

Creative East-West Cosmopolitanism?

The Changing Role of International Mobility for Young Japanese Contemporary Artists

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COMMENTS WELCOME

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Introduction

As with other facets of social change, innovation and creativity explored in this volume -- such as science and technology, cuisine, youth culture, gender identities -- the rise of distinctive new contemporary art from East Asia offers possibilities for exploring the interaction of the local, the national, the regional and the global, in a particular field of cultural production and from new world perspectives. My chapter offers another angle on the "making and unmaking of transnationalism in East Asia", by considering the cross-border dynamics of Japanese modern and contemporary art - - and particularly the international mobility of artists -- as a part of an Asian led cultural globalization.

It is widely accepted that the economic rise of Asia in recent decades has in effect produced an alternative Asian modernity (or modernities) that is capable of challenging American and European global hegemony, not only economically or politically, but also in terms of cultural production. In this, clearly, Japan was a leader (see, for example, Clammer 1997). Having absorbed the Western lessons of modernization in its emergence as a modern nation state in the early part of the 20th century, and then as a global economic power from the 1960s onwards, in the 1970s and 1980s it began to produce innovative and distinctive variations on modern global culture that swept through both regional and global markets (Moeran 2000; Iwabuchi 2002). Japan became a globally visible producer of new culture, not only in terms of the wildly popular culture of *anime* (animated cartoons), *manga* (comics), tv and film, toys, electronic games and brand characters -- Godzilla, Pokemon, Hello Kitty and all that (Allison 2006; Kelts 2006) -- but also the "high culture" branches of, for

example, contemporary design, catwalk fashion and architecture (Japan Foundation 2008; Kawamura 2004; Koolhaas and Obrist 2011). Japan in effect patented a model of Asian modernity that, in the 1990s and 2000s, has become a path for others: pop culture from Hong Kong, K-Pop from Korea, Singapore or Taipei as creative cities and, above all, the rise of China.

The production, consumption and appreciation of contemporary art from Asia is another key index of this so-called "world class" modernity. In the 1990s and 2000s, indeed, it might be argued that contemporary art became *the* quintessential global high culture, a form of culture itself very characteristic of the era's global capitalism. The globalization of contemporary art produced an apparently borderless global art world that stretched from the auction halls of New York and London, via the high art temples of MOMA, Tate and Pompidou, to the new museums of Istanbul and Dubai, and the biennials and art fairs of East Asia. In parallel with the deregulated markets and finance knocking down national borders, the free spirited *avant garde* intellectual discourse of artists and art curators complimented perfectly the free moving money of venture capitalists who bought the works or built the museums (Stallabrass 2004). Amidst a vast inflationary boom, contemporary art became the calling card for newly rich oligarchs in emerging economies everywhere, as well as the signature form of city branding for "global cities" the the world over. It might even be argued -- as captured beautifully in the ethnography of this world by Sarah Thornton (2008) -- that contemporary art became a truly sublime form of the global: approaching a new religion for the secular, atheist, "post-modern" elites that followed and believed in it.

Part of this story was an Asian art boom as the world discovered new Asian art and artists, a boom unquestionably centered on Chinese artists but which progressively involved many other sources of origin (Vine 2011; Chiu and Genocchio 2010; Philipsen 2008; Ciotti 2012). The presence of Asian artists on the global market, and the curatorial and museum prestige which has been invested in their works, alongside the physical location of many huge global events (such as art fairs and auctions in Hong Kong, or biennials in Shanghai and Singapore), might be seen simply as affirming the rise of a truly de-centered, de-colonized contemporary world or global art sensibility; something that might be identified with the "cosmopolitan imagination" identified by recent critical social theory (Delanty 2009; Papastergiadis 2012). Western art history as a discipline has been very slow to question its own ethnocentric assumptions, but in the wake of this world art boom, there has been a veritable deluge of reflection in these terms on globalization in art theory (see Harris 2011).

This reflection was, of course, the back end of the post-colonial critique which swept across the humanities since the 1960s. Yet the self-styled "cosmopolitan" global art of the 1990s and 2000s was at the same so patently anchored in the free market liberalism of rampant global capitalism of that era (see also Kofman 2006). As the sublime, utopian form of these material global forces, contemporary art could -- to echo the famous works of Hardt and Negri (2001; 2005) -- in effect unify both "empire" and "multitude" in the critical discourses of the free moving global curators who very self-consciously selected, promoted and put (extraordinary) value on the art from new, non-Western sources. The most fashionable Asian artists might slam global capitalism or evoke universal environmental ideals, but those selected for stardom on the global art market or museum circuit often looked very similar as they were

presented for global consumption. Superstar new Asian artists such as the Chinese Ai Weiwei or the Indian Subodh Gupta were always positioned as liberal, cosmopolitan heroes, critiquing the forces of modernization sweeping their countries as well as their restrictive political regimes, yet producing very nationally specific icons and images of their home countries that could be easily packaged into simple sociological lessons about exotic (and sometimes still dangerous) locations to curious Western viewers and buyers. The cosmopolitanism of the new global art, and its selective presentation, may thus easily be questioned as a sophisticated new form of orientalism that was not challenging the global order anywhere near as radically as supposed. Behind the apparently free flowing global circuit, for all the new Asian talent, it could also be seen that the personnel powering this world -- the institutional "art power" of top curators, dealers, collectors and art writers -- were all still as solidly as ever anchored in the usual Western hub locations (Quémin 2006).

The story with global contemporary art in East Asia, though, is complicated by the positioning of Japan in this picture. Japanese artists were among the first to be presented as part of the "discovery" of world art in the late 1980s, a moment usually linked with the famous *Magiciens de la Terre* show, curated by Jean-Hubert Martin at the Pompidou, Paris in 1989 (McLean 2011). Yet although a vibrant commercial and conceptual contemporary art scene has continued to develop in Japan during the next two decades, Japanese contemporary artists have been surprisingly marginal to the Asian art boom in global art. This is a long and complex story, but it is largely because the western global curators have been unable to get in to Japan and shape the contemporary art scene as they have in China. With one or two notable exceptions, then, Japanese artists have been neglected in global art history narratives of the 1990s

and 2000s. The perfect evidence is the canonical handbook of modern western art history, *Art Since 1900*, edited by the five ruling modern art historians of the East Coast Ivy League: Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh and David Joselit (Foster et al 2011, 2nd ed.). Only one Japanese contemporary artist since the 1960s is discussed. That artist is, of course, Takashi Murakami: Japan's version of Ai Weiwei or Subodh Gupta, Japan's only true global superstar artist since 1990, who will be central to my story below.

