environment, “Japanese people don’t want to be growing up so quickly” and “would rather stay young mentally and socially”.¹²² Observing the Lolita subculture in this context, the former creative director of Bennetton, Oliviero Toscani, has commented that:

The girls who gathered in Harajuku every weekend in their... romper-room dresses and their silly shoes... were “tragic angels” living “the only existence in the world that is alien to the problems of the contemporary world such as poverty, war... discrimination or joblessness”.¹²³

Kawamura adds that a general “feeling of helplessness, disillusionment, alienation, uncertainty and anger has permeated throughout society”.¹²⁴

In returning to the *kawaisa* paradigm, as Tomoyuki Sugiyama explains it, this fear is reflected in the search for “spiritual peace and an escape from brutal reality through cute things”.¹²⁵ The Lolita movement, in its envelopment of cuteness, sweetness and innocence, can thus be identified as a symptom of these societal and economic crises. In the Gothloli’s regression back to childhood, there is therefore an air of sadness.

Disdain for the Lolita Look

Although one may empathise with the plight of recent generations and acknowledge the difficulties of growing up in an environment accented by “poverty, war... discrimination or joblessness”, there is and has been, nonetheless, a larger aversion to the attitude of youth by others. This connects with a reaction against the Lolita subculture in regard to what it appears to stand for.

Ginny Parker has claimed that “despite the nation’s reputation as a culture with a love of all things cute, many in mainstream Japan are contemptuous of the Lolita look”.¹²⁶ She has spoken of “fans of the style... being called stupid by strangers, getting mean looks and having chewing gum stuck to the backs of their dresses”.¹²⁷

In line with other subcultural identities that sit outside the normative the Gothloli’s appearance tends to shock and even anger critics as it is seen to disrupt the social order. As Dick Hebdige has observed, “violations of the authorized codes through which the social world is organized and experienced have considerable power to provoke and disturb”.¹²⁸ And although the Gothloli image is referred to as sweet and cute, and may not be immediately viewed as shocking, it still manages to operate in the manner that Hebdige describes, to incite heated responses and generate fierce debate.

There are several areas of concern voiced in relation to the Lolita subculture. One is, again, connected with the movement's attachment to *kawaisa*. Garger has referred to a "lamentation" in terms of "the societal infantilization that *kawaii* culture represents" and highlighted that "some even blame it for creating a generation of youth unable to face reality".¹²⁹

According to Alicia Kirby, there is disdain associated with a "movement that has taken cute fashion into the realms of self-parody [as] a refusal by the young to grow up" and embrace the adult world.¹³⁰ Says Kirby, the Lolita style especially irks the more conservative, particularly the "elderly Japanese [people, who have been known to] tut with disapproval. Shocked and ashamed by the way young people are dressing, they see it as another symptom of the breakdown of society and of tradition and respect".¹³¹

Participation in the Lolita subculture, then, does not only stand for a symbolic urge to shirk traditional responsibilities, it is also literally a vehicle for doing so. The Gothloli, in her embracement of frills and childish frippery, does behave in a way that is frivolous, immature and morally irresponsible. And, although this behaviour may be seen as an effect, it is conscious.

As Yuko Hasagawa has argued:

Immaturity does not necessarily... signify innocence. In Japan, intentionally remaining in a state of *kawaisa* (cuteness), an undefined or indeterminate state in which “determination” (maturity) is never reached, has the potential to perform a political function of undermining current ideologies of gender and power... [and] could also be interpreted as a deliberately oppositional image.¹³²

In other words, the appearance of innocence does not necessarily determine a lack of conscience.

*“It is at this point that the word *kawaii* may...*

be able to take on an expanded function within the collective consciousness

that signifies...

*all things that evoke a response”.*¹³³

Chapter Three:

Challenging The Polita Complex

Lolita, Sexuality and the Symbol of the Perpetual Child

As discussed in the previous chapter, my analysis is that the Gothloli image evokes the senses of mourning, memory and loss in relation to childhood and innocence. This feeling is of course present in the case of the Sweet Lolita or the frilly baby-doll look but is more pronounced with the Gothic Lolita persona who, as I have suggested, in choosing to wear the habit of a Victorian child in mourning, belies a particular feeling of bereavement in terms of nostalgia.

Buried within this nostalgic element is the memory of childhood and the wish to retain it or return to it. In regard to innocence and loss, however, is the sense, paradoxically, that innocence has in fact been lost, reflected in the desire to get it back.

The most popular age group for participation in the Lolita movement is adolescence or young adulthood, a phase when there is a “sense of duality” in regard to “fading innocence and emerging sexuality”.*¹³⁴ In regard to her appearance as a little girl and at the same time existence as a

* I have taken these quoted phrases from an article by Hellen van Meene on an art exhibition, *Viva Lolita* (see reference details), curated by James Putnam. Van Meene was referring to the notion of Lolita in the Nabokovian sense, but I have used her language to describe the Japanese Lolita, as I find it apt in this context.

young woman, my claim is that the Gothloli can be interpreted as representing, simultaneously, the Perpetual Child and the Sexualised Child and, therefore, there is an apparent semiotic conflict between the desire to retain childhood innocence and being or becoming sexually active.

As the Gothloli image subconsciously recalls that moment whereby sexual awakening is mingled with the sensation that innocence has been lost, it can also be associated with a fear of or at least apprehension about sexuality. In wanting to be seen as a child and hence projecting her resistance to growing up, I believe that the Gothloli is refusing to become sexual and or be sexualised.

I would also argue that the appearance of the Gothloli is not consciously sexual. Sheila Burgel supports this by highlighting the Gothloli's "almost pathological obsession with modesty and the minutiae of etiquette" that sits happily alongside a notion of "Queen Victoria's strict moral code".¹³⁵ Many Lolita, all around the world, in fact choose this manner of dress because they view it as modest and refined, which allows them to feel pretty and elegant and at the same time non-sexual.

For example, 28-year-old Gothloli “Loli-Bee” believes that “because a Lolita girl covers more than 70% of the body, in no way it is [*sic*] meant to be sexual. It’s meant to be cute and elegant”.* Besides, says 18-year-old “Harcole”, “me [*sic*] wear bloomers.... What about that is erotic?”.†

Auckland Gothloli “Mental Tart”, age 22, reiterates this commonly held position:

I love the fashion and the attitude of Lolita.... I also love the focus on trying to look as pretty [and] sweet... as possible. It is a welcome shift of focus from that of the Western world, which is shoved down our throats through every form of media possible. The usual focus when one is dressing up to go out is to look as sexy as possible for the opposite sex. Showing off as many curves as possible... and as much flesh.... It is actually a relief to know that as I look at my reflection I do not think men will desire me in this [Lolita] outfit. I know this isn’t what they want to see, this isn’t what they find sexy. I smile knowing this. I breath [*sic*] a sigh of relief to know that if a man looks at me now he will be thinking, “What the hell is she wearing?!” and not much else.‡

* Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “Loli-Bee” (Hong Kong/Auckland, New Zealand) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 18 January, 2010.

† Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “Harcole” (Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 10 February, 2010.

‡ Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “Mental Tart” (Auckland, New Zealand) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 14 April, 2010.

“Kasutei” chooses the Lolita style precisely because she sees it as non-sexual, modest, “romantic and elegant”.* She states, “I like art and history. Lolita fashion is inspired by history yet... [it] is cute and pretty. Also... it covers up everything”.† She goes even further to claim that “as [it is] a non-sexual fashion... it appeals to [her]... asexuality”.‡ Kasutei also agrees that the style should not expose flesh: “I sometimes feel self-conscious in anything mildly revealing that might [even] hint at sexuality because it’s just not me”.§ She declares, “It’s not my fault if somehow [*sic*] wants to twist and make it a sexual thing”**.¶

This attitude that the wearer of true Lolita fashion should come across as being non-sexual is commonly upheld by Gothloli worldwide. There is, though, a dichotomy or at least an ambiguity in regard to the Gothloli image in that it neither wholly represses nor completely embraces a sexualised identity, and yet it does both. The Gothloli, even in the sense of her terminology as “Lolita”, especially in consideration of its Nabokovian undertones (or perhaps overtones), appears at once as the precocious Sexualised Child and also as an adult or young woman who wishes to *be a*

* Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “Kasutei” (Kirkcaldy, Scotland) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 17 January, 2010.

† Ibid.

‡ Ibid.

§ Ibid.

** Ibid.

child. In fact, in regard to the contemporary Cult of the Lolita, Hannah Feldman has noted that “[w]hat is so striking about this phenomenon is not that [the new] Lolita is a sex object, even a wilful one as the legend goes but that she is actually a child”,^{* 136} and if she is not actually then she is visually.

Indeed in regard to the Lolita subculture, my argument is that the association of Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita* with the Gothloli is confounded. The fictional character, Lolita, is interpreted as a child with adult feelings; the Japanese Lolita, or Gothloli, represents an adult or young woman with childish sensibilities.

In discussing Nabokov’s *Lolita* and any possible links to the Lolita subculture, 23-year-old Gothloli “Duplica” poses the question, “What is a Lolita?”[†] She believes that “1. [She is] a young girl who [arguably] wants to attract older guys [and]; 2. [She is] an adult woman who wants to look like a young girl”.[‡] In contemplating Nabokov’s heroine she again asks, “What is Dolores [Lolita] in the book?”, claiming:

* Feldman, as I explain again later, does not discuss the Japanese Lolita, specifically. Her article is on the Cult of Lolita from the 1990s, which examines the interest in the Sexualised Little Girl, or the “new” Lolita, in contemporary Fine Art.

† Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “Duplica” (Germany) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 16 January, 2010

‡ Ibid.

In my honest opinion she was nothing [*sic*] of [either of] them! She was a lonely girl without a family. She didn't want to mislead Humbert [the older male protagonist].... She realized that she gets what she wants if she does what Humbert wants of her. [But], especially in [*sic*] the end of the novel it gets clear that she never wanted a romantic relationship with him... Because of... that I wonder why people think that Lolita has a negative connotation.*

In other words, although there is this perception that the Lolita “wants to attract older guys” – an association that stems from a particular reading of the sexual relationship between Nabokov’s Lolita and her “guardian”, Humbert Humbert, and subsequently becomes implied in the Lolita subculture – a thorough understanding of the novel reveals that the Nabokovian Lolita was a victim of statutory rape and, therefore, neither she nor her namesake, the Gothloli, should be seen in either a derogatory light or as inviting this reputation. I agree with “Duplica” when she says that the “problem is just [in] the [mis]interpretation of the book”.†

These misunderstandings in regard to Nabokov’s novel, and indeed the character of Lolita herself, feed misinterpretations of the motivations behind participation in the Japanese Lolita movement, especially in regard to intentions. The Gothloli’s desire to be seen as a child and her refusal to grow up, I maintain, should be read as a reluctance to become sexual. The choice to engage in the Lolita subculture is, therefore, a means of drawing

* Ibid.

† Ibid.

out adolescence, the transitional phase between younger childhood and adulthood, whereby sexuality becomes ambiguous and or masked, and is an extension of that precious moment before one must deal with some of the harsher realities of life.

In this way, the Japanese Lolita hangs on to her innocence or postpones its potential loss. Ironically this empowers the Lolita. For while Nabokov's heroine is a vulnerable but corrupted victim, the Japanese Lolita declines to appear corruptible by projecting a sexually immature or innocent little girl image.

This means that while membership of the Japanese Lolita subculture symbolises and demonstrates several things – amongst them a yearning to return to the preciousness and safety of the childhood state; the desire to prolong childhood innocence, and thus resist sexual, adult pressures; and the fear of entering the daunting world of adult responsibilities and anxieties – being Lolita is also a declaration through visual signs that one is not ready to grow up; to be taken or used, emotionally or physically; or to become a married woman, a mother and or mother figure; roles that have, traditionally and historically, been the ultimate destinies of the Japanese girl.

That the Gothloli is not willing to enter the adult world is both symbolised in her image as the Perpetual Child and signified by her actual behaviour. The Gothloli would rather play with dolls than take on the duty of raising a real child. And she would rather play at tea parties, to be served tea and pretty cakes or make-believe she is serving tea to her dollies, than to be a real tea lady – a servant, or the server to men – another traditional status for the Woman in Japan.

Therefore I am venturing further to say that, not only does the Gothloli reject the adult world, she rebels against it and, as such, the Japanese Lolita movement represents a new feminism, one that is constructed by the feminine, whereby Lolita reclaims her power and becomes the controlling force. This will be the crux of this chapter.

Gender Relations in Japan

In the previous chapter I discussed anxieties in regard to a generalised perception that Japanese youth are reluctant to grow up, symbolised in the nation's apparent infantile mentality expressed via an obsession with cute things, or *kawaisa*, and the fear that it could lead to the downfall of Japanese culture. More importantly, though, I also argued that this resistance to growing up, or postponement of maturity and reversion towards childish things, demonstrates a rejection of responsibilities determined by traditional expectations and strict social hierarchies.

