The Floating World
The Floating World
An investigation into illustrative and decorative art practices and theory in print media and animation.

**Summary of Project**
An investigation into illustrative and decorative art practices and their historical lineages, with particular attention given to the Edo-period in Japan, resulting in the production of a series of new media artworks.

**Candidate**
Phip Murray

**Supervisors**
Senior Supervisor: Martine Corompt
Supervisor: Dominic Redfern
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title Page</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declaration and Acknowledgments</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters Proposal</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Vitae</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exegesis – The Floating World</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetics</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary Adaptations of <em>Ukiyo-e</em></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gothic Romance and Associated Genres</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guide to Projects</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animation</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curatorial Projects</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Trips</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Appendices

- DVD of animations
- Invitations
- Catalogues
- Publicity material
- Reviews and publicity material
Declaration and Acknowledgments

Declaration
I certify that, except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

Philippa Lesley Murray
Date: 10 December 2007

Acknowledgments
Thank you: Martine Corompt, Dominic Redfern, Philip Brophy, Ian Haig, Keely Macarow, Lesley Duxbury, Joy Hirst, RMIT School of Art Gallery, Cornel Wilczek, the Media Arts Department at RMIT and the postgraduate students, Madeleine Griffith, Lily Hibberd, Jeff Khan, Jane Bland and Lizzie, Rob and Lesley Murray.
The Research Program

Title of Project
The Floating World – an investigation into illustrative and decorative art practices and theory in print media and animation.

Brief Description
The aim of this research project is to create a series of artworks, primarily in the form of digital animation and illustration, which investigate decorative and illustrative art practices and their historical lineages. Particular emphasis will be given to investigating the links between contemporary decorative/illustrative art practice and the aesthetics and psychology of the Edo period in Japan (C17th – C19th).

The initial stage of my Masters program is concerned with researching the illustrative techniques, distinctive spatial arrangement, and history and culture of the Edo period in Japan with particular attention to the idea of ‘The Floating World’. This term was used to describe the prosperous city of Edo (old Tokyo) which was, throughout C17th – C19th, a significant metropolis.

Considered under the theme ‘The Floating World’, the resulting artwork of my Masters program will represent a sustained exploration of decorative and illustrative art practice and theory, and will incorporate experimentation with associated genres such as magic realism, gothic romance, the uncanny, iconography, surrealism and other metaphorical and abstract representational practices. I plan to use the themes and methodologies of Edo-period work but to translate them into a contemporary Australian, as well as contemporary new media, setting. I am particularly interested in using recent art technologies designed for illustration, such as vector-based digital drawing and animation programs such as Adobe Illustrator and Macromedia Flash, to create artworks that reference the decorative line work of the Edo-period. I am also interested in developing an installation practice that utilises new media formats (such as the monitor or the digital print) in ways that reference traditional Edo formats (such as the screen or the scroll).

More broadly, my Masters project is an investigation, both theoretical and practical, into the way drawing and illustration have been a process through which to (literally) give shape to hopes and fears, and to describe understandings of self and the world. I am particularly interested in exploring how, through the act of abstraction and the use of metaphor and decoration, a capacity to ‘speak the unspeakable’ and ‘know the unknowable’ are somehow enabled. For example, when contemporary Japanese artist Takashi Murakami decorates Edo-inspired screens with a colourful arrangement of morphing cartoon mushrooms, he conjures up a startling and complex poetic space that juxtaposes traditional Japanese aesthetics and philosophy with the hyper-consumerist characters and ethos of Disneyland, as well as disquieting references to the mushroom bombs that dropped down on Hiroshima and Nagasaki from US planes. A similarly complex space is enacted by contemporary US artist Inka Essenhigh: her oversized canvases seem like sublime Japanese-inspired screens but a closer inspection reveals that the decorative motifs are actually dismembered body parts morphed together to create a savage and compelling metaphor for contemporary America that is all the more disarming for being performed in a seemingly innocuous illustrative style. My research will draw on these examples but will endeavour to create a series of artworks that are particular to an Australian context. This interests me particularly in a time when, as a nation, we appear to be confounded about what it means to be Australian: as a contemporary artist I am interested in how we represent ourselves as a nation, and in exploring the motifs and attributes that we consider to be ours.
The Research Program

Rational for Program

I believe this research is important because:

• a number of distinct stylistic practices emerged in the Edo-period that have been particularly influential on later artistic movements. Contemporary artists like Takashi Murakami, Chihō Aoshima and Inka Essenhigh, for example, directly reference Edo-period artwork but combine it with a distinctly post-War outlook: their delicately arranged illustrations depict scenes of anxiety-inducing fragility which, I would argue, adds a richness of new contemporary meanings to the term ‘The Floating World’, particularly in the post-September 11th atmosphere.