The dominant Western narrative is, to say the least, not a representative history from a Japanese point of view (see Favell 2012a).² And despite all the talk about global art and cosmopolitan sensibilities, the "national" point of view is still very relevant here because it does not align with the global view. This in fact is also a peculiarly distinct feature of Japanese contemporary art in comparison to other Asian countries, whose art has been assimilated more easily into global art theories and narratives. At the same time, Japan's relative neglect is also symptomatic of the Japanese art world's long history of self-understanding and positioning in relation to Western modernity. As I will argue, the story of Japanese modern and contemporary art in relation to transnational flows and mobilities reveals an ambivalent globalization. It suggests that, in this field of cultural production at least, Japan has preserved a certain independence, less obviously dominated or colonized by global forces. And that by analyzing the international mobility of Japanese artists, it is possible to chart the

² Here and throughout, I draw upon my own narrative and analysis in Adrian Favell, *Before and After Superflat: A Short History of Japanese Contemporary Art 1990-2011* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8 2012). My work is based on a five year long ethnography of the Japanese art world, particularly as seen from the Tokyo contemporary art scene, supported initially by an SSRC-Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership Abe Fellowship 2006-7, as well as by a European Union Marie Curie Reintegration Grant no.224868, and a Danish government EliteForsk prize funding. As a UCLA sociologist I engaged with the Tokyo art world as a foreign observer then participant, developing journalistic, blogging and occasional curatorial activities in the art world alongside my regular academic work. See also my online blog for the Japanese art magazine ART-iT (<http://www.art-it.asia/u/rhqiun>) as well as various catalogue and magazine publications cited.

changing forms of both cosmopolitanism *and* nationhood in the ways their experiences have been expressed through artistic forms.

The chapter proceeds as follows. In the first section, I take the story back to the historical pre-World War Two origins of modernist Japanese art, tracing the role of self-positioning in relation to Western modernity and the dynamics of international mobility and return in international Japanese artists' careers. This introduces the notion of the *gaisen kouen* -- the "triumphant return performance", that is, the acclaim at home that perceived success abroad bestows -- which has hitherto always been thought to be necessary to cement a Japanese artist's international (i.e., "world class") reputation. Along the way, the story introduces a number of the most famous figures in Japanese modern and contemporary art from different periods in relation to our broader themes. These distinct generations can be thought of as cohorts who have varying interactions with their global and national contexts, thus revealing how forms of cosmopolitanism and nationhood have changed over time. It also lays a groundwork to understand the problematic evolution of the Japanese modern art tradition and art world institutions, and to assess the effects of their domination and resistance up to and through into the global art era from late 80s onwards.

In the second main section, I then shift to the younger "post-Bubble" or "zero zero generation" who came of age amidst the economic decline, social malaise and shattering disasters of Japan in the mid to late 1990s. Their evaluation as emergent artists is, of course, not as yet settled -- neither in Japan nor internationally. Japan in the 1990s and after experienced economic hardship and global contraction while the rest of the world -- in particular the rest of Asia -- was going through a development

boom. I suggest that this disjuncture with world trends has caused important changes in the dynamics of influence and recognition on the part of these younger Japanese artists in a global context. While they have been largely ignored until now by the mainstream global art world, the need for the *gaisen kouen* in their work is arguably being transcended.

The argument is that the qualitative change of Japan from being a rising Asian power and alternate modernity to one now pioneering forms of post-Bubble, post-developmental society, has largely confounded dominant Western understandings of this new Asian culture. These understandings assume a modernizing developmental paradigm, and thus create their narratives of artistic importance accordingly: essentially in terms of global market value and "political" art theoretical interest, and hence as a "challenge" to the West. But what works for China and India does not work for Japan. Rather, the new post-Bubble generation offer a different way of pinpointing how East Asian society and culture may interact with regional and global forces or embody the national and transnational in a post-development future. It is a rather different narrative to the one told about contemporary Chinese or Indian artists, as well one comparatively free of the typical dominated passive-aggressive position of Japanese artists from past generations. I illustrate my interpretation with a number of artists born in the mid 1970s who have all drawn diversely on *both* national themes and material sources *and* global contemporary theoretical sensibilities. While acutely aware of their origins and trajectories, they all have wide experience of travel and life in different Western global hubs. They are therefore fashioning convincingly cosmopolitan *and* Japanese contemporary art: not least because the "global" or

"cosmopolitan" influence of cities where they have lived and work, such as New York, London and Berlin, are all quite different.

***Gaisen kouen* ("triumphant return performance"): the international as the source of legitimacy in Japanese modern and contemporary art**

How were Japanese artists from different generations during the twentieth century received and understood on the international stage? I will now examine this history in relation to three distinct cohorts, who emerged to prominence in Japan, via international mobility in the 1920s/30s, 1960s and 1990s respectively.

After the opening of Japan to the modern world with the Meiji Restoration of 1868, the traditional arts in Japan -- as with all areas of technology, consumption and public life -- were all progressively joined by imports from the West, which the nation took it upon itself to reproduce and master as part of the modernization process (see especially Sato 2011; also various essays in Rimer 2012). At the same time, the imported arts took on institutional structures similar to those that so tightly organized the traditional forms: with, for example, "schools" (*iemoto*) led by a single master (*sensei*) who would train follower to reproduce particular styles and techniques. These structures and distinctions continue to have an impact on art in Japan, which in turn impinge upon the automatic adoption of Western or "global" forms. Even contemporary art training, in art school departments that embrace global styles and references, as well as careers within a recognisably modern art system of commercial

galleries and museums, still reflect elements of the old institutional structure that go back to pre-modern times.