This notion of revolt by, and the widespread attitude of, the youth of Japan, reflected in an attraction to cuteness and a desire to escape the pressures of adulthood, comes across as even less superficial if examined in relation to gender roles and hierarchies, placed in context with Japan's political history.

Returning to Yuko Hasegawa, she explains that *kawaisa* as a paradigm becomes profoundly significant to Japan when considered in its connection with *yōjika*, or the “infanticisation” of Japanese post-war culture:

There is a strong connection between [*yōjika*]... and the establishment of a system of patriarchal control as a result of the psychological sense of despair and loss of confidence amongst the Japanese, particularly the male population, following the country's defeat in the Second World War.¹³⁷

This, argues Hasegawa, has caused “the establishment of immature and distorted gender relations”.¹³⁸ Through a feeling of insecurity due to the devastating (and emasculating) after-effects of World War II, the Japanese male, “needing protection, seeks a mother figure” who is at the same time “a girl whose sexuality is yet to emerge and who responds passively to his overtures”.¹³⁹ This means that women often “find themselves forced into performing the contradictory roles of [both] mother and young girl in personal relationships”.¹⁴⁰

Each of these roles, I would argue, is similar in that they place women in a submissive position, as the virtuous, angelic nurturer and the subordinate, obedient provider of pleasure, which is somewhat reminiscent of the dichotomous perception of Woman in “repressed” patriarchal Victorian Western societies.*

As Ilya Garger has noted, if “you’ve spent a day in Japan, you’ve witnessed the hegemony of *kawaii*”.¹⁴¹ There is a sense in the inter-textual relationships between the Cute and the image of Woman that this hegemonic control represents a form of patriarchal oppression.

* I say “repressed”, within inverted commas, as whether or not Victorian societies were actually repressed is a whole new argument (and thesis in itself). The point I am making is that these perceptions of Woman are similar.

Confronting a Patriarchal Hegemony

Patriarchal control in Japan and the objectification or repression of Woman is partially exercised through visual media, particularly imagery from advertising and popular culture, again via the trajectory of the Cute.* Elise Tipton, writing in 2000, the time when the Lolita movement was beginning to peak, stated that “most [media depictions]... reinforce[d] the image of women as cute (*kawaii*), childlike, and by extension... powerless”.¹⁴²

Included in this type of imagery is the sexualised Woman-child (Fig. 75) which, in its abundance, creates an unstable environment for the Gothloli childlike adult to exist. However, while these types of images, specifically, effectively undermine both women and children, I strongly maintain that the Gothloli identity, aside from the fact that it may be connected culturally to this paradigm, is intended to operate differently and oppositionally.

To begin with, according to Donald Ritchie, the actual attraction to Cute and adoption of a cute identity reflects in the individual a sense of purity. He claims that this “innocent rectitude is important [especially] to

* Of course this is not specific to Japan. It is the type of imagery that prevails in Japan that is problematic, in that it often worships the Child-woman, or the Sexualised Child, and thus exacerbates the Lolita Complex, or the fascination by older men with young girls. This is the major discussion contained in this chapter and will be further explained. My argument, however, is that although the Gothloli is implicated in this type of imagery she, paradoxically, resists this connection.

those Japanese still influenced by Confucian-based insistence upon goodness and integrity”.¹⁴³ In choosing to represent herself as a cute doll-like child, especially in relation to this argument, but also in any case, the Gothloli is determinedly not asking to be viewed as a man’s plaything. Even more significantly, she is in fact rebelling against this role.*

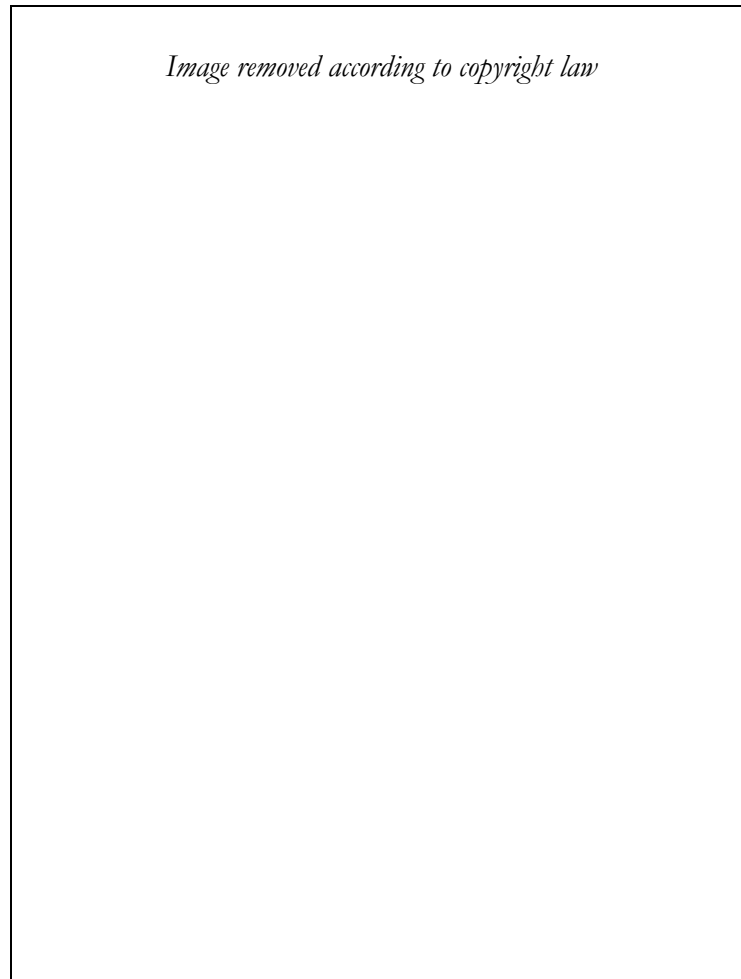


Figure 75: *Hentai Lolicon*

* This may appear to be a controversial opinion. However, I intend to develop this argument and explain this stance. At this point, I will say that although she may not *intend* to be seen as a man’s plaything, there is no doubt, especially due to her title of “Lolita” and the existence of the Lolita Complex as a dominating force, that the Gothloli is associated with sexual fantasy. These associations and conscious (dis)associations with sexual imagery, will be discussed in more detail in the body of this chapter.

For one thing it is widely believed (whether rightly or wrongly) that the Lolita fashion style is unattractive to Japanese males. Makoto Sekikawa, the founding editor of Japan's *CUTiE* magazine, has supported this notion, having stated that the cute aesthetic to which the Gothloli pertains is "not pleasing to the eye of most men" because it is "the antithesis of [acceptable and] traditional fashion".¹⁴⁴ In general, he has claimed, the overriding preference is for women to wear clothing that emphasises "womanliness and common sense".¹⁴⁵

This opinion that cute attire is not appealing to men is due to the expectation that girls are raised to be mothers and wives. Demonstrating that one is still a child and not ready to be responsible or sensible through the adoption of childish behaviour and dress is, therefore, nonconformist and culturally unacceptable. Hence my argument that the Lolita movement represents rebellion or, in Sekikawa's words, "there is rebelliousness in it".¹⁴⁶

That the *kawaii* aesthetic, wherein the Lolita style resides, does not conform for the young adult woman to the way that "respectable" women should present themselves is emphasised when one remembers that cute images of women are often related to Woman as a sexual object. Rejecting the "norms" or expectations that nice, respectable, marriageable women should be womanly (or mature), and have (adult) common sense in favour of childishness and cuteness, *is* thus rebellious, as it rejects the ultimate duty of growing up and acquiring a suitable husband.

Being a Woman in Japan

As also discussed previously, the development of the Lolita phenomenon in Japan can be aligned with *kawaisa* as an effect of post-war anxieties whereby gender relations have become distorted. In my opinion, the subculture can also be observed in terms of a reaction against the establishment of an institutionalised method of patriarchal control.

My stance that Lolita in fact bucks this system may appear to be a contradiction, in consideration of the psyche of the post-war male, in that, due to aforementioned insecurities, women find themselves in the dichotomous roles of both mother and young girl in relationships with men. For in her identification as the Child-woman/Woman-child it may appear that the Gothloli is symbolically playing into the hands of this patriarchal construct and resigning herself to an expected life of subservience.

However, paradoxically, as I maintain that in choosing to represent herself as a woman who prefers to be a child, the Gothloli is in fact refusing to conform to these traditional roles and responsibilities.

The Gothloli's childish behaviour, especially in regard to playing with dolls, which I have previously interpreted as not being prepared to grow up and have one's own babies, also demonstrates not only a desire to postpone becoming a real mother but to conceive the babies in the first place, let alone taking on the role of the mother figure, sexually and metaphorically,

for a husband. This is a shift in attitude that appears to be a reflection of contemporary Japanese female society on the whole, confirmed by statistics that highlight the rising age of marriage for women, as well as the average age for giving birth to a first child.

The Shifting Position of Woman in Contemporary Japan

The Lolita phenomenon rose to prominence in the late-twentieth century, a time when Elise Tipton was writing her chapter “Being Women in Japan”.¹⁴⁷ In context with this period she stated that “from birth, girls are socialised to make marriage and motherhood their primary goals”¹⁴⁸ and that:

Women in their early twenties undergo intense pressure from family and friends as well as society at large to marry before they reach twenty-five. A common joke refers to them as “Christmas cakes”, meaning that like Christmas cakes they will become too old and stale after the twenty-fifth.¹⁴⁹

This meant that motherhood was also a state usually reached at a relatively young age. Said Tipton, “it goes without saying in Japan that motherhood means marriage”.¹⁵⁰

However, it was also in this period that “*onna no jidai* (the era of women) became a catchphrase, connoting freedom, affluence and independence achieved by women”.¹⁵¹ And although there was this immense pressure to marry, “women’s average age at first marriage rose to twenty six for the first time” (Table 1).¹⁵²

In 2007 this figure rose again to twenty eight:

Average Age of First Marriage for Women in Japan	
Year	Age
1950	23.0
1975	24.7
1985	25.5
1995	26.3
2007	28.3

Table 1: *Average Age of First Marriage for Women in Japan*

Source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan.¹⁵³

According to Tamiko Yamakawa, “traditionally most women married at least once. It was taken for granted that women married at a marriageable age and raised children. But starting in the mid-eighties marriage became just one of the alternatives for women”.¹⁵⁴

The average age for giving birth to a first child has also increased with the most common age group rising for the first time to thirty-to-thirty-four years, and the average age for first-time mothers to age twenty nine in 2007 (Table 2):

Changes of Mothers' Age at Childbirth							
Year	Distribution of mothers' age (%)						Average age bearing first child
	- 19	20 – 24	25 – 29	30 – 34	35 – 39	40 +	
1975	0.8	25.2	53.4	16.8	3.3	0.5	25.7
1985	1.2	17.3	47.7	26.6	6.5	0.6	26.7
1995	1.4	16.3	41.5	31.3	8.4	1.1	27.5
2000	1.7	13.6	39.5	33.3	10.6	1.3	28.0
2007	1.4	11.6	29.7	37.9	17.1	2.3	29.4

Table 2: *Changes of Mothers' Age at Childbirth*

Source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan.¹⁵⁵

In 2009, according to the National Social Security and Population Research Centre, a third of all women in the country's thirty-to-thirty-four years of age bracket were also still virgins.¹⁵⁶ This is extraordinary given the expectations noted only a decade ago by Tipton that Japanese girls were to marry and conceive a first child by their mid twenties.

As early as 1996, Yasuko Aobuchi wrote:

Women's view on marriage has drastically changed. Marriage used to be the goal of life for women, and those who remained single were suspected of having some unknown defects or disadvantages, which prevented them from getting married. Sometimes they were called "high misses" or "old misses", which meant "dropouts" in the marriage race. But nowadays 40% of women in the age group of 25 – 30 remain single, and 14% are still unmarried in the 30 – 35 year age group. They are not "left on the shelf". They remain single by choice. The reasons they

give for remaining single are [that] they don't feel a necessity to marry.... In reality... they don't want to lose their freedom and comfort.¹⁵⁷

Tamiko Maruyama writing in the same year also stated that a “few decades ago young women thought they had to get married during ‘*tekireiki*’, the Japanese marriage age, from 20 to 24”.¹⁵⁸ Now more young Japanese women have begun to think that marriage is not “the only way of life”.¹⁵⁹

Incidentally this marriage age, or *tekireiki*, is a typical age bracket for women to choose to participate in Gothloli culture, which again emphasises a certain endeavour by young people to prolong a utopian childhood state before accepting society's traditional responsibilities.