• despite resurgence in decorative and illustrative art practices (particularly in digital illustration and animation), there has been little commentary exploring the nexus between contemporary art practice and the historical foundations of decorative/illustrative art.

• similarly, there has been little research regarding the reinterpretation of Japanese philosophy and aesthetics, particularly in the artworks of non-Japanese contemporary practitioners. In addition, I want to consider how these aesthetics can be meaningful and useful for an Australian artist where a more Victorian sensibility is apparent.

• computer graphic illustration and animation are new art practices that, I would argue, offer significant metaphors for contemporary identity and experience (i.e. hybridisation, morphing, consumerism, fluid identities, and so on).

• I feel that much could be garnered about contemporary understandings of identity and meaning through an investigation into decorative tropes such as flatness (of the screen and the digital print), morphing, hybridisation and abstraction.

• furthermore, I feel there is the potential to make significant theoretical and practical contributions to image theory by looking at contemporary and illustrative art practices in conjunction with associated images theories such as, for example: the role of the icon in Mediaeval art, the function of decoration in Islamic art, or the radical flattening out of meaning in the post-modern simulacra.

• the resulting artworks will continue the lineage of decorative/illustrative artworks but in a new media setting and, significantly, will add an Australian voice.
The Research Program

Method
The Masters program was undertaken on a part time basis.

Stage 01
This stage was primarily a research and development period that included:
- research into the theme, including bibliographic research as well as visiting galleries (including the Seasons and 100 Views of Mount Fuji exhibitions of traditional Japanese art at the National Gallery of Sydney)
- applications to galleries for exhibitions in 2004, and consequent plotting of production cycles
- development of aesthetic style and technical ability, including learning applicable software
- presentation of the animated work Brace, Brace in a curated ABC online project entitled Strange Attractors of Victorian animators

Stage 02
This stage was concerned with:
- continuing research and development (both gallery-based and bibliographic)
- participation in the Next Wave KickStart development program in the role of curator and participating artist in the exhibition Option Escape
- a major production cycle related to the preparation of artwork for the exhibition Option Escape at West Space

Stage 03
- a field trip to Japan to conduct primary research assisted by a RUN_WAY Young and Emerging Artist grant
- a major production cycle related to the creation of the animation We Gotta Get Outta This Place for Decore II at ACMI
- creation of print media artworks
- further research and development

Stage 04
- further presentation of artworks in various group shows
- writing up research findings
- creation of abstract animated artworks
- creation of a new series of illustrated artworks

Stage 05
- consolidation of research and documentation in preparation for final Masters examination
Bibliography


Matthew Collings This is Modern Art (MIT Press, 2001)


Patrizia Ferri ‘Japan in the 90s’ in Flash Art 26, 173 (Nov–Dec, 1993): p 110


Patrick Fuery Theories of Desire (Melbourne University Press, 1995)


Francesca Dal Lago ‘Personal Mao: Reshaping an Icon in Contemporary Chinese Art’ in Art Journal 58.2 (Summer, 1999): pp 46-59


Adrian Martin ‘Lady, Beware: Paths Through the Female Gothic’ from Senses of Cinema at www.sensesofcinema.com (Issue 12, Feb–Mar 2001)


Takashi Murakami (ed) Tokyo Girls Bravo (Kaikai Kiki Corporation, Japan, 2002)


Raphael Rubinstein ‘In the Realm of the Superflat – exhibition of Takashi Murakami’s sculptures’ in Art in America (June, 2001)

Noi Sawaragi and Nanjo Fumio ‘Dangerously Cute’ in Flash Art 25.163 (Mar – Apr, 1992): pp 75-77


Ivan Vartanian Drop Dead Cute: The New Generation of Women Artists in Japan (Goliga Books, Tokyo, 1996)
Curriculum Vitae

Academic qualifications
2004–07: currently studying for a Master of Arts (Media Arts) (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology)
2003–05: Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training (Swinburne University)
1999–2002: Bachelor of Media Arts (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology)
1993–1997: Bachelor of Arts/Law (University of Melbourne) (law component unfinished)
1991: Victorian Certificate of Education (St Michael's Grammar School)