After Meiji, art in Japan was essentially divided between *nihon-ga* (Japanese art) -- rooted in certain styles, forms and materials that required specific training -- and *yo-ga* (Western art), which consisted of the appropriation of western materials and forms, particular oil painting and forms of western representation. As art forms, of course, neither were fixed. Even traditional arts in Japan, such as *ikebana* (flower and plant arranging), have in time evolved in their highest forms to take increasingly modern, even post-modern forms: contemporary *ikebana* can look like a kind of abstract installation art. But the old distinctions still matter, and it has always permeated the classification and recognition of artists who adopt Western (and later "global") forms of artistic expression. When recognisably modernist art emerged in Japan in the late 19th and early 20th century, it inevitably put these *yo-ga* artists, inspired by 20th century European or American techniques and ideas, in a difficult position (on these issues, see especially Lucken 2001). From both sides they could easily be seen as nothing more than local derivations of Western trends, for example, in impressionism or surrealism. At the same time, they could not, by definition, be part of the wave of "japonisme" that was simultaneously sweeping the Western artworld as it awoke to the traditional arts of the newly opened Japan. This was the discovery of Edo (pre-Meiji) era arts, such as screen painting, *ukiyo-e* (wood block prints of the "floating world") and materials from *nihon-ga* (such as gold leaf or traditional ink line drawing) that had such a massive impact on the art of many leading names of European modernism, such as van Gogh or Klimt. *Yo-ga* artists, in contrast, would be seen usually as naive versions of Western styles in, say, portraiture or sculpture; at

best, they might, with a certain stylistic or material element, catch a Western collector's or curator's eye as an slightly exotic variant on the Western norm.

The hierarchization at work here, in terms of the global art historical evaluation, was locked in a dominant colonialist logic. And yet, at the same time, there was a resistant art system within Japan, that defined itself in opposition to Western (and even other Asian) influences, defying its unitary categorizations. For those artists part of the opening up/modernization, international mobility was, of course, an obligation, with distant Western capitals the Meccas to which the artists must face. As for every artist in the world, in the high modernist period of the 1920s and 30s, the global art world centered on Paris. It too attracted its Japanese heroes, as small exotic bit-part players in the wider creative trends of the city. Two, in particular can be mentioned:

"Leonard" (Tsuguharu) Foujita (1886-1968), a painter and celebrated member of the Picasso circle in Montparnasse from 1914 to 1931; and Tara Okamoto (1911-1996), a surrealist painter and sculptor, influenced by Bréton and, again, Picasso, who studied extensively in Paris during the 1930s (see Birnbaum 2006; Gomez 2000).

Today, Foujita and Okamoto are probably the two biggest popular names in Japanese modernism. Their styles which found marginal success in Europe, were eventually accepted back home on the back of their reflected foreign glory: what is often referred to as the paradigmatic *gaisen kouen*, the "triumphant return performance", when the artist who is often long time despised or not properly recognised in their country of origin finally gains massive acclaim via their perceived success abroad. There is both a clear general mechanism at work here, as well as subtle variations in these two archetypal stories from the 20s/30s, as there are in others from later periods.

Foujita is now certainly celebrated by Japan as a modernist classic. After also working in Latin America, he returned a hero to Japan in 1933. His formidable talents were called on to mythologize rural life, with paintings of his native Akita, and then during the war he was pressed into service as a famous "war artist". Nowadays he is regularly shown in Japan, collected in museums, and his most famous works from the 20s can still be seen in France. He left Japan after the war, and re-settled back in his adopted European home. Okamoto, meanwhile, went in and out of favour, over the years, often seen by his peers in Japan as a "foreign" artist apeing Western modernist styles. Yet eventually his notoriety won him acclaim: his famous *Tower of the Sun* symbolised Japan's great display of futurist modernism at the Osaka Expo of 1970, and after spending his later life popularizing Japanese national myths, he is now cherished as a populist icon. His massive atomic bomb mural, for example, now adorns part of Shibuya train station, after it was discovered and returned from Mexico. Yet to achieve this he had to step outside of the mainstream art system, creating his own media identity, with a museum and art prize in his own name: an anti-institutional strategy that has strongly influenced Japan's star artist of the 1990s, Takashi Murakami.

By the 1960s, of course, New York had supplanted Paris. And the heroes of the 1960s *gaisen kouen* were heroines: the *avant garde* women artists, Yoko Ono and Yayoi Kusama (Munroe 2000; Yoshimoto 2005; Yamamura 2009). Closely connected with Fluxus and John Cage, Ono's humanistic performance art was a significant part of the New York *avant garde* of the period, although her reputation took a heavy blow from her notorious association with John Lennon after she moved to London. Yet she has

slowly transcended this, and by Venice in 2009, she was being officially celebrated as one of the greats of the twentieth century and a real pioneer. Ono is also ubiquitous in Japan, the one household name (along with Genpei Akasagawa) from the *avant garde* of the 1960s. Kusama, meanwhile, was even more radical. A young troubled prodigy, she finally escaped to New York in the late 1950s. Her early work, which was initially close to Jackson Pollock, evolved into experimentation with relentless repetition, *mise en abyme* mirrors, and sexually charged installations that closely paralleled the leading American pop art of the period, such as Andy Warhol and Claes Oldenburg. By the mid 60s she was organizing orgies and happenings, a significant figure in the New York counter-cultural scene, as well as feted across Europe in major art museums. Here, it has been argued, Kusama's reputation underwent a sinister gender- and ethnic-based marginalization. Her own originality and ground breaking conceptual vision, which tended towards almost absurd extremes, was ultimately upturned in its importance: as a easy to dismiss Japanese "copy" or derivation of American male pop artists who subsequently took much of the credit for ideas she in fact pioneered. Kusama went home broken to Japan in the 1970s, while being reviled as a crazy old lady in her home contry. Only the interest of international curators later in the 1980s and 90s, such as David Elliott and Alexandra Munroe, and the key support of a highly internationalized Japanese curator, Akira Tatehata, helped put her back on the global map. By the 2000s, she was apparently thriving in her seventh active decade as an artist, living as a permanent mental patient, and now managing a vast portfolio of easy to recognize, brandable work that would appear in global cities everywhere: a late career canonisation only paralleled by the French artist Louise Bourgeois -- although in Japan there has always been a little more hesitancy in embracing her radical libertarian vision of the 1960s.