In 2000, when the Lolita subculture was becoming increasingly prominent, Elise Tipton was also noting that young Japanese women in general were becoming “increasingly... reluctant to give up their independence”.¹⁶⁰ As well they were proving to defy tradition in that even in cases whereby marriage was still their primary goal they had become more assertive in opting “toward a preference for ‘love marriages’... which was not the custom in earlier times”.¹⁶¹ I would say that this is another reason why the Gothloli chooses, symbolically and often physically, to perpetuate the phase of innocence. Rather than being forced into an arranged and loveless marriage (especially to avoid being left “on the shelf”, or becoming a stale “cake”), many young people in Japan are now choosing to wait for the right time to grow up by remaining virgins until they find a love partner.

The Position of Woman in Historical Japan

Previously, up until the burgeoning twenty-first century, life in Japan was quite different for women.

Ruth Benedict, in *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, her seminal work on Japanese culture and society, discussed women's lot in the twentieth century from the commencement of the post-war period through to the 1960s (her time of writing):

Whatever one's age, one's position in the hierarchy depends on whether one is male or female. The Japanese woman walks behind her husband and has a lower status....¹⁶² A woman... wants children not only for her emotional satisfaction... but because it is only as a mother that she gains status. A childless wife has a most insecure position in the family....¹⁶³ Japanese mothers [therefore] begin their childbearing early, and girls of nineteen bear more children than women of any age.¹⁶⁴ [And, as it is considered their honorable duty] women may not cry out in labor.¹⁶⁵

It was thus usually for the roles of mother and wife that girl-children were raised and on which their education was based. Benedict claimed that the “Japanese [*sic*] daughter ... must get along as best she [could]... while... the attentions, and the money for education [went]... to her brothers.... [And even] when higher schools were established for young women the prescribed courses were heavily loaded with instruction in etiquette and

bodily movement”¹⁶⁶ or, in other words, those subjects considered most suitable for raising “ladies”, rather than perhaps mathematics or sciences.

According to Benedict, though, the very young girl-child, except for having a few more “duties” around the house than her brothers, was initially “trained” in the same way as a boy.¹⁶⁷ She “played in the streets with the boys”, and “fought with them”.... She too, as a child, ‘knew no shame’”.¹⁶⁸

Then between the ages of six and nine girls and boys were segregated; from that moment on, girls had to learn their “responsibilities ‘to the world’”.¹⁶⁹ Childhood therefore ended very abruptly and traumatically. It is no surprise that little girls were to have generally “become sullen and withdrawn and hard to teach”.¹⁷⁰

After going into household service as children, girls usually had only their arranged marriages to look forward to, whereby they would become the servant to a husband often in their early teenage years.*

This traditional upbringing of children continued to be practised until quite recently. In 1996 Ritsuku Matsumura was still maintaining that “Japanese parents raise sons and daughters differently”.¹⁷¹ “Moreover”, she said, “they still have the traditional idea that boys should be strong and intelligent; girls should be lovely and kind”.¹⁷²

* Note that the age of consent, except in the case of a few regional variances, was, and still is, thirteen.

Lolita as a New Form of Feminist Resistance

While psychologically Japan still generally conforms to the strictly gendered divisions in society that Ruth Benedict revealed, especially the priority that girls should be “lovely and kind” above all else, the Lolita subculture, while it has developed from this same sensibility that young women should represent themselves as modest, innocent, sweet, kind and cute, paradoxically resists the traditional position of Woman.

It is my argument that the Japanese Lolita movement encompasses nonconformist, even antiestablishment social behaviours and as such is a women’s revolution.

Sebastian Masuda has gone as far as describing Lolita most provocatively as “punk... minus the violence”.¹⁷³ Lolita, in this sense, is thus a passive-aggressive form of feminist rebellion, or in Deborah Cameron’s words “the baby doll face of feminism in Japan”.¹⁷⁴ This is a strong reason why the movement is also controversial and confrontational.

But how does this resistance operate? In contemplating the new Lolita, Hannah Feldman has highlighted the problematic aspect that to “desire her on the one hand, or to simulate her appeal on the other, involves [in either case the] infantilizing [of] women as well as their sexuality – a move that is hard to reconcile with the advances of feminism”.¹⁷⁵ She has asked:

Just what kind of power is gained through manufacturing a sexuality based on vulnerability and childlike frailty? One would think that infantilizing women's bodies and eroticizing girls... would endanger the power of both. What happened to the battle that has been waged... in the effort to have women called "women" instead of girls? The question remains, then, why women would want to rename themselves as *Lolitas* [*sic*].¹⁷⁶

Feldman raised these questions not in relation to the Japanese Lolita movement, specifically, but in the context of Fine Art, whereby she identified, at her time of writing in the 1990s, a newfound obsession with the sexualised "little girl" as subject matter within the arts industry. This period, as I have discussed, was also concurrent with the rise of the Lolita in Japan. However, in recognising these issues, Feldman also argued that Lolita, "the sexualised child" of Nabokovian tradition, is not back "*per se*".¹⁷⁷

Feldman claimed that Lolita, "as a name, a category, which designates, laments or applauds young girls' sexual desirability, lost its specificity long ago.... Lolita has become divorced from the narrative specifics of her story".¹⁷⁸ The new Lolita is "now being celebrated by women as a positive symbol that they are anxious to claim as their own and assert".¹⁷⁹ Lolita has become "an object of desire... for women and young girls".¹⁸⁰ In my opinion, these statements describe, aptly and exactly, my own sentiments in regard to an analysis of the Japanese Lolita.

In reference to the Japanese movement, Deborah Cameron has suggested this notion, maintaining that “for women in Japan” *Lolita* is a positive feminist force simply “because it is not about men. Nor is it about housekeeping, children, mothers-in-law, dead-end part-time work or the national obsession with raising the birth rate”.¹⁸¹ *Lolita* is about and *for* women.

How may this shift have come about? Let us diverge, for a moment, away from the subculture, to a history of the notion of *Lolita* as a universal motif but from a particular viewpoint that she is the victim of voyeurism, a vulnerable and potentially corruptible child (rather than one who is essentially already corrupted),* beginning with a nineteenth-century movement known as the Cult of the Little Girl, or the Cult of the Child.

* In reference to the dualistic reading of Nabokov’s *Lolita* (depending on one’s take on it) and its influence on the reputation of “*Lolita*” as a term for either a sexually corrupted but promiscuous child or simply a victim of rape.

The Victorian Cult of the Little Girl

Nabokov was certainly not the first to immortalise the prepubescent to adolescent girl. Most significantly a raft of well-known Victorian artists and writers felt compelled to celebrate and depict the beguiling beauty and innocence of the Girl/Child.

According to Jacqueline Banerjee, although the worship of children, and with it the “notion of childhood innocence, goes back at least to Greek ideas on human perfectibility”, making appearances at various key moments throughout history, “the so-called ‘Cult of the Child’ [truly] flourished in England when William Blake and the Romantics embodied it in their poetry”.¹⁸² Says Jackie Wullschlager, from that time onwards a “fascination with childhood” appeared “everywhere in nineteenth-century society and art”.¹⁸³ Artists and writers, particularly, ranging from William Wordsworth, Charles Dickens, Edward Burne-Jones, Edward Lear, George Eliot, John Everett Millais, Frances Hodgson Burnett, George Macdonald, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Julia Margaret Cameron, J. M. Barrie and A. A. Milne, amongst many others, “took the Victorian romance with childhood to an extreme”.¹⁸⁴ In art, Thomas Cooper Gotch immortalised the Girl/Child as Icon in two of his most famous works, *My Crown and Sceptre* (1891) and *The Child Enthroned* (1894) (Figs 76 & 77).

Image removed according to copyright law

Figure 76: Thomas Cooper Gotch

My Crown and Sceptre, 1891

Image removed according to copyright law

Figure 77: Thomas Cooper Gotch

The Child Enthroned, 1894

The most notable, or notorious, figure to demonstrate an obsession with the Little Girl was Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (1832 – 1898) better known by his pseudonym Lewis Carroll and as the writer of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass: And What Alice Found There* (1871). Besides his literary notoriety Dodgson became (in)famous for his, some would say questionable, hobby of photographing children who were more often than not naked (or “nude”) little girls (Fig. 78). The inspiration for his classic children’s stories and the heroine of his tales, the young Alice Pleasance Liddell, was also his main muse for his photographic work (Fig. 79).

Image removed according to copyright law

Figure 78: Charles Dodgson

Evelyn Hatch, 1879

Image removed according to copyright law

Figure 79: Charles Dodgson

Alice Liddell as a Beggar-child, c. 1850s

Since the twentieth century many critics have reflected on Dodgson's photographs of children with disdain and disgust in terms of the images themselves and what they perceive to have been paedophilic behaviour on his part. However, Stephanie Lovett Stoffel, in her biography of the author and artist, disagrees with this widely held opinion and has defended Dodgson's practice, stating that:

The assumption is made that a bachelor's interest in little girls must be sexual and that a photographer of little girls must be a voyeur.... But to view him [Dodgson] so is to judge him by the standards of our time while taking no account of the culture in which he lived.... The romanticizing of childhood was part of the Victorian ethos. Dodgson, a devout Christian, saw children... as [being]... freshly arrived from the presence of God, uncontaminated and asexual.... As for his photographs the study of the nude body has been the hallmark of serious artists for centuries and Dodgson truly saw himself as an artist in his medium.... The adult nude was to him... too sexualized; the female child whose body is not yet sexual provided a way... to celebrate the human form without obliging him to come to terms with... sexual beings.¹⁸⁵

As Stoffel points out, to judge Dodgson through modern eyes is to disregard the environmental framework of his day. Images of juvenile nudes were part of mainstream society and existed not only in art but in popular culture, appearing on ephemeral material such as Christmas cards. More importantly though, to the artist and his contemporaries, the notion of child pornography was remote and was not considered or even imagined in regard to this material. Hugues Lebailly argues that those “who still think of him (Dodgson) as a monomaniac pervert engrossed in a perpetual little girl hunt” need to recognise this context:

Far from singling him out among the society of his time his very attraction to the immature female form was shared... by so many [members] of... the literary and artistic élites... that it should be read as... partaking in one of the most typical attitudes of his time.¹⁸⁶

To the Victorians, the Child was a metaphor for purity, innocence and grace and so the untainted naked vessel of the Child was not readily connected with sin or sinful motives. There was instead an emphasis in common trains of thought and representation that “dwelt on the holiness of the Child” whose image was often seen as “redemptive”.¹⁸⁷

In regard to the mindset of Dodgson, Hannah Feldman has supported his innocence to a degree, claiming that his “interest in these girls (often the daughters of friends) was... the outgrowth of... [an] aesthetic that... [found] in the girlish physique an innocent beauty untainted by experience”.¹⁸⁸

However even one of Dodgson’s main defenders Hugues Lebailly believes that “it would of course be preposterous to attempt to dispute the reality of that fascination [with little girls] and to deny that it ever played a part” in his behaviour.¹⁸⁹ And, states Feldman, “it could be said” that Charles Dodgson was indeed “an early sufferer” of the Lolita Complex which “in Japan sociologists call the male desire for girlish women”.¹⁹⁰

Hannah Feldman likens Dodgson to the fictional Humbert Humbert, the male protagonist of Nabokov’s *Lolita*, in seeing his behaviour as an “outgrowth of a sexual aesthetic that privileged the developing body over the developed” which, in association with what we know of that character, suggests her belief that Dodgson’s practice was less than healthy.¹⁹¹

Defining the Lolita Complex

In returning to a critique of the Japanese movement – especially in light of the paradigm known in Japan (and understood elsewhere) as the Lolita Complex – it would appear that the adoption of the Lolita fashion style, formed in the image of Dodgson’s Alice and named after Nabokov’s sexually active child, would create an environment whereby the Gothloli situates herself in a vulnerable position and thus plays into the Voyeur’s hands (Figs 80 & 81). Paradoxically though, although she does place herself in dangerous territory, the Gothloli, I strongly argue, is determined to confront and deflect this position from within this construction.

As Hannah Feldman explains, in “[r]eclaiming Lolita’s alleged sexual assertiveness” the contemporary Lolita also “appeals to the ‘new’ or ‘pro-sex’ feminist agenda of overriding patriarchal hegemony by reclaiming the desires on which it is based”.¹⁹² In other words this new Lolita is restoring the rights of the Nabokovian Lolita by taking back the balance of power. *She* is in control of her identity.

Image removed according to copyright law

Figure 80: Figure Sir John Tenniel, *The White Queen*

Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass: And What Alice Found There*, 1871.

In regard to the Lolita subculture, as 21-year-old Gothli “Tsukiyo” declares, “this is women who have the power”.^{*} The movement commands this power by giving women the choice to be feminine or “girly”. It allows women the right to be whom and what they want to be.

^{*} Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “Tsukiyo” (Nord-Pas-de-Calais, France) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 18 January, 2010.