Employment
2007: Lecturer, Bachelor of Fine Arts (Media Arts, RMIT)
Role includes: teaching experimental animation.
2003–07: Lecturer, Diploma in Visual Arts/New Media and Advanced Diploma in Multimedia (Swinburne University)
Role includes: teaching new media and visual arts theory and practise. Subjects include: art history and theory, film and media theory, critical writing, animation, photography and drawing.
2005–06: Associate Producer, Next Wave Festival
Role included: producing artistic content for the festival; liaising with artists, arts workers and organisations; writing grants; financial management and acquittal; managing legal and contractual obligations; and producing 43 diverse projects including managing the Australian content for the Containers Village, Shed 14, Docklands.
2000–07: Freelance Design, Art Direction and Editing
Role included: editorial and design work for clients including Hardware Records, Maribyrnong Council, Port Phillip Council, Freehills and L'Oreal.
1998–99: Online Editor/Producer, LOUD Festival
Work included: editing and designing the features section of the online magazine 'noise!' (www.loud.net.au/noise); writing feature articles; commissioning nationwide contributions in audio/visual/written formats; and media work.
1997: Co-editor, Farrago (Melbourne University Magazine)
Role included: editing; writing articles; graphic design and art direction; publishing print and web versions of Farrago; securing sponsorship; reporting to student council; managing the office and staff; allocation of budget; and responding to legal issues.
1996: Sub-editor, Farrago (Melbourne University Magazine)
Role included: editing, art directing and designing the arts and writing sections, commissioning contributions, building up the contributor base, liaising with arts institutions and photography.
Selected bibliography of published work
‘Everybody’s going to die’ article on Tony Garifalakis: un Magazine, 2005
‘Something is out there’: article on Siri Hayes: un Magazine, 2005
‘Remote Control’ article on Barbara Kruger: Milk Magazine, 1999
‘Spiderbait’ interview with Janet English: noise!, 1998
‘The History of Sex’ interview with Andres Serrano: noise!, 1998
‘Gangland’ interview with author Mark Davis: noise!, 1998
‘Loaded’ interview with author Christos Tsiolkas: Farrago, 1997
Interview with Billy Bragg, published in Farrago, 1997
Interview with Kaz Cooke, published in Farrago, 1997
Interview with Senator Amanda Vanstone: Farrago, 1997
Interview with MP Lindsay Tanner: Farrago, 1996

Selected creative projects
The Floating World (2005)
Illustrations exhibited in Address Book (Bus Gallery) and A Portable Model (Plimsoll Gallery)

We Gotta Get Outta This Place (2005)
Animation written and animated by Phip Murray with a score composed by Philip Brophy. Commissioned for Descore II at ACMI

Wormwood (2004)
Illustrations exhibited in Option Escape (WestSpace, 2004) and videolovehatevideo (PhatSpace ARI).

Brace, Brace (2003)
Written and animated by Phip Murray, sound by Jean-Philippe Larue.
Screened as part of Girls, Boys, Machines (ACMI, 2002) and curated into the ABC’s online animation showcase Strange Attractors

Splash (2001)
Solo exhibition comprising installation of video projection and digital prints exhibited as a part of the Fringe Festival, first site gallery, RMIT.

New QII: The Globe Art Award (1999)
Digital prints exhibited at Linden Gallery.

Awards and grants
2007: Arts Victoria development grant
2006: Siemen’s Art Award Finalist
2005: Australia Council RUN_WAY Young and Emerging Artists grant
2004: City of Melbourne, NAVA Artist grant
2003: Next Wave Festival KickStart
1999: New QII: The Globe Art Award Finalist
The initial stage of my Masters project was concerned with researching the history and culture of the Edo period in Japan (1603–1868) in order to explore the conceptual and artistic lineage of Ukiyo-e or ‘pictures of The Floating World’. Particular attention was given to distinctive aesthetic practices used by Ukiyo-e artists and the multiple translations possible of ‘Ukiyo-e’ as well as exploration of contemporary Japanese artists whose work can be connected to the Ukiyo-e lineage. My research also included other illustrative and decorative genres, broadly considered under the term ‘Gothic Romance’.