Again, the *gaisen kouen* was at work in these women's careers, although it played a complicated role. Ono is effectively a New York artist; "Japanese" is a convenient adjective, but not entirely significant, except in the somewhat "zen"-like atmosphere of many of her works. Back home, it is the classic *gaisen kouen*, endowed with a weighty worldwide respect, although sometimes undermined by her more trivial fame as someone famous's widow. Kusama, whose touch for exploring leading edge global currents in her work was no less secure, made it and lost it in New York: it took a later global reconstruction of her reputation to secure her recognition at home and abroad. It is important to note that other vitally important *avant garde* movements from Japan in the 1950s and 60s, such as *Gutai*, *Mono-Ha* and *Anti-Art* in Japan established themselves and have claims independent of the global/international trends they nevertheless related to; where they have been discussed as part of a bigger global narrative, the discussion has often been distorting and is generally patronizing, again relegating them to a derivative relationship with supposed Western pioneers (Tomii 2011; Tiampo 2011a; Tiampo 2011b, critiquing Foster et al.). It has taken significant art historical reconstruction for the appropriate recognition to start to be given by the global mainstream (Munroe 1994; Merewether and Hiro 2007; Tomii 2009; Yoshitake 2012).

In the post 1990 era, Japanese contemporary art has continued to have a difficult time to be understood in its correct context (Favell 2011). This concern is, of course, a pre-occupation of traditional specialist art historians. When the dominant selections of global curators or global markets can be seen to narrow, distorted and non-representative, there is a clearly need to re-present artists correctly in terms of their

career trajectories and meaning in relation to their origins in the Japanese art world. Although it was initially a part of the late 1980s discovery of world art as part of a vision of global contemporary art, Japanese contemporary art lost ground massively in subsequent years to the appreciation, consumption and understanding of other Asian art. Korea, then China, then India and a growing list of other smaller Asian countries, all became more exciting targets for global curatorial and art market discourse, somehow easier to process than Japan through the stylized, development and rising power obsessed political and sociological context setting frames that were produced to select and make sense of the art: for example, famous international and touring shows such as *Alors, la Chine?* (Pompidou 2003), *China Power Station* (Serpentine 2006), *China Onward* (Louisiana 2007), *The Revolution Continues: New Art from China* (Saatchi 2008) *Indian Highway* (Serpentine 2008), *The Empire Strikes Back: New Art from India* (Saatchi 2010), *Paris-Delhi-Bombay* (Pompidou 2011), etc. The one exception to the failure of Japanese contemporary art to provide a resonant story about itself for global art consumption has been the spectacular international success of pop artist, Takashi Murakami: an entrepreneur, impresario, art theorist and curator as much as he is an artist. Alongside him, out of the 1990s, the only other two names to make it onto to the global art radar at were the similarly "pop", easy to brand and consume charms of Yoshitomo Nara and Mariko Mori.

Takashi Murakami's relation to the *gaisen kouen* mechanism is self-conscious and explicit. A young prodigy at the heart of an explosive and brilliant pop art scene in Tokyo in the early 90s, he worked out his full "global" strategy while on a one year residency in New York 1994/5. In it, he seized upon the manifold delights of Japanese urban sub-cultures such as the sci-fi and sexual obsessions of "loser" male nerds

(*otaku*), the Japanese commercial talent for producing endless cute (*kawaii*), infantilized brands and characters, and the rising fascination in the West for *anime* and *manga*. He then, very deliberately, packaged these "low" cultural forms in elite gallery and catalogue spaces as a world-beating formula for the high brow Western art market. By the end of 1995, his peers and rivals back home were pronouncing the death of *otaku* and Tokyo's pop art scene, as a result of the shock of the disasters earlier that year: a massive earthquake in Kobe followed by a stunning terrorist poison gas attack on the Tokyo metro. They were moving on to new and darker artistic concerns, just as Murakami was beginning to gain his first victories in the West using his colourful pop culture themes. By 2001, he was able to coordinate a smash hit show in LA, selecting a mix of popular and unknown young Japanese artists under his name and framed by his theory, "Superflat", to the applause of an almost entirely ignorant Western audience, totally seduced by the cartoon-like representation of this weird and wonderful Asian paradise (Murakami 2001). The trick was reproduced on an even bigger scale in New York in 2005 (Murakami 2005a). It was a Japanese contemporary art very deliberately lost in translation, with Murakami playing a knowing double faced game: a laughing pop impresario for his (gullible) Western audiences, while triumphantly announcing his success as a bitterly instrumental, resentful nationalist for his (smart) Japanese audiences back home. In a self-help autobiography (Murakami 2005b) -- a bestseller in Japan, and addressed to the young amateur artists to whom he calls to be his followers -- he bragged immodestly while coolly analysing how he had made a million dollars out of his work. The overall package was both a clever Japanese variation of global commercial superstars, Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst, and a sincere homage to his heroes Warhol and Okamoto.

Murakami's astounding rise underlines those aspects of the *gaisen kouen* that are genuinely convertible back home in a universal sense: massive sales in New York auction houses, and his impressive citation index rating in worldwide art press and academic scholarship. He is constantly in the news, all the major international collectors have a piece of him, his prices outstrip all other Japanese artists, and he always gets a page or two in global art reviews, or a solid paragraph in any narrative of modern and contemporary art (see Foster et al 2011: 734-7). Much of his art world reputation rests less on the content of his art than the methods by which it has pursued a Warholian pop art right to its logical ends (Lubow 2005; Schimmel 2009).