Image removed according to copyright law

Figure 81: *Angelic Pretty* (Japanese label)

Alice Collection, 2006

Says “Loli-Bee”:

Some people think that girls... that choose to look “girly” are not supporting feminism. I think it is true feminism if girls are able to choose what they wanted [sic] to wear, which included [sic] things that makes them look girly, pretty and cute”.*

“Marie Dauphine”, age 19, believes that this factor proves that “the feminist movement is STILL MOVING” because as a Gothloli she gets to wear what she wants”.† “Duplica” agrees, stating that “feminism is also about women’s rights to be able to decide what we wanna [sic] do and what we wanna [sic] wear”.‡ For “Tempest Paige”, “feminism is about choice and equality. Women can dress in skimpy clothes or frilly clothes or be covered from head to toe. We can do what we want for ourselves”.§ And “Kasutei” thinks “to hell with gender stereotypes. I’ll be who and what I want, as in myself”.**

* Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “Loli-Bee” (Hong Kong/Auckland, New Zealand) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 18 January, 2010

† Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “Marie Dauphine” (Los Angeles, California) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 16 January, 2010.

‡ Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “Duplica” (Germany) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 16 January, 2010.

§ Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “Tempest Paige” (New York, New York) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 17 January, 2010.

** Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “Kasutei” (Kirkcaldy, Scotland) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 17 January, 2010.

In that it does not strive for a womanly look, the Lolita image also rejects dominating media stereotypes of largely unachievable, sexy body types, obliterates silhouettes that accentuate breasts and a toned physique, and thus defies beauty standards that are based on sexually mature bodies. As 20-year-old “d0ll” claims:

[It is] mainstream fashion [that] is setting back the feminist movement more than anything. Everything is sexualized and women are generally viewed almost as “sex objects” and treat themselves that way too. They act promiscuous and hope for acceptance. By dressing in a modest and feminine fashion, such as Lolita, girls and women can prove that you don’t have to show off your body to be beautiful and that you can do what you want in life.*

This aspect is particularly pertinent in Japan. As leading G&L designer Naoto Hirooka (of the label h.Naoto) has noted, “many Japanese women feel intimidated by high fashion in the West and feel that they can never live up to the refined beauty that they feel Western women strive for.... So instead they shoot for a cute look, one that doesn’t require tall, curvaceous bodies and instead emphasizes girlishness”.¹⁹³ He also believes that “one of the salient points about Lolita is that it is really a fashion that is not intended to attract men”.¹⁹⁴

* Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “d0ll” (Omaha, Nebraska) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 16 January, 2010.

That men are largely not attracted to the Gothloli look is apparent not only in Japan but elsewhere. “BeliaMadHatter”, age 23 from Stuttgart, thinks that for her “the style can be sexy” but she says “I don’t think that many men think a Lolita is sex [*sic*].... My boyfriend for example and the most other friends of me [*sic*] don’t like it”.*

The purpose behind the Gothloli look or its actual intention is also not, as Naoto has stressed, about attracting men. What is of foremost importance to Lolita is that they dress for themselves and for their girlfriends and to compete with and impress other girls.

“Ashy”, a 19-year-old Auckland Gothloli, reiterates Naoto’s observations, claiming that “women are entitled to choice of [*sic*] how they portray themselves... [and Lolita] fashion isn’t held [up] as the media ideal of beauty nor is it generally used to entice men. It’s completely for the woman’s enjoyment”.†

There is also a sense of girl power amongst Lolita communities. Gothloli “Harcole” from Nordrhein-Westfalen says that what she likes most about the subculture are the friendships she makes with like-minded girls. She states: “We meet about two to three times a month and we visit churches, castles (Germany has a lot), make fotos [*sic*], go to a café or a

* Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “BeliaMadHatter” (Stuttgart, Germany) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 17 January, 2010.

† Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “Ashy” (Auckland, New Zealand) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 17 January, 2010.

restaurant and eat there. I love to be with the others and without Lolita I would never have known them”.* “Duplica” repeats this: “I like to meet other Lolitas [sic] who share my interests. We have the same passion and because of that I was able to meet some wonderful girls who became my friends”.† Says “BeliaMadHatter”, another German Gothloli, Lolita makes her “feel free and it’s a feeling like I can do what I want like in the song ‘girls they wanna have fun’ [sic]”.‡

Lolita represents both female and feminine solidarity. Novala Takemoto, author of *Kamikaze Girls (Shimotsuma Monogatari)*,¹⁹⁵ a cult novel in the worldwide realm of Lolita, has also proclaimed that the Gothloli would “rather stay girls. It’s their form of resistance.... They don’t exist to please anyone; they lean on nothing”.¹⁹⁶ Choosing to be “girlish” girls is a form of revolt. Says Deborah Cameron, the Lolita movement “is a rebellion with frills on”.¹⁹⁷

* Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “Harcole” (Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 10 February, 2010.

† Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “Duplica” (Germany) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 16 January, 2010.

‡ Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “BeliaMadHatter” (Stuttgart, Germany) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 17 January, 2010.

Lolita as a Radical Subculture

In a nation, as described by Ruth Benedict, that was historically framed by a social hierarchy dependent on whether one was born male or female into a world where women, who were considered of a lower status, had to walk behind their husbands, the Lolita movement assists in allowing women to finally come forward and become visible. As Ginny Parker has discussed, “conspicuous clothing also satisfies a craving to stand out. Japanese youth are generally less conformist than their parents and often believe it’s crucial to be different”.¹⁹⁸ Moreover, “Yo Yahata a clinical psychologist who has done case studies and written articles about aspects of Lolita culture” has highlighted that for Gothloli “[d]ressing like this and having people stare at them [also] makes them feel that their existence is worth something”.¹⁹⁹ That audiences do stare and comment negatively is understandable in some ways, as Jane Pinckard has argued.²⁰⁰ “After all, [it’s] alienating to want to be someone else, even in pretend”.²⁰¹ But as a collective, intimidating force, these women are in fact noticed, which is empowering and powerful.

Most notably in regard to this new feminism, what is unique about the Lolita subculture is that it is essentially a feminine movement. What sets this phenomenon apart from the historical subcultural model is that the face of the Lolita is feminine. Although it was instigated and is still influenced by several prominent male figures, such as Mana and Novala Takemoto, the classic identity even when adopted by men is female. As Takemoto claims,

he has “been racing headlong in full-blown Lolita mode for years, in spite of being a straight male”.²⁰² On men such as Mana, though, the look is neither effeminate nor androgynous. It is feminine (Fig. 82). The appearance is still that of the girl and it celebrates the girl. This is a relatively new concept in regard to subcultures and as such posits this movement as unique and radical.

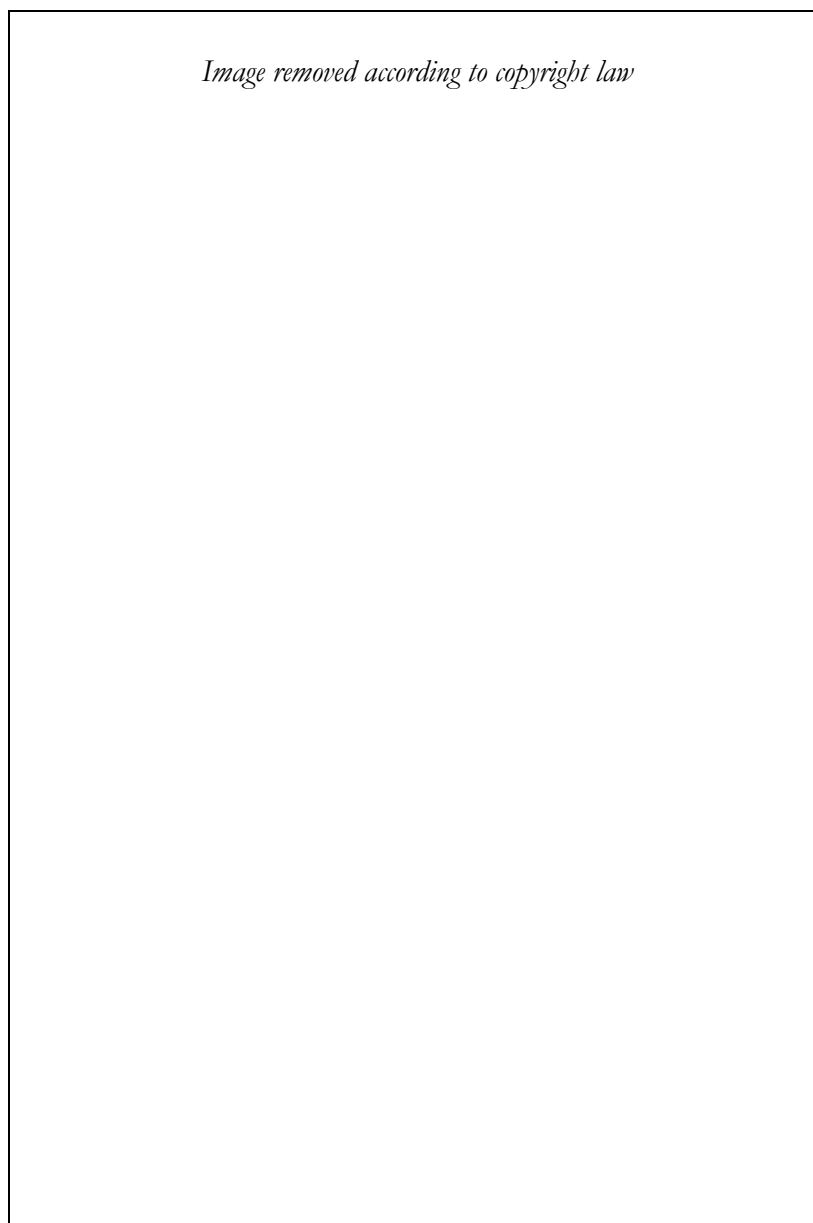


Figure 82: *Mana*

Musician (Malice Mizer and Moi Dix Mois) and Fashion Designer (Moi-même-Moitié)

Yuniya Kawamura highlights Dick Hebdige's observation that "girls have [in the past] been relegated to a position of secondary interest within both sociological accounts of subculture and photographic studies of urban youth and [that] masculine bias [has existed]... in the subcultures themselves".²⁰³ What is different about the Japanese Lolita movement is that it is essentially a girls' subculture.²⁰⁴ This alone makes it revolutionary.

In the 1970s, Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber also discussed the anomaly in subcultures in regard to the invisibility of girls. According to Anoop Nayak and Mary Jane Kehily, they:

speculate[d] that the relative absence of girls in subcultures may hinge around issues of gender and space, [with] girls being more centrally involved in the "private" domestic sphere of home and family life rather than the "public" world of the street where most subcultural activities occur.²⁰⁵

This observation illuminates the fact that historically – even within the realm of subculture, which by term alone carries with it an emphasis on underground or alternative behaviour, and is usually thus associated with rebellion and disestablishmentarianism against mainstream ideologies – the twentieth-century, until the emergence of the Japanese Lolita in the 1980s, had achieved little in its progression from the nineteenth-century model of women's place in society. The Victorian culture of "separate spheres", which professed that the public space was to be reserved for men while

women should be providing a “safe haven” at home,²⁰⁶ appears to have still held authority in Japan and elsewhere.

The Japanese Lolita movement flies in the face of this historical hegemony in that the forum for the subculture is the street. It can thus be read as a “triumphant emblem of a newly configured” feminist model,²⁰⁷ especially in its associations with “play”, “display”, and “parade”. In dressing up and taking herself and her dolls out to congregate and promenade with friends on the street, the Gothloli transfers the notion of private play to public exhibition. She therefore transgresses the rule that women’s place is in the home and trespasses the male domain. A true measurement that the Lolita subculture is indeed radical, even subversive I believe, is that it transcends this age-old patriarchal order in that the Gothloli has reclaimed her right to play in the streets like the boys, without shame.*

* In reference to Benedict’s comment that as children girls traditionally “played in the streets with the boys” knowing “no shame” (see page 193 of this thesis); Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (1967; repr., London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 192.

Resisting the Power of Pornography

In transporting the Lolita identity to the streets or the public arena, the Gothloli exposes the little-girl image, taking it out into the open whereby it is no longer secretive or mysterious (and by extension “naughty”). As such, however, she ventures into unprotected territory. Through her actions of public display the Gothloli actually invites voyeurism and thus her safe haven, sought via the yearning to return or hang on to the security of the childhood space is potentially corruptible.

However, as I have argued, the Japanese Lolita subculture as a collective power should be identified as a “transgressive model for representing female sexuality”²⁰⁸ which can be understood in terms of an insurgence against the so-called Lolita Complex. According to David McNeill, “if the Lolita enthusiasts share a philosophy it might be best understood as a reluctance to embrace the ‘dirty world’ of adulthood”.²⁰⁹ Therein lies the paradox that, in a country where the age of consent is thirteen years old and pornographic imagery of cute little girls is rife, the Gothloli rebels against a position of vulnerability by, as I have emphasised, taking back the power of the little girl and owning it.

Comparisons are made in the media between the Gothloli identity and a perceivable link to pornographic and paedophilic material in Japan, including *manga* (or two-dimensional illustrations) of very young girls posed provocatively in often demeaning situations, known as *lolicon* or *roricon* (Jap.), a term contracted from “Lolita” and “Complex” (Figs 83 – 86).^{*} There is also a popular *anime* (or moving-picture) industry that produces *bentai*, sexually explicit animations that very frequently depict young women in pornographic acts with older males (Fig. 75).

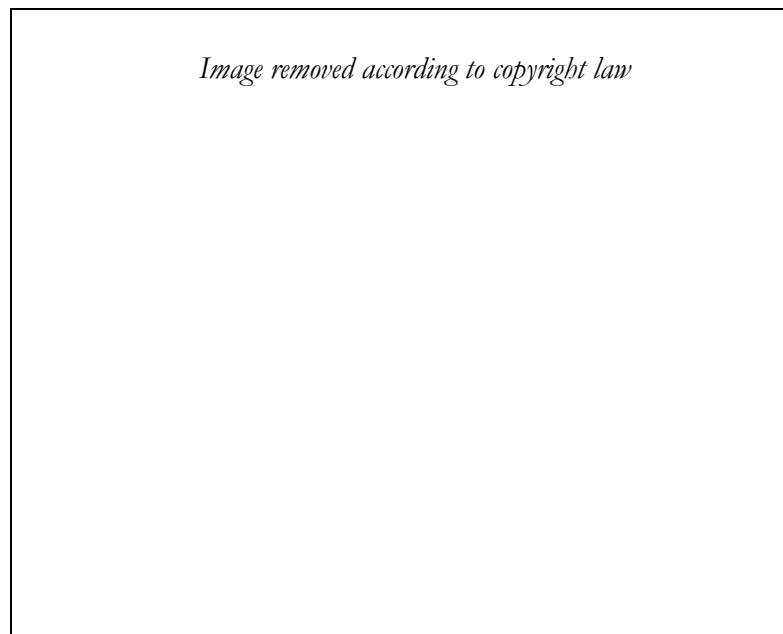


Figure 83: *Lolicon*

^{*} These examples differ in regard to their level of pornographic intensity. Figure 83 could represent an innocent scenario until it is observed in context with its origin, an online *roricon* website. Given this connection, one becomes more aware of the potential for paedophilic voyeurism, which in turn changes one’s perception of the characters’ expressions to a recognition that they are suddenly aware of being watched. Figure 84 makes this association even more obvious with the added sense of impending violence towards the subject. As the viewer, one becomes implicated in that offense. Figures 85 and 86, on the other hand, represent little girls as provocateurs in various states of dress and undress, although the first subject appears to be less knowing than the second who looks, again, vulnerable. Ultimately, though, they all signify the little girl as victim.

While examples of *lolicon* and or *bentai* (or moving *lolicon*) very rarely portray the Gothloli, they do exist and therefore she is nonetheless attached by association due to the fact that she is both a child and Lolita (Figs 87 & 88).*

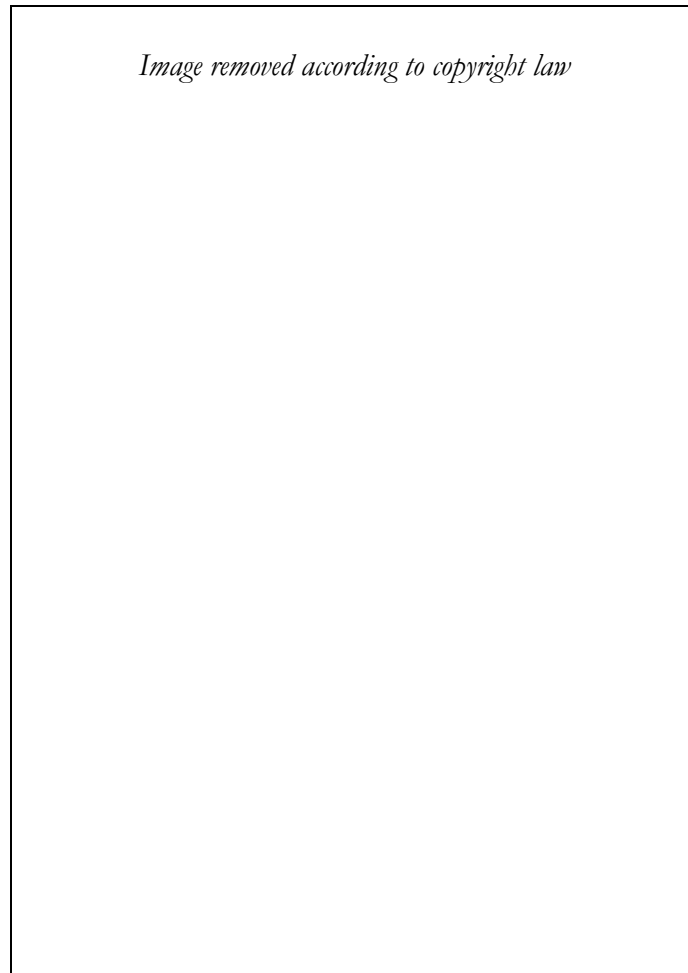


Figure 84: *Lolicon*

* I have periodically trawled through online *lolicon* and *bentai* imagery to ascertain how much material appropriates the Gothloli identity. This is a dangerous task that should be carried out with care as these types of images are often attached to viruses and can cause the computer to freeze, crash or worse. However, I feel confident that I can make this statement in regard to the internet, having attempted this type of research numerous times. As far as what is available in Japan, in other formats such as printed material and moving-image media, I cannot say. I imagine though that the relative scarcity of online examples would reflect the same ratio elsewhere.

Image removed according to copyright law

Figure 85: *Lolicon*

Image removed according to copyright law

Figure 86: *Lolicon*

Image removed according to copyright law

Figure 87: *Gothloli Lolicon*

Image removed according to copyright law

Figure 88: *Gothloli Lolicon*

In that this environment does exist, the Gothloli identity when contemplated in this context – especially when enforced by terminology that instantly connotes the Nabokovian Lolita – thus elicits the most heated reactions and emotional responses from critics.*

There is no doubt that these types of images can excite both men and women. But sexual tastes and practices are so varied and boundless that any type of fashion could be blamed for instigating sexual arousal. There is the obvious debate about miniskirts, but shoes, hats, and a limitless list of clothing items can also be fetishised.

And, while there is no denial that there is this element of culture in Japan, it would and did exist for centuries with or without the Lolita subculture. Erotic *manga* itself, of which little-girl imagery is an extension, has proliferated as an age-old Japanese tradition originating in the production of woodblock prints from as far back as the seventh century. Furthermore, while the Gothloli identity has been adopted by the *lolicon* industry, my argument is that these pornographic images bastardise Lolita, a movement instigated and motivated by purer, even revolutionary intentions.

* Speaking from personal experience, creating or participating in discourse around even a critique of the Japanese Lolita phenomenon as an academic endeavour is seen by some to be illuminating, broadcasting, advertising, popularising and feeding a movement that is often believed to be perpetuating and exacerbating violence against young girls. I have been accused of this after speaking at international conferences. Interestingly, though, I have not encountered these reactions from Gothic scholars.

The *lolicon* is also yet another product stemming from the “infanticisation” of Japanese culture and *yōjika* which, as discussed, is a dominating impulse contributing to a patriarchal ordering of society. As I have previously claimed, the Japanese Lolita movement defies and confronts this patriarchal construct and therefore also fights against this pornographic hegemony. The *lolicon*, as part of a larger pornographic framework that objectifies and represses women, is merely another element of Japanese culture that the Gothloli consciously or subconsciously, but symbolically, resists. Once again, I must stress that the classic, original, authentic Gothloli image, in its purist untainted form, is intended to represent modesty and childhood innocence, the polar opposite of “the ‘dirty world’ of adulthood”.

However, as I have stated, the Gothloli’s identity has undeniably become associated with Japan’s pornography industry, which has corrupted her reputation. Does this mean that the authenticity of the subculture has also been debased? Can the Gothloli’s original intentions be projected and understood? Are these purist motivations still behind participation in the movement? Although the character of the Gothloli has been tarnished, the Lolita still determines to combat this sexualised paradigm. But, in light of this predicament, should the subculture continue?

I believe that in succumbing to pressures, giving up her involvement in a movement she is passionate about and thus changing her behaviour, the Gothloli is abandoning her choice, her right, to be whom she wants to be, and thus diminishing her power whilst transferring that power back to the patriarchal hegemonies that she fights against.

Whether this “fight” is or is not conscious, a young woman, especially in Japan, does not enter this subculture through ignorance. Although motivations behind her participation may be quite simplistic, as in she may just choose to be Lolita because it is pretty or cute, she *knows* about the associations and connotations; they are “everywhere” and she is or becomes all too aware of the dangerous territory she inhabits.

During my research trip to Tokyo in 2007 with my colleague Bevan Chuang, we witnessed the dangers of parading on the street whilst we were mingling and chatting with, and taking photographs of, other Lolita at the *Jingu Bashi* (Jingu Bridge) Harajuku, the most popular site of congregation.

While Lolita are generally contented with photographers taking their photos – as it is expected that this will happen due to the publicity of this spot and thus an inundation of curious tourists in this area – the girls prefer to be asked first and often will only give permission if the photographer is considered to be polite (or felt to be “safe”). Just as often, though, they will deny the request as, although they consciously place themselves in this voyeuristic position, they do sense their subsequent vulnerability and

understand that photographs of them could end up anywhere. This became very apparent to us as we were taking photographs for several days and were not just verbally asking for permission but providing notices, written in both Japanese and English, explaining that we were there officially on behalf of Auckland War Memorial Museum for our upcoming exhibition.* Even with the provision that we would treat their images with respect, the larger percentage of the girls denied us permission to photograph them.

A particular incident emphasised the extent to which this wariness, or fear, is not unfounded. One afternoon a young Gothloli, Tama, who had previously happily posed for photographs for us (Fig. 89), appeared terrified and was in floods of tears. An elderly male photographer had suddenly become fixated with her and was pursuing her relentlessly. Tama asked us to help her, stating that she did not know this man and that although she had told him repeatedly to leave her alone, he was continuing to chase and photograph her. He was behaving aggressively towards other photographers, ordering them to stop shooting, and saying to her “I own you! You are mine”.

* Details of this exhibition will be discussed in the concluding chapter, “Death of a Subculture?”.



Figure 89: Bevan Chuang

Tama and Mae (both age 21), Jingu Bashi, Harajuku, Tokyo, 2007

This anecdote also stresses the reason, indeed the need, for the Gothloli's defiance. Just because girls choose to meet up on the streets and hang out does not mean they do this for other peoples' benefits.

The Gothloli expects and can feel proud to be photographed, even in a sense to be consumed. She knows it is inevitable that she will attract voyeurs as she is on display, and it can be empowering, even invigorating, as I discussed before, to become visible, to be noticed. However, again, this does not mean that she invites, let alone wants to encourage, sexual advances, abuse or violence. She is also not asking to be consumed in a pornographic way; nor does she wish to feed the Lolita Complex. It is not her fault if her signals, her intentions, are misread.

To associate the Japanese Lolita with the sex industry is to misinterpret the Gothloli's motivations and, as I have stressed, intentions, and to use her image as pornography, as I have also argued, is to bastardise her identity.

Journalist Francis Henville has stated her agreement with this opinion, wishing to “dispel” what she also calls “one common misconception”.²¹⁰ She has gone as far as claiming that the “Gothic Lolita has little or nothing to do with *roricon* or *lolicon*... [or] hyper-sexed *manga* or *anime* that would probably violate child porn laws in most countries”.²¹¹

Kath Bridges, a 34-year-old Auckland Gothloli and independent Lolita fashion designer for her label *Kitty Bridges* agrees, declaring that:

This type of pornography and the Lolita fashion style from Japan may share the same name but couldn't be more different! Japanese Lolita as a [form of] dress and lifestyle does not personify sleaze.... They are as far removed from one another as a lamb is from a wolf!*

However, while I support the stance that the Gothloli does not intend to be involved in pornography, I disagree with Henville that she has *nothing* to do with *roricon* or *lolicon*, as the Lolita identity has been, as I have highlighted, implicated in the sex industry. But again I must emphasise that this is not by choice, and the association of the Gothloli with this type of imagery has been due to misappropriation.