Murakami's production is a seamless corporate factory-like operation, and in dabbling with *anime* production or designing brands for American pop stars or global fashion companies, he works indifferently across the line between high art and low consumer culture (Gingeras 2010). That part of his work, beyond the art world, hitched itself during the 2000s to the somewhat desperate policies of the Japanese government to find an alternative to its declining manufacturing and financial might in its creative and content industries: Murakami was always was one of their key "global performers" (Favell 2010). And so he duly became a face of "Cool Japan". In doing so he also engendered a sort of *neo-japoniste* phenomenon in world art consumption, in which any and every representation of contemporary Japan became a "fun" cartoon: a futurist paradise of high tech urban landscapes, cute kids and wild sub-cultures, and endlessly adorable characters (all with a satisfyingly dark hint of weirdness underneath). Effectively, the complexity and often unpalatable realities of contemporary Japan were, to paraphrase Koichi Iwabuchi, turned into a simple, "odorless" code: signifying "Japan" but easy to sell as cosmopolitan ("mukokuseki")

product. In Murakami's case, though, behind the happy smileys and pop art flowers, lay the double-faced, rather angry, irony of an unrepentant nationalist artist.

As a footnote to Murakami's success -- they are not likely to figure more than that in world art history text books -- the parallel global art triumphs of Mariko Mori and Yoshitomo Nara in the late 1990s confirmed and extended Murakami's stunning success. Mariko Mori knew even earlier success in New York, then Venice, already in the mid-1990s (Holland 2009; Borggreen 2008): she was one of several Japanese "neo-pop" artists that entrepreneurial gallerist Jeffrey Deitch tried to take to fame as a token Japanese in New York. In her sensational series of robot and sex-plaything "Japanese girl" photos, set in a touristic fantasy of Tokyo, Mori just happened to be the most photogenic and easy to sell of these artists. "Made in Japan" was Deitch's slogan; it was not entirely accidental either that she was a close relative of one of the richest and most powerful families in Japan, the Mori Building Corporation whose Roppongi Hills development and art museum dominates the skyline of South West Tokyo. Nara meanwhile quietly built a cult name as a people's artist in Japan, with a solid second division global career anchoring his untouchable fame back home. For him, the *gaisen kouen* drew on the mythology of the international "freeter" (free arbeiter) artist: the young creator-on-the-road, soaking up international experiences, living like a student well into his forties, pursuing his dreams and obsessions in countless art works and books before going home to Japan to cult fame (Tezuka 2010). Nara's naive image and simple lifestyle have engendered a fanatical fan base, who help him produce his shows and buy his endless spin off commercial products. Nara's life and work, meanwhile, is a paradigm that literally thousands of young Japanese artists and creative types have followed in cities around the world: they are

the legions of young, fashionable Japanese that can be seen today in any hip and happening neighbourhood of LA, New York, London or Berlin.

Murakami's story, in particular, articulates a view that is still unquestionably accepted as a truism by all in Japan: to make it globally you have to go abroad. Yet there is a double irony with Murakami's success in this respect. First, he was never really an American artist. Although he made all his connections during his time in New York and LA, and he keeps offshore bases in both places, Murakami essentially lives and works in Tokyo: developing an alternative corporate organisation, media presence, gallery, and cult-like school that he presents as a revolutionary alternative to the moribund mainstream Japanese art system. Secondly, and frustratingly for Murakami, in his case the *gaisen kouen* is not really working well in all respects. Everyone in Japan is impressed at his global achievements, but the Japanese art world -- with its stubborn spirit of distinction and categorizations still partially autonomous from the outside "foreign" global criteria that Murakami has learned to manipulate so well -- is quite resistant to many of the criteria that might be presented as "proof" of his importance. In terms of Japanese critical evaluation, museum visibility and popularity, influence on new young artists, or site/location specific impact, Murakami is in fact not at all considered as the most important contemporary artist in Japan (Favell 2012b).

After "Cool Japan": new forms of mobility in the next generation

As I will now argue, Takashi Murakami's problems with the *gaisen kouen* perhaps indicate another shift in the context of cultural production in Japan, as the country has slipped out of the front rank of nations seen to be driving the alternate Asian modernity challenging the dominant West. A younger generation of artists, born in the 1970s and who came of age amidst the disasters and decline of the 1990s, are arguably pioneering a new kind of Japanese art. The work of this generation illustrates both Japan's changing relationship with the world, and a different kind of cosmopolitan aspiration to the quite instrumental use of international experience and the *gaisen kouen* that marked Murakami, Nara and Mori's career trajectories. It becomes apparent with the younger artists that unlike with previous generations there is no longer a dichotomy between the local/national and the global/transnational. These levels are no longer clearly distinguishable, and maybe no longer need to be distinguished as such.

Murakami, Nara and Mori were part of generation born from the late 1950s to mid 1960s whose pop art work strongly reflected the emerging Japanese and consumer culture of the 1970s and 80s. While in popular culture, all these forms have continued to proliferate and sub-divide into numerous sub-cultures, its influence in Japanese contemporary art has waned in recent years. Western art shows and surveys that have continued to focus on the significance for art of *manga* and *anime*, *otaku* and *kawaii* are significantly out of touch. Only very recently have discussions emphasizing the new trends after Murakami begun to emerge (Baldissera and Knelman 2008; Favell 2008; Cavaliero 2011; Ha Thuc 2012). The global art world ignored it, but there was indeed a significant generational change in the creative environment as a result of the

end of Japan's economic boom years in the early 1990s, and especially after the shattering disasters of 1995.

In global terms, the only narrative of the shift that is known outside of Japan is Midori Matsui's *Micropop* (2007), a series of shows and books written by the one recognized curatorial/theoretical name to have risen globally with Murakami and Nara. *Micropop* collects together a series of younger artists who came of age during the "lost decade" of the 1990s, and who use adolescent, low-tech, and/or ephemeral styles as painters, installation and video artists. Matsui's argument is that their art reflects an introverted "politics" that uses the everyday resources of the private bedroom or alienated observation of daily life to resist, from a "minor" position, the hegemonic domination of (Western) global capitalism.