As Sheila Burgel has stated, the “prissiness and prudery” of the Gothloli look is in fact an effort “primarily intended to keep it sacred and ensure that the image is not destroyed by links to sex”.²¹² Burgel also agrees that pornographic images of Lolita are the result of “misconceptions [which]... run rampant in a country where [terms]... like ‘Loli-Complex’... are imbedded in the culture”.²¹³ She goes on to say that:

The demure, well-mannered Gothic Lolita is ultimately a rejection of the sexual demands placed on little girls in Japanese society. Although child pornography in Japan was finally outlawed in 1999, fetishizing prepubescent schoolgirls is still commonplace.... However... [the] Gothic Lolita [image] doesn't quite carry the significance the look suggests.²¹⁴

* Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “Kitty Bridges” (Auckland, New Zealand) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 18 January, 2010.

Writes Henville (somewhat contradictorily), “while [the] Gothic Lolita [image] certainly has sexual undertones it’s not about child porn”.²¹⁵ “To be sure the little-girl look [may inhabit]... Japan’s sex industry... but this particular trend” or, as Ginny Parker describes it, this “frumpy, frilly fashion”, is not meant to be “sexy”.²¹⁶

There are stringent rules and regulations pertaining to the authentic Lolita fashion subculture, supported by Japanese periodical manuals, such as the *Gothic & Lolita Bible*,* the *Gothic, Lolita & Punk Book*, and *Rococo*, that profess the true intentions of Gothloli to represent both modesty and innocence and expound opposition to displaying much flesh.

Outside Japan it has also become clear, through my involvement with virtual Gothloli communities such as social networking sites like MySpace, blogs and personal communications with real-life Gothloli worldwide, that the larger percentage of non-Japanese members of the Lolita subculture are also keen to preserve the purist reputation and origins of the fashion style, and frequently voice, quite vehemently, their opposition to those who would suggest that the movement is anything other than respectable. In fact, an “outsider” Gothloli, or non-Japanese participant, may often shout the loudest in defence of the subculture in order to heighten their sense of authenticity and belonging, and in an endeavour to prove that they are well-

* This Japanese publication has been recently introduced in the USA in an English-language version.

educated about and sympathetic towards the original, classic Japanese sensibilities. This means that they will also follow the dress-code guidelines quite strictly.

As noted, the classic Gothloli will usually have her dress buttoned right up to her neck and the hem of her dress will never be too short; at the most her skirt usually finishes just slightly above the knee, if not below. Her manner of dress therefore is to avoid provocation.

28-year-old “E.G.Lolita of S. Florida” supports this argument, claiming that the Gothloli style was actually “created to *fight* the exposure of the body and skin”.^{*} Says “Duplica”:

I rebel against the modern fashion and the sexism in fashion because I wear Lolita. It's a fashion which hides nearly all parts of the body.... It's important to be proud of the fact being a woman [*sic*].... Instead of trying to look like a guy we overdo the look of a girl. It's more feminine and classy than showing tits.[†]

In “Duplica’s” opinion, “feminism and Lolita don’t contradict”.[‡]

^{*} Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “E.G.Lolita of S. Florida” (Oirsbeek, Netherlands) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 16 January, 2010.

[†] Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “Duplica” (Germany) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 16 January, 2010.

[‡] Ibid.

There is also much to be said in this regard about the experiential aspect of the wearer. It is all very well to observe and or analyse Lolita fashion and its symbolic signifiers from the outside. But speaking from experience, as an insider looking out, and communicating with other Gothloli about how Lolita also makes them feel is an entirely valid exercise.

For while the Lolita style can be viewed by the outsider as fetishist and sexy, the wearer of true, authentic Gothloli attire very rarely, if ever, perceives herself as sexual. This is perhaps because it makes one feel immature and even intimidated. Yet, for me especially, and other Lolita I have consulted, the overwhelming layers of clothing one must wear can make one feel very dressed. If anything, it can create a sense of being overdressed.

As Deborah Cameron highlights, the “Japanese Lolita has a protective cordon of passion-killing petticoats”.²¹⁷ This may feel intimidating for the wearer it but it also serves to intimidate. According to Cameron, “the message is clear: Look but don’t touch”.²¹⁸

The Lolita as Princess Regnant

It is apparent, and I argue this strongly, that Gothloli do attempt to separate and disassociate themselves from sexualised images and to actually combat misinterpretation through communication and education. This is just as much a necessity as it is a desire. As Isaac Gagné explains:

There is more at stake in educating each other through magazines and web forums than merely constructing a shared notion of community. Haunting the Gothic Lolita at every turn is... a *pervasive* misunderstanding of their subculture... and results in attempts... to distance themselves from unwanted stereotypes... due to its superficial similarities to bondage fashion and the fetishized Lolita of *rorikon*.²¹⁹

As discussed, this is imperative, especially in a country where the sex industry is so heavily framed by cute images and an obsession with the little girl image; an environment especially fraught with dangers for any young woman who is perceived to feed the Lolita Complex.

Even further complications, and another reason for the Gothloli to battle against a sexualised misidentification, arise in regard to comparisons made between Lolita and the Japanese Maid phenomenon. This industry which sees young “maids” working in so-called Maid Cafés – whereby these maids mostly innocently serve tea, but may provide, in some establishments, extra private “services” – is recognised by Gagné as an “additional catalyst to the sexual objectification” of Gothloli due to a commonly mistaken

notion that the fetishised French-maid image is an extension of or somehow related to the Lolita subculture.* ²²⁰

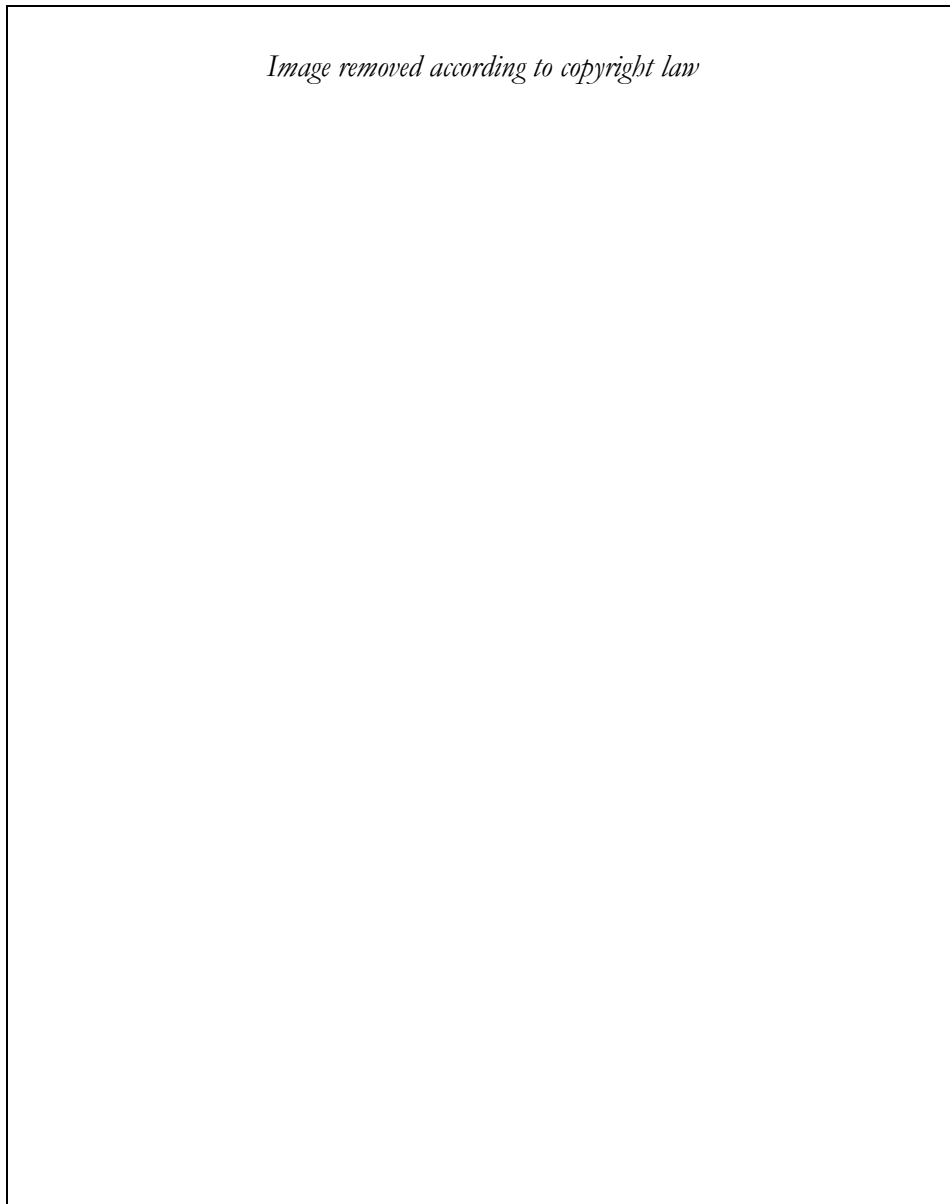


Figure 90: *Princess Resurrection* graphic-novel manga (page detail)

Featuring Hime and Flandre, Chap. 2: Princess Destruction, Vol. 1, 2007

* This is a misunderstanding that I have witnessed and experienced, in that, besides reading online debates and arguments about this conflation, I have been misinterpreted as a Maid, several times, when wearing my black and white Gothic Lolita attire (Fig. 9). Apart from the colourway, the design, I would argue, is not related. One noticeable difference is the omission of the apron.

As Gagné argues, “the crucial difference” between the two phenomena “beyond that of the maid’s vastly inferior clothing style and quality” is essentially one of “class” in regard to both appearance and manners, or an “aristocratic” tone. I would say, in regard to image, that there is often a certain regal aspect to Gothloli attire, particularly in the case of Sweet Lolita in relation to royal fashions of the Rococo period. But more importantly, what sets the Lolita and Maid apart is “princess” behaviour on the part of the Gothloli, whereby princesses are served and maids do the serving.²²¹ This observation is reinforced by practice: Gothloli delight in attending tea parties, drinking tea and eating cakes; Maids do not partake in this pleasure, they are there to provide pleasure and a service.

This distinction is illustrated in the popular *Princess Resurrection* graphic-novel and *anime* series. The main character whose name is Hime, which is the translation of the English word “princess” in Japanese, displays not only princess-like, tea-drinking manners but is waited on as a princess by a maid, Flandre, who, although she is also Hime’s closest companion, never shares in the drinking of the tea (Fig. 90). During these tea-drinking scenes, Hime takes on an extra air of superiority, talking down to Flandre in a more pronounced way, accentuating the maid’s position as mere servant. That this behaviour towards Flandre, though, is a little tongue-in-cheek is suggested by Hime’s response to being addressed as *Ouju-sama*. While the word *ouju* also means “princess”, the title combined with “sama” implies “Imperial princess” or “Empress” (i.e. ruling princess). It’s as if Flandre is, therefore,

calling Hime Your Royal Highness or Your Majesty in a sarcastic tone, referring to Hime's princess-like airs and graces. Hime figuratively replies, "don't call me princess, just call me princess-like, you servant" (note that this graphic novel is translated from Japanese and as such the dialogue bubbles are still read from right to left). Although the character of Hime is supposed to be of royal blood and Flandre is literally her servant, this exchange of words emphasises that they are playing at their roles or playing them up. But it also demonstrates the difference in attitude towards, and perceptions about, Gothloli and Maids. Leaving aside their personalities, this is indicated in their actual names; while Hime is the royal one to be served, the name Flandre connotes the role of a French maid. There is in this a sense, especially in regard to stereotypes, that the "princess" is sweet and pure, but haughty and cold; while the French maid image is warm but obedient and, as an archetypal identity, sexualised.

In *Princess Resurrection*, Hime is depicted as a *Hime Lolita*, Himeloli/*Himerori*, or Princess Lolita. The Himeloli style is a subcategory of Lolita that combines the silhouette of Gothloli with items such as mini crowns, tiaras and long silk gloves. With the Himeloli the aristocratic tone of the Gothloli is raised. The term "princess" is also used by Gothloli to describe themselves overall. For example, "Tsukiyo" says:

I have a quiet character, elegant like a little princess...! I love take tea with Lolitas friend [sic]! I think it's like in Versailles...! Loli clothes are the real me! A princess in a modern world that loves history of the past time [sic]. Every girls dream to be princess no [sic]? I realise mine and I live my life!*

“Marie Dauphine”, who has certainly nicknamed herself after the Rococo Queen Marie Antoinette, chooses the Lolita style for the same reason, stating that she likes “the whole concept of looking like a... princess”.[†] “When I wear Lolita”, she says, “I feel almost royal.... I love the aspect of being polite and ladylike.... Lolita is beautiful, therefore your personality must [also] be beautiful”.[‡]

“†Gothic*Lolita†”, an 18-year old from Harajuku, Japan, is also drawn to the romantic past. When explaining why she is attracted to the movement she claims it is “because I love the old ages like the Rococo and the Victorian age, I like antiques... and I feel the Lolita fashion like a escence [sic] of the past in our days [sic]”.[§] She likes “the preservation of the elegance and the beauty of the dresses” which make her feel “like a lady of the past in

* Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “Tsukiyo” (Nord-Pas-de-Calais, France) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 18 January, 2010.

† Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “Marie Dauphine” (Los Angeles, California) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 16 January, 2010.

‡ Ibid.

§ Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “†Gothic*Lolita†” (Harajuku, Japan) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 17 January, 2010.

the rong [*sic*] age”.* And similarly, “Ashy” believes “it brings back the etiquette and innocent romanticism that has been lost in the present. I love that fact of it”.†

Gothic Lolita Kath Bridges waxes lyrical:

Since I was small I have always been intrigued by the notion that just beyond our reach lie magical kingdoms filled with wonders and we can get there if only we know how to turn the key. The attraction of Lolita... (for me) is that I love the way sweetness and innocence are fused with a lush dark beauty, influenced by past times and this is all recreated in a modern world and lifestyle.‡

Whereas fellow Aucklander “Mental Tart” plainly states, “Sometimes I just want to feel like a beautiful princess. Or at least dress up like one!”.§

While some Lolita fashions are visually more regal than others, it is clear that on the whole the wearing of these dresses generally makes Gothloli feel princess-like. Moreover, in returning to the new feminist aspect of the movement, the Gothloli re-establishes her right to be a feminine, girly little princess but also a woman playing at being a princess-like little girl.

* Ibid.

† Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “Ashy” (Auckland, New Zealand) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 17 January, 2010.

‡ Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “Kitty Bridges” (Auckland, New Zealand) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 18 January, 2010.

§ Personal communication between “Angelic Lolita” and “Mental Tart” (Auckland, New Zealand) on MySpace, www.myspace.com/botticelliangel_nz, 17 January, 2010.

The Means to Shock

As discussed, the Japanese Lolita fashion subculture is unique in its trajectory of the feminine. It is also revolutionary in that it gives women the right to be feminine, to be cute, sweet, childlike and princess-like on their own terms. Although the Cute paradigm in Japan is associated with vulnerability and weakness, submission and repression, exploitation and powerlessness, especially in relation to popular imagery, the Lolita movement paradoxically resists this construction.

Many Gothloli vehemently deny any sexual connotations attached to the Lolita movement. This can be said in regard to the intentions, appearance and behaviour of its members. However, as indicated, it cannot be said that the subculture is in no way linked to notions of paedophilia, child sexuality, and pornography. And while it may not be calculated to feed the Lolita Complex, it certainly helps to satisfy it. It is this element particularly that makes participation in the subculture so rebellious.

What is truly shocking about Lolita is the adoption of an innocent yet fetishised identity and the brazen acceptance of the Lolita tag itself, considering all of its controversial evocations. This is contentious and therefore subversive.

Just as she takes on the identity of the Lolita, the Gothloli equally reclaims that persona as much as she claims it. She hijacks the male fantasy, takes possession of and over it, reverses and controls it. Lolita is no longer either Nabokov's sinful and corruptible child or, depending on one's interpretation of the novel, powerless victim. The new Lolita sees herself as absolved, converted, purified and empowered.

This power is identified in examples of *shōjo* Gothic fiction. A re-imagining of Lolita is embodied in three of the texts previously discussed in this thesis, namely *Petite Cossette*, *Rozen Maiden* and *Princess Resurrection*. Each of these narratives revolve around powerful, dominant, controlling, aggressive, violent, even chainsaw-wielding Gothloli heroines, who take on vengeful roles in which they confront, challenge and fight against society's, and mostly male, evils. Writes Susan Napier:

Certain texts of popular culture [particularly *shōjo manga* and *anime*] not only implicitly resist the ideology of the patriarchal Japanese super-state but actually work to problematize it, if not to actively subvert it.²²²

For example, *Cossette* symbolically challenges the Lolita Complex through her actions. She is the ghost of an adolescent girl from the eighteenth century who has haunted an antique glass, waiting for the right person to find and release her so that she may take revenge for her murder by an older lover, Marcello. Marcello, an artist, had painted *Cossette's* portrait over and over again and, obsessed with her image, had killed her to

stop her growing up, in an effort to keep her in his memory as a perpetually beautiful, pristine, doll-like woman-child. Her rescue comes in the form of Eiri, a twenty-first-century young man who also falls in love with her image, which only he can see in the antique glass. It is his love that releases her from captivity. However, fuelled by a vengeful spirit and the search for justice regarding Marcello's ill treatment of her, for his fetishisation of her image and her subsequent death at his hands, Cossette coerces Eiri into making a "pact of blood", whereby she uses his body as a surrogate for Marcello's, cruelly torturing and inflicting pain on him, which he must endure in order to earn her love. If he can withstand the punishment he will become worthy of her love and she will be able to reclaim a love relationship on her own terms.

As with Cossette, Shinku of *Rozen Maiden* takes complete, dominant control over a male protagonist. In this series the leading characters, including Shinku, are violent, warring, Gothloli dolls who come to life and take revenge. Shinku desires not to be an actual doll, an inanimate object or a plaything for others, in this case again for a male figure, but to be taken seriously as a real girl. In order for her to win the prize of becoming "Alice", or a human Lolita, she must beat and literally slay all other dolls at the "Alice" game. The male character is Jun, a young man known as an *otaku*, which in Japan is someone addicted to *manga*-graphic novels, *anime*, action figures, character figurines, comics and the internet, and often thus associated with the viewing of *lolicon* and *bentai*. Although the suggestion of

pornographic activity is not openly brought out in the narrative, it is for the educated in these matters implied, as for some reason Jun has shut himself off from all society and spends his entire life in his bedroom, on the computer. One day a mysterious package arrives at Jun's house, a casket that contains the dormant Shinku doll accompanied by a key. Jun inserts the key into Shinku who is then brought to life. While on the one hand this is symbolically an erotic gesture, on the other it would appear that Jun is in control of Shinku's destiny. However, it is the other way around. Under her spell, Jun is forced to be completely servile towards Shinku, who makes a vague promise to the boy that if he attends to her every command, assisting her to win the "Alice" game, she will save him from his hermitic state and she will eventually be all his. Again, though, as the rules are made by the female protagonist, the male character may or may not get his own wish but, if he does, it will be according to the girl's regulations.

This formula is repeated in *Princess Resurrection*. In these stories, Princess Hime possesses all creatures she comes into contact with or takes them under her control as an ultimate autocratic ruler, if she does not kill them first. She fights, particularly, the evils of Man~kind and battles against all competitors who would even dare to attempt to disempower her. Female enemies, however, are convinced by Hime to become allies and, although no one is her equal, they join forces with her to create a small army of young girls against male opposition. The girls come up against some truly terrifying opponents who prove to be no match for the females' power and,

specifically, Hime's violent and bloody methods of destruction. Hime's various weapons of choice are the rapier, axe, hammer, sword, circular saw, flail, mace, pitchfork and, her favourite, the chainsaw. But Hime is also Princess Resurrection. She is given this title because she resurrects a young man, Hiro, from a corpse. While this is the only male she saves, she brings him back to life, however, only to bring him into an existence of complete servitude: Hiro must drink Hime's royal blood for sustenance; without it he will again die; Hime uses this dominating position to completely control Hiro's every move; he must succumb to her demands or go without his life-force which she often chooses to withhold at her whim, making him even more susceptible to her power.

In regard to these powerful types of "battling beauties" in *shōjo manga*, Mari Kotani argues that, although they are imaged as hyper-feminine or hyper-girlly identities, they are "also able to evade the imposition of patriarchal categories".²²³ This symbolic endeavour to take revenge against patriarchal constructs is made more obvious in a "Special Bonus Spinoff" provided as an insert at the end of *Princess Resurrection, Vol. 1*. In this short story, a very young girl is found chasing an older man down the street. When she is able to confront him, she says:

Little girl: "It's been a year.... I finally found you. I will take you to hell!"

Man: "Me? I'm just an ordinary businessman."

Little Girl: “Don’t try to play dumb. I knew it was you when I saw you by the escalators. You were taking pictures up girls’ skirts!”

This man, the little girl duly destroys.

While these cases are fictional, they highlight the realities of an environment that places an emphasis on sexualising young girls and the need for young women to stand up to it. One way that the Gothloli does this, ironically, is to reveal the little-girl image through public display so that her identity is surveyed openly. Paradoxically, although this action is potentially dangerous, it assists in disarming the Lolita Complex by revoking the private and secretive nature of this fascination, especially in relation to the viewing of *lolicon* and *hentai*. In turn, this exposes and confronts the Voyeur.

The communal aspect of the subculture, represented as girl power in literature and realised in everyday life, also reduces the Lolita’s vulnerability. As they say, there is safety and strength in numbers. As a collective identity, Gothloli reinforce and protect each other. *En masse*, Lolita is “in your face” and intimidating. In Jane Pinckard’s words, Lolita seem to say:

“We are dolls... but don’t play with us. We bite.... It’s a ‘screw you’ to creepy older men who might fetishize the Lolita”.²²⁴

After all, it is...

“the very cuteness, the prettiness, which is creepy....

*The creepy cuteness is meant to disturb, to provoke”.*²²⁵

Conclusion:

The Death of a Subculture?

Is this the Beginning or the End?

On March 11, just over a couple of months before writing this, the huge *tsunami* hit Japan. After the initial shock subsided, it had me wondering what it would mean for this entire endeavour of mine, and what it might affect in terms of the Lolita subculture itself. Would this research still be relevant? I will return to these points toward the end of this chapter.

My original intention for naming this conclusion, “The Death of a Subculture?”, was in contemplation of just how much the parameters of my initial theories on Lolita may or may not have now become obsolete, and how the movement itself has altered since I embarked on this research. Does it still operate in the same way? How has it shifted since its globalisation? Can we still speak of an authentic movement? I have been asking myself whether or not the Lolita movement can still be recognised as a subculture, and wondering if it even continues to exist. A difficulty with researching and writing on a contemporary fashion, which may be a cutting edge topic at the time of its conception, is that by the time one gets to completing the thesis, the subject may no longer be of currency. Or, like the painting of a bridge, once one gets to the other end, must one go back and start again? This chapter will raise and discuss some of these queries by revisiting my journey into Lolita.

My initial interest in the subculture began in 2002, inspired by Shoichi Aoki's publication *Fruits* (2001) and the subsequent initial exhibition at the Sydney Powerhouse Museum (December 2002 – July 2003). While the entire compilation of Aoki's street photographs intrigued me, it was the handful of images of girls in Lolita dress that sparked my enthusiasm, which was accentuated by a *Baby the Stars Shine Bright* ensemble displayed as part of this show. The concept of this street fashion, as it was essentially at the time, resonated with me as it incorporated so much of what I am passionate about, especially as it combines the image of the Doll with the Gothic. My motivation for finding out as much as I could on this movement was fuelled by my lifelong obsession with all things Gothic, medieval and medievalist, my immersion into Neo-gothicisms, and my occupation as an avid doll collector. This latter aspect, especially, incited my curiosity when in 2003 I began to start collecting Japanese *Pullip* dolls from the time of their inception. In those days, however, there was very little information on the actual Lolita subculture. I started my investigations, therefore, by piecing together every snippet I could find to build up a picture and an understanding. And, even from the outset, I observed the phenomenon with a critical and analytical eye, formulating my theories about the movement, which remain largely unchanged.

In 2003, the Japanese Lolita subculture was almost unheard of in the West. As an academic research area, as far as I can still gather, it was non-existent. Despite knowing this, I had studied this movement enough to believe that it was a worthwhile topic to pursue, and having read the existing literature in relation to the frameworks I have used to construct this thesis, I understood that it was possible to accomplish this task as a research project; as such I proposed it as my postgraduate topic in 2004. But the real problem was not convincing myself; it was convincing others. I could get no one to support me on it, no one would touch it, and without a potential supervisor I could not go ahead. Almost all reactions were, “I’ve never heard of it”; and one comment was, “I don’t believe you can pull this off and, even if you can, who wants to read it?”. My comeback was that “someone probably thought the same about Punk, once”. I was not deterred, and even though I was not formally enrolled as a student, I continued with my research. In the meantime, I became fully ensconced in the Lolita subculture both as a researcher and as a participant.

After relocating from Australia to New Zealand in 2006, I came up against some similarly negative reactions to this topic as an area of research. Having gained a position in the Fashion department at AUT University, however, I was encouraged by some of my peers who saw value in the subject. In the same year I proposed an abstract for a paper based on the film, *Kamikaze Girls*, which had just been released with English subtitles, to the *Fashion in Film* conference, held at the University of Technology, Sydney,

in May 2007. That event became my foray into the academic arena, establishing my name in connection to the topic of the Japanese Lolita, as it became the catalyst for the exhibition I curated at Auckland War Memorial Museum, titled *Loli-Pop*, which ran from September to November, 2007.