Aside from freighting a very partial selection of this generation's art with a lot of rather overstated theory -- mostly influenced in the usual one-way colonial style by French master thinkers, in this case Deleuze and Guattari -- Matsui does offer a substantial sociological analysis of the difficult new world into which this generation had to make its way as mature artists. They now lived in (or fled from) a Japan whose corporate stability was shattered, with an economy embracing flexibilization and marginalization of the young, a depressed recognition of American dominance and China's rise, and an increasing tendency to escape into private, self-isolating fantasy and obsessions. Yet they were also a generation with a full and relaxed knowledge of global culture from internet connections and international travel, especially the cheap "HIS" travel agent packages, which had enable them quite routinely to explore both Asian countries and the West when they were young. Murakami was admired for his

business entrepreneurship, and Nara for his globetrotting lifestyle (Mariko Mori, for other reasons, has faded in importance since her heyday in the late 1990s). But Matsui, who has remained loyal to the two male artists who she made her career writing about, tends to overstate their stylistic influence by selecting a lot of artists who were clearly followers of these "godfathers": especially the young girl artists groomed as part of Murakami's company Kaikai Kiki. Her own *otaku* generation tastes predominate, but the ephemeral, everyday style of some of the artists -- with its emphasis on irony and quixotic observation -- does capture one important dimension of the artists of the "lost generation", who often often referred to as the unlucky *zero nen kai*, the "zero zero generation" who came of age around the year 2000.

Although she was symptomatically missing from *Micropop*, the most successful and representative artist of the "zero zero generation" is in fact the young women video artist Tabaimo (with images). A discussion of her work is essential to understanding the shift in Japanese contemporary art as it has moved further into the post-Bubble, post-disaster condition, and away from other global trends (see also Rawlings 2010). Born in 1975, Tabaimo was famous and feted in Japan almost before she left school: the new, experimental Kyoto University of Art and Design, that is headed by the famous philosopher Akira Asada. Her breakthrough work was her sensational graduation piece: the prize winning *Japanese Kitchen* (1999). It is an adolescent work but one which has the essence of all her best set pieces. *Japanese Kitchen* is, like most of her work, a large scale colour video installation, in which a short five to ten minute video animation plays in a specially constructed theatrical environment. In this case, she built a small wooden house, with the Japonist paraphernalia of *tatami* mats and a temple-like atmosphere. Profanely, though, visitors to the house are advised by a

sign outside that you do *not* need to take off your shoes (Japanese people almost can never bring themselves to obey this sacrilegious suggestion). Inside, it is a claustrophobic space, with an animation playing out on three screens. In the centre we watch an overweight mother making a *nabe* (stew) in a cluttered kitchen amidst the sweat of high summer; on side screens, we see an anonymous city environment, with ugly high rises and wires cutting across the blank sky of an archetypal Japanese urban sprawl. Bugs crawl across the screen, humidity rises on the wall, a politician screams on the television screen; then we see inside the fridge where a depressed looking salary man is sitting at a desk awaiting his fate along with the other vegetables. The mother reaches in for him, and cuts off his head on the chopping board. Outside, a couple of school girls pass by laughing, followed by a battered Toyota car; then, mysteriously, past the high rise windows, bodies start falling from the sky, one by one.

Western audiences, in a cognitively limited way, tend to see Tabaimo's work as a piece of cute "manga"-like *anime*, referencing clichés of Japan. It is true that a certain traditionalism lies under the imagery and techniques she uses: *ukiyo-e* colours and line drawing techniques predominate in her style. But Tabaimo resents this association with pop culture. Her world is not at all the "Cool Japan" Western tourists love to imagine, and which Murakami celebrated, but a distinctly "uncool" place: one in which people live in unglamorous and dense packed urban sprawl threatened by earthquakes and chronic social disfunctions, and where on average nearly 30 people a day commit suicide. This is a Japan that has been of little interest to an outside world fixated on Asian dynamics and rising Asian power.

In other internationally successful work -- all single room videos -- Tabaimo used other archetypal Japanese settings to tell an unfamiliar story about a quite grim and sometimes gothic everyday life. She goes inside a public bath full of frustrated middle age and old men, with a latent air of violence everywhere (*Japanese Bathhouse*, 2001); a packed commuter suburban trains full of isolated travellers unable to communicate (*Japanese Commuter Train*, 2001); a woman's latrine, in which young women are apparently administering abortions to themselves (*public conVENIENCE*, 2006); a doll's house, in which neurotic, scratching hands destroy the furniture before mysteriously waters come and flood everything away (*house*, 2008). For Tabaimo, no *gaisen kouen* was necessary: international recognition simply came knocking soon after her discovery in Japn: she was feted with a solo shows at both Hara Museum Tokyo and at Fondation Cartier in Paris before she was 30. There was no need for a self-conscious international strategy. Here was someone from the "zero zero generation" who was able to make an art that reflected this harsh reality of this era, while finding a form of presentation that was perfectly attuned to the trends in global installation art.

Tabaimo is exceptional in that by her mid 30s, she has attained a level of unambiguous national and international success that means her representative significance cannot be doubted. As the problems with Midori Matsui's selection attest, it is perhaps (still) too early to make a choice of other representative artists of her age group. Nevertheless, certain features of this generation, common to Tabaimo, can be pointed to. These include features not highlighted in Matsui's emphasis on introverted, naive, and adolescent stylings. Other aspects less clear in her presentation include the still striking technical ability of many young Japanese artists (a virtue of

an art education that still values technique over conceptual teaching); their often "cool" and quite "neutral" commentary on politics and society; the influence of the white screen and non-spatial networks of computer technology; their strong interest in low cost, craft intensive, sustainable practices; and the sophistication with which traditional Japanese influences or local references intermesh with a knowing awareness of global trends, such that it is difficult to distinguish these various levels of context.

As Tabaimo has also emphasized in her work -- one show focused on what she called the *danmen no sedai*, the "cross-sectional generation" of which she is part (*Danmen*, 2009) -- the generational features of the 1970s born cohort are significant. Here I will introduce three further artists, among the most interesting of this generation, who each in turn embody aspects of cosmopolitanism and nationhood particular to younger artists from Japan. Each relates to three of the key international destinations that still routinely form part of the career development of young Japanese artists.³

New York: Yuken Teruya (with images)

New York remains the global art capital, still attracting a major slice of young international artists hoping for a global scale breakthrough. The Japanese presence in New York is pronounced, and strong networks and organisations to link the artists who have made their home there. With Yoko Ono a kind of patron saint in the city, a well received show in 2007, *Making a Home*, celebrated the particular kind of "global Japan" reflected in the Japanese artist residents in the city (Shiner and Tomii 2007).