By 2007, the Lolita subculture had finally begun to make small waves in terms of media awareness, with newspaper articles appearing worldwide. However, mainstream society outside Japan was still waiting to catch on. The question remains whether it ever really has in any significant way. Besides known communities in some of the US states, and pockets of Europe, such as Germany and France, the subculture has never really operated on the same scale in many countries as it has in Japan. In a sense, this has been a positive thing as it means that the minority groups around the world have tended to adhere to the authentic Japanese proclivities, deviating little from the movement's intentions.

In New Zealand, it was the *Loli-Pop* exhibition that began public discourse. It came about when Bevan Chuang, who was employed at Auckland Museum in an administrative position, was planning to propose a show on a contemporary, Asian theme to coincide with and promote the opening of a new permanent gallery display titled *Arts of Asia* (an “anthropological” collection of mostly traditional and historical Asian artefacts and antiquities). It had been Chuang's observation that, statistically, Museum attendance was comparatively lower in regard to both the Asian

and youth (post-school-aged) communities and that exhibitions in a similar vein to *Arts of Asia* usually interested a more mature audience. When Chuang began looking for a theme that she felt would interest a younger sector, she immediately thought of *Fruits* and then began to contemplate whether she might accomplish something similar. In late 2006, after some research, Chuang found my abstract on *Kamikaze Girls for Fashion in Fiction*, which had been published online, and discovered that I was based in Auckland. It was a momentous day for me when I received a formal letter from her asking if I would be interested in curating a show with her on Japanese street fashion. After our first meeting I became aware that Chuang, too, was one of the very few Aucklanders who considered themselves members of the Lolita subculture and, like myself, frequently wore authentic Gothloli clothing. With this shared passion, we decided that our exhibition would focus on the Japanese Lolita phenomenon.

At this time, as I have mentioned, there was not much knowledge about the movement around the world, and New Zealanders, particularly, were quite unaware of it. This means that, from the outset, Chuang and I faced quite an uphill battle. It is to Chuang's credit that our idea even got off the ground. This was partially due to the notion that G&L was not a topic of merit. It was, though, with this show that perceptions, at least in this country, altered.

Loli-Pop was an exploration into the G&L movement with a focus on the Lolita subculture and its relationship with popular culture, thus the title *Loli* = “Lolita” + *Pop* = “popular culture”. Our initial intention was to exhibit original Japanese Lolita garments, specifically examples delineating the separate categories of Gothic Lolita, Sweet Lolita, Country Lolita, Punk Lolita and Classic Lolita, supported by street photography in the vein of Aoki, and authentic items of popular culture, fashion accessories, *manga*-graphic novels and dolls. The designer labels we were looking to display were mainly Mana’s *Moi-même-Moitié*, *Baby the Stars Shine Bright*, *Metamorphose* and *Angelic Pretty*. This grand vision happened in part.

Our initial hurdle was in convincing all parties of the validity of this exercise as it was not foreseen as the draw card that it would become. After that, the most challenging episode was the argument that ensued over the naming of the show in the first instance. The issue was that both the words, “Lolita” and “Gothic”, were considered too controversial. Admittedly, “Lolita” is a loaded term. Negativity attached to this word was exacerbated when email exchanges between Chuang and myself, containing “Lolita” in either the subject fields and or bodies of messages, and copied to contact addresses of Museum management staff members, were continually blocked by the system and recognised as “offensive”. It also appeared, however, that “Gothic” invited its own stigma, especially in relation to “Goth”, creating a panic that our topic was unsuitable for the reputation of the Institution. Both titles were subsequently banned from usage.

The question Chuang and I raised was how does one hold an exhibition on Gothic & Lolita when “Lolita” and or “Gothic” cannot be mentioned in the title? And if one omitted these words, what would it mean for a potentially knowledgeable audience that may be attracted to the show for the very reason that it was related to “Goth”? How would they be drawn in? Could we even invite this new youth audience? And what about the young Asians, particularly, who knew about Lolita? How would they realise what the show was about? Besides, it was Chuang’s goal to bring in this young Asian audience, and New Zealand youth in general, people who were more likely to comprehend the nuances of these labels and be magnetised by them. And what about museum goers of any age group that might be enamoured with the Gothic, full stop?

Our struggle was to find a way to discuss Gothic & Lolita without actually stating it. We tossed up titles containing Japanese phonetic forms, such as *Gosurori* and *Gosuloli*, and some that ignored the terms completely. Through this process, Chuang came up with “Loli-Pop”, as mentioned, a contraction of “Lolita” and “Pop” but also a clever pun alluding to the sweetness of Lolita.

However, we were still confronted with difficulty. In order for the Museum to take this topic seriously, even to have our proposal approved, Chuang emphasised the movement’s growing popularity among youth communities worldwide. This was misunderstood by Museum staff

members, particularly the marketing department, who ran with the idea that the Lolita movement was a thriving subculture in Auckland. While it existed here it was by no means vibrant. There was a group of us who were at the time dressing up, meeting up and continue to do so. But this is still a small collection of women who are part of the larger Goth community.

On the last Sunday night of every month the Goths of Auckland attend the Church, a themed event at a local nightclub, for which I am one of the administrators. This is now generally the only time that some of us dress in the Lolita style. A few girls get together at my place, very occasionally, and play with my dolls, which has encouraged some of my friends to become doll collectors. We have also participated in festivals, such as the *Taste of Japan*, the *Japan Festival* and *Japan Day*, performing in runway shows as Gothloli. And I have lent my Lolita wardrobe to the local singer-songwriter Plum Green, a fan of the style herself, to dress models who performed in a recent shooting of one of her music videos. In regard to the availability of fashion, most girls buy Japanese brands online or create garments themselves, although there are a few stores in Auckland that sell authentic pieces of Lolita clothing, and there is still just one successful local designer who refers to herself as a Gothic Lolita, Kath Bridges of the label *Kitty Bridges*, who I mentioned in the body of my thesis. But, there is no Lolita “scene” in New Zealand, in Auckland or elsewhere. Lolita do not congregate in large groups anywhere here as they do in Japan, or the US, Paris or Baden-Württemberg.

Just as the Aoki Sydney Powerhouse Museum exhibition was about Tokyo street fashion, Bevan Chuang and I intended our show to concentrate on Japan. This did not fit, apparently, with the criteria of the Museum.* To make our concept relevant, according to the Museum's parameters, the emphasis was therefore shifted by the publicity department from our proposed Japanese angle towards an Auckland-based hype. While I am eternally grateful to the staff at Auckland Museum for giving us the opportunity to run this show, and particularly for the immense support that we were given in regard to advertisement, which included radio, television, newspaper and magazine journalism and a massive poster and billboard campaign, this decision to market *Loli-Pop* as a local craze was extremely problematic. While it supports my observation that, as late as 2007, mainstream society was still largely ignorant about the Japanese Lolita subculture, which was advantageous to Chuang and myself in that we were seen as experts on a cutting edge, current trend, this misperception called for difficult and embarrassing times when interviewers, on radio and television, repeatedly questioned the two of us, at times during live broadcast, about where Lolita were "hanging out" and where the Auckland "hotspots" might be. This situation was worsened by the Museum's choice of subtitle: "A Downtown Auckland View on Japanese Street Fashion".

* Bevan and I did not agree with this argument. The Auckland Museum is not the same as *Te Papa*, the National Museum, which promotes New Zealand content (although even *Te Papa* ran the *Pompeii* exhibition). The *Arts of Asia* gallery establishes the fact that the Institution often looks outside this nation when selecting works for display.

While I tend to ignore the show's subtitle when mentioning it in any literature, it turned out to be connected, in a roundabout sense, to the outcome of what would be exhibited. After funding for purchasing authentic Japanese Lolita fashions was not forthcoming, we decided to alleviate the problem by making the garments ourselves. Staff members of the Fashion Department and AUT University created the following ensembles: Angie Finn, *Evangeline*, Classic Gothic Lolita (Fig. 10); Yvonne Stewart, *Adorabelle*, Sweet Lolita; Lize Niemczyk, *Violette*, Punk Gothic Lolita Bride; Gabriella Trussardi, *Sebastien Isadore*, Gothic Aristocrat; and Kathryn Hardy Bernal, *Amorette*, Sweet Country Lolita (Fig. 14). While I designed and cut the pattern for my dress, petticoat and bloomers, and did all the hand sewing and embroidery, Carmel Donnelly assisted me in the machine stitching. The fabrics I used were authentic G&L textiles, which were being used by a couple of Lolita designer brands for their 2007 collections, which I purchased from a haberdashery shop in Shibuya during the research trip I took with Chuang the same year.

These garments, which were displayed on dress forms in large individual glass cabinets, were supported by a wall backdrop of large street photographs and DVD footage, playing in a loop on a computer screen, that Chuang shot of Gothloli and Gothic boys in Harajuku and Shinjuku during the same trip. Further photographs were taken in Auckland of models wearing our exhibition fashions, as well as studio portraits of local Gothloli in their own creations, including Chuang and myself wearing Gothic Lolita

dresses we bought in Japan. The final addition was a case of twelve of the Gothic & Lolita dolls from my personal collection.

The enormous media attention that *Loli-Pop* elicited proved that the show was a success. And, with it came exposure for the Japanese Lolita subculture. However, as far as I have noticed there are no more Gothloli in Auckland than there were previously. On a trip to Sydney in 2008, to attend the Australian tour of Japanese Visual-*kei* band, BLOOD, I observed that in this city there appeared to be many more Gothloli who turned up to both the “meet and greet” session at the *Kinokuniya* bookstore and the gig itself. I would imagine, though, that the numbers are relative to population. The main difference in Auckland is that since 2007 I have not come across anyone who has not heard of the movement or to whom I have to explain its meaning. Yet, I have been told that the phenomenon is subsiding in Japan. Recent visitors have said that it was hard to find Gothloli on the streets of Harajuku and others have noted that more girls seem to be wearing non-descriptive cute styles rather than authentic Lolita fashions.

This brings me back to the question I have been posing recently, “Is this the death of the Subculture?”. One reason for wondering this is in relation to terminology. Can a movement still be called a subculture when it is no longer subterranean, or underground? When it can no longer be considered élitist connected with notions of having to be “in the know”? When it becomes globalised and, at least in some pockets of the world,

mainstream? When it is no longer about the concerns of its instigators and thus loses credibility? I mean in this latter case that, if it moves out of Japan, should it then be classed as pseudo-Lolita? In other words, how does it translate when taken out of its country of origin in terms of the specifics of resistance pertinent to that nation? Just as the shift of Punk from Britain to other cultures meant that it no longer stood for the same sense of rebellion in regard to local politics and anxieties, becoming distilled once re-localised, is this the case for Lolita? Can Lolita make the same statements about its society once removed from its locality, or can those statements still apply to the site of relocation? These are not questions I have aimed to answer within the scope of this current investigation but they are queries I intend to raise in regard to future exploration.

The recent earthquakes, *tsunami*, however, and the impending doom aroused in me the sensation that these points may be moot. My immediate feeling after the catastrophe was that my concentration on this work was in fact superficial. I asked myself whether there were greater concerns than this endeavour, which seemed at the time to be trivial in comparison to what was unfolding in the nation of Japan. At the very least I thought to myself that this would be the final nail in the coffin for Lolita.

But, is this the end or just the beginning? History has shown, in regard to movements of popular culture, that natural disasters, on a scale such as this, will cause certain shifts in society. In association with Lolita, I believe that these precedents will determine one of the following things:

Due to larger priorities it may be that running around in expensive, pretty, frilly dresses, and playing at tea parties with dolls, will be considered even more frivolous and superficial, and thus through guilt and or necessity, this kind of behaviour may become obsolete. It may be that Japanese youth itself wakes up and realises that it is no longer appropriate to shirk adult responsibilities.

On the other hand, as argued throughout this thesis, at times of crisis, and often as a reaction to trauma, upheaval and instability, it can be natural to want to escape and to turn to something that feels safe and or even joyous. It may be that the apparently waning Lolita subculture thus begins to take off on a larger tangent than ever before.*

Only time will tell what the future holds for Lolita. Maybe she can be an eternal princess, but perhaps the Perpetual Child will have to grow up.

* In any case, the *tsunami*, even if only temporarily, did something to break down barriers between Japan and the rest of the world, in that the Japanese were not for that moment the “Other” but kindred human beings at a time of suffering. It was an agony that was felt by many the world over. It appeared to be our trauma, not just theirs. Perhaps this was felt on a greater scale in New Zealand, coming so soon after the devastation of Christchurch, from which everyone was still reeling. Sympathy must also have been felt in Australia by those who had just endured the destruction caused by the terrible floods.

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