³ Material in the following sections is largely based on interviews and repeated meetings with the three artists, i.e. (with date/place of first interview/meeting): Yuken Teruya (New York, 19/03/12); Satoru Aoyama (Tokyo, 19/07/07); Kei Takemura (Yokohama, 08/06/08).

One of the most successful of the younger generation, both in the US and at home in Japan is Yuken Teruya, who is best known for making extraordinary environmental and political commentaries out of tiny and intricate installations made of cut up cardboard boxes and paper bags. Born in Okinawa (1973) Teruya always felt himself an outsider while studying in Tokyo; this sense of identity was then only sharpened by the subsequent move to live and work in New York. Distinctively Japanese in his sense of craft detail, as well as in his humour and in the only obliquely articulated conceptual ideas -- Japanese artists are rarely comfortably articulating clear big "theoretical" ideas of the kind loved by global art discourse -- Teruya says he finally felt comfortable as himself in the "global" New York environment. Yet New York is both "global" -- the world in a city -- as well as a very particular American environment, provincial and specific in its own way. Teruya has absorbed the New York environment clearly in the way he has been influenced by the typically American obsession with articulating one's "identity" and one's own migrant trajectory as a form of politics and selfhood in society. For example, there are his installation pieces (2008-) in which a series of videos installed in improvised cardboard box "cinemas" tell the story of tiny paper ships, each marked with flags of Brooklyn's resident immigrant populations, as they follow their way towards the sea in the flowing waters of the borough's gutter system. Teruya positions himself as another immigrant among others in the city; a cosmopolitan artist identifying with the poorer classes around him.

So far, so transnational. Characteristically global environmental concerns also might be read into his extraordinary *Notice-Forest* (2005-) series that gave him his first

important breakthroughs as an artist. In each work, he turns a luxury branded paper bag (such as Hermés, Vuitton, etc -- although one is made out of a McDonalds bag) into an improvized art space: peering in we can see a tiny minutely cut and composed tree actually made out of cuts in the paper bag, then placed inside. These works offer a quiet statement about consumer waste and environmentalism, as well as illustrating a sustainable art economy of creating your own miniature white cube out of everyday recycled waste. There is of course an allusion at work here to traditional Japanese paper art techniques such as *origami*: Western viewers often want to read it this way, although Teruya himself does not present it as such. On the other hand, a specific local origin does surface in the way his work draws on traditional Okinawan techniques -- stencils and fabrics, as well as the recycling of familiar global commercial branded packaging (that is, Okinawan delicacies such as Kellogg's cornflakes or local fashion such as Adidas). In more recent works, he also mixed in American icons -- using traditional, almost kitsch, Okinawan stencils to portray typical American heroes, such as native American leader Geronimo, and a reworked version of the *Newsweek* cover of Barack Obama. In other works, these same almost kitsch touristy stylings are mixed with alarming military images, and references to General MacArthur's speeches and statements of the 1940s, that remind all that Okinawa (now part of sovereign Japan since the 70s) is still America's biggest floating aircraft carrier in the Pacific. The mix is distinctly cosmopolitan, "American" and local, all at once.

London: Satoru Aoyama (with images)

Teruya processes the familiarly American “cosmopolitanism” of New York: the American “capital” as the paradigmatic “global” experience. Yet artists that have chosen to live and work in other global cities can be seen to embody different forms of cosmopolitanism refracting their Japanese national origins, each city inflected by local variations in the global. London, in many ways, offers a quite different context to New York.

For example, there are the elaborate tableaux made from a sewing machine by Satoru Aoyama (born 1973), who spent several years of his formative education in London, at Goldsmith's during the heady years after the breakthrough of the YBAs (Young British Artists, i.e., Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin, Sarah Lucas and so on). Aoyama is another younger Japanese artist who rejects the mass production of "pop art", in favour of painfully honed craft skills and laborious handiwork: in other words, the polar opposite of Murakami's factory production lines. At Goldsmiths, he soaked up some of the atmosphere of arch conceptualism that marked the height of the YBAs, but he actually was trained on the unfashionable, almost women's only, BA in textiles. There, he adopted a peculiar methodology, from a despised women's “craft”: to reproduce painterly images using only an archaic Singer sewing machine.

On one level his work echoes the themes of Gerhard Richter and David Hockney, concerning painting as reproduction and the use of technology in art: in their case, the impact of photography on artistic representation. Like them Aoyama deliberately "copies" given photographic or painted images, only with a sewing machine. On the one hand, then, Aoyama's method is an anachronistic art form long swept over by the march of technological progress. Maybe this is the point of contemporary art,

Aoyama is saying, rather than pop art's attempt to keep up with and process the latest in design or fashion technology, which is Murakami's hopeless quest. Aoyama thus explores and re-values art forms and techniques that have been rendered "obsolete" in the usual linear, developmental reading. Yet, from another angle (the sewed "paintings" are in fact hard to detect as works of needlework), Aoyama is practicing a form of "digital" production: with each stitch approximating the pixel of a computerised image, which transforms analogue brushwork into digital code. Explicitly evoking the spirit of 19th century labour organisation and the ideas of William Morris, Aoyama thus makes contemporary reproductions that question the hierarchy of modern media images. Aoyama's craft based style echoes the intricacy and intensity of much Japanese design work, and fits within a recent trend in Japan to re-evaluate "craft arts" (*Ko-jutsu*) as distinctively "Japanese" arts. Yet Aoyama rejects any notion he is a "Japanese" artist, positioning his work firmly in a theoretical line at ease amidst the conceptualism of high global art theory.

Berlin: Kei Takemura (with images)

Despite the claims of New York and London, or Paris and Los Angeles (which might be similarly contrasted), it is Berlin today that has become the most fashionable global art capital. As other global cities have gone through real estate and finance booms that have priced artists out of the residential and studio spaces they need to live and work, Berlin became the prime destination for this younger generation of footloose international *freeter* who sought opportunities outside of Japan during the depressing the late 90s and 2000s.

In this respect, it is illuminating to consider the work of Kei Takemura (born 1975). Takemura is another artist of this generation who left Japan in search of global experience and opportunity. For her, it was the typical Berlin artist's aspiration for an authentic, cosmopolitan expression: something which can draw on the international resources of a world city and the conceptual language of global art centered there, but is untainted by the exigencies of the art market and commercial space as New York inevitably is, and London has become. The concentration in Berlin of artists and especially many leading curators indeed has arguably made it the most important *avant guard* location in global art today.

Takemura also uses needlework, linking different ends of the historical silk road from Asia to Europe, with fine Japanese silk threads and Italian synthetic fabrics applied to huge tapestry-like works that evoke memories of travel, people, and a life lived between Japan and Europe. As with most of her peers in this generation, she found little inspiration in the pop culture and consumer ideologies that drove the interests of Murakami's generation. Influenced by the local scene in Berlin, Takemura also performs her memories, living out words or songs of the characters she remembers as part of her installations. The emphasis on the work is always on the small and the sustainable. In another line of work, she "sews together" broken objects, renovating them while preserving the meaning of the break, "veiling" the damage, she says, rather than restoring it. Takemura's work is uncanny, yet distinctly humanistic in attempts to find transcendent forms of communication, which as with Aoyama and Teruya draw in form though not content, on Japanese craft traditions. At the same time the translucent, ghostlike objects floating on her tapestries, as with Aoyama's tableaux and Teruya's stencils, also evoke contemporary digital or media images. Yet

working from Germany, Japan is still everpresent: such as in the powerful and disturbing *A.N.'s Living Room in Tokyo, Premonition of an Earthquake* (2005), a work Takemura says she made, well before the disaster of March 2011, because she just could not get Japan off her mind.

These artists of the zero zero generation made their careers in a hostile environment. Those that didn't give up to go abroad, struggled long term to make viable careers in a depressed Japan, only to face continual set backs as the nascent contemporary domestic art market failed to ignite. Meanwhile, the Japanese art world has watched all the global attention passed straight over, to China and the rest of Asia -- with the exception of Murakami and Nara's easy-to-consume pop art, which almost entirely monopolised the perception and understanding of Japanese contemporary art from the 1990s and after. Yet there is a return to Japan among many of these young artists, both physically (as they come home during the approach to middle age), but also stylistically. Not to dig into the nationalist myths and war-obsessed fixations of the past, but rather to produce an art that respond to the condition of a post-Bubble, post-disaster society, which has learned a new, non-linear attitude to development. There is of course an influence at work of emergent global environmental concerns, as well as a critique of global capitalism that has become clearly worldwide since 2008. Yet the emphasis on renovation, sustainability and aesthetic reflection amongst these young Japanese artists, sits in stark contrast to the rampant technology and consumer driven development sweeping the rest of Asia: the concerns of Asian modernity more reflected in many contemporary young Chinese and Indian artists, who are also much more visible and successful internationally. In contrast, the younger generation's art in Japan is well suited to the new post-crash age now emerging, even before the latest

disasters of 2011 -- events that have surely interred any further notions of promoting Japan globally as "Cool Japan".

Conclusion: Going "Home" and the New Sakoku

Tabaimo was honoured in the 2011 Venice Biennale, chosen that year for the Japanese pavilion. The enigmatic video installation she produced was announced as a work that evoked the notion widely discussed in Japan of "Galapagosization", exploring the country's identity as island state. This is the idea that the islands of Japan had become something akin to the Pacific islands explored by Charles Darwin, disconnected from evolutions elsewhere in the world, producing weird and wonderful flora and fauna more advanced than anywhere else, yet doomed to extinction in the face of dominant global currents. It is a gloomy idea, recognising Japan's objective decline internationally, while proudly upholding some of the national products that the country produced in spite of American, European and (other) Asian norms. A classic example was Japan's 3G phone technology which led the world for years, while being incompatible with global norms: it finally only succumbed to crushing American business interests, with the introduction of the iPhone; within a year the influence of Apple's products had virtually wiped out the "native" technology.

A part of the reaction to the disappointments and incursions of the global in Japan has been the re-emergence of an introversion often mentioned in terms of the new *sakoku*: the foreign policy of the pre-Meiji era based on wilful closure and self-isolation from the world. Sometimes, it is said, ordinary Japanese people still dream of a time after

the black ships of 1853 have gone again (the American gun boats of Commander Perry which forced Japan to open to trade), and they can return to a pristine national culture untouched and untroubled by (foreign) global influences. Contemporary artists, of course, position themselves differently: their self-consciously border crossing trajectories often embody the complex relationship between local, national, regional and global contexts. Yet, as I have argued, in terms of the creative impulses of artists and art world professionals from Japan, the contrast across generations is stark. Murakami's generation and those older were, above all, in awe and fascinated by the power of foreign Western culture. Following a colonial pattern, they sought out the global art capitals, such as Paris and New York, and tried to assimilate and re-import their cultural forms and aesthetic trends, while still sometimes expressing nationalist resentment and despair at the cultural power and domination that this relationship expressed. By the zero zero generation, young Japanese artists seemed to have come to a more relaxed relation to the rest of the world: with international travel and ease of internet connections, they absorbed the world while confidently developing their own original forms, enmeshing Japanese traditions and global conceptual trends. Moving in a world in which these binaries have broken down, the mechanism of the *gaisen kouen* has become less relevant. The talk now amongst older generations is that even younger people in their teens and twenties, disillusioned with the global, and alienated from both the West and Asia, are going back more forcefully to a regressive Japanese "island" mentality: self-sufficient with Japanese popular culture, escapist internet, and ambitionless in terms of a global world no longer apparently interested in Japan -- except as an object of pity.

This kind of reaction is not unfamiliar in other parts of the world that have experienced the incursions of a globalizing economy and culture in a difficult, sometimes destructive way. Whatever new generational shift may be underway now, the cosmopolitanism of the zero zero generation in Japan remains a complex, original and hopeful response. Having transcended the problematic colonialist paradigm of the *gaisen kouen* and the reductive stereotypes of "Cool Japan", they also offer an art signally at odds with the development and power obsessed narratives of a rising Asian modernity, but very much in tune with the emergent post 2008 global concerns of a world economic and environmental crisis. Largely ignored by the blinkered readings of the global art world, it is to be hoped that their vision of Japan in the world will find better appreciation in the future.

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