Felice Beato Panorama of Edo (1865/66)
Pampas grass, now dry,
once bent this way
and that.
Shoro (1894)
Chapter 01: The Floating World – History

A brief overview of the historical context for Ukiyo-e artworks – The merchant, rather than imperial, audience for Ukiyo-e –
The particular status of the chônin (merchant) class under the Tokugawa Shogunate (ruling warlords) –
The emergence of the (both real and imagined) ‘Floating World’ district – The development of the woodblock print –
The metropolis of Edo (now called ‘Tokyo’)

Ukiyo-e – ‘Pictures of The Floating World’
Customarily translated as ‘Pictures of The Floating World’, the term Ukiyo-e is historically associated with woodblock prints and paintings created in Japan throughout the Edo period (1603–1868). The artworks of Ukiyo-e are connected to a distinctive historical, political and cultural moment, and the images – of beautiful courtesans, celebrity actors, famous local scenery, and the minutiae of everyday city life – give an insight into the lives and ethos of a particular class of society, the townspeople or chônin. In contrast to previous lineages of Japanese art, which had been the domain of the elite and the courtly classes, Ukiyo-e were artworks commissioned and consumed by the chônin, and the work is a reflection of the interests and ambitions of this mercantile class.

The Floating World district
In the newly instituted hierarchy of the Edo period, the chônin (the townspeople or the merchant classes) occupied a demoted, low ranking position. To put it bluntly, the Tokugawa Shogunate despised the chônin classes and placed many laws and regulations upon them that limited their freedom. To reduce feelings of resentment against them – and potential uprisings – the Tokugawa created a pleasure district for the chônin that was not subject to the same regulations. This unrestricted area, an entertainment district notorious for geishas and kabuki theatres, became the centre of chônin life. The district was given the moniker ‘The Floating World’ by the locals, a name that appropriately alluded to the unusual and unregulated nature of the area as well as to the fleeting pleasures to be found in the district.

Ukiyo-e artworks are inseparable from this ‘Floating World’ district. They were created for an audience frequenting this area and they depict life (or perhaps, more accurately, imagined life) in this quarter. Historically speaking then, The Floating World was both a real district and simultaneously a world of fantasy, and this interplay between fantasy and reality becomes central to the aesthetics and narratives of Ukiyo-e artwork. Ukiyo-e emerge from a place where fact and fantasy intermingle. Significantly, then, Ukiyo-e is both an art based on observation of a real district but also the art of illusion and imagination.

The woodblock print
The non-courtly audience for the work affected the mode of production of Ukiyo-e prints. In contrast to the original – and expensive – artworks created for the imperial courts, Ukiyo-e artworks were mass-produced and broadly distributed. The woodblock print was central to this process: it enabled pictures to be created cheaply, reproduced many times and then sold to townspeople who could not afford original paintings.

The metropolis of Edo
Ukiyo-e artworks are set against a backdrop created by the metropolis of Edo. Due to a change in the ruling regime in 1603, the centre of political power moved from the imperial court in Kyoto to Edo (now Tokyo). In a relatively short period of time, the previously sleepy fishing village of Edo transformed into a large bustling city that became a formidable centre of power and commerce. The experience of existing in a place undergoing accelerated urbanisation is central to Ukiyo-e artworks. ☞
Coming, all is clear, no doubt about it.
Going, all is clear, without a doubt.

What, then, is all?

Hosshin (13th century)
Possible translations of the term Ukiyo-e – Interpretations connected to The Floating World, The Sorrowful World and the ‘here and now’ – Meditations on impermanence in Ukiyo-e art – The Japanese concept of mono no aware or ‘sensitivity to things’ – Symbols of temporality such as sakura (cherry blossoms)

The term Ukiyo-e

While the translation ‘Pictures of The Floating World’ is common, the term Ukiyo-e is complex and resonates with different meanings. To get a sense of the multiple layers of interpretation surrounding the works, it is helpful to deconstruct the term to explore the multiple translations that are possible. In classical Japanese script, or kanji, the term ‘Ukiyo-e’ is comprised of three different characters:

浮世絵

The first character, uki, can be translated as ‘floating’, ‘cheerful’ or ‘frivolous’. The second character, yo, as ‘world’, ‘generation’, ‘age’, ‘era’ or ‘reign’. The third character, e, can be translated as ‘picture’, ‘drawing’, ‘painting’ or ‘print’. This configuration leads to the usual translation ‘Pictures of the Floating World’. In addition, there are also positive resonances such as ‘cheerful age’ or the more disparaging ‘frivolous generation’.

However, the character for uki can also be written:

憂世

This alternate script can be translated as ‘sorrow’, ‘grief’, ‘distress’ or ‘melancholy’, which also enables the translation ‘Sorrowful World’ to be made. This translation connects the works to a Buddhist tradition and gives the term The Floating World connotations with impermanence. The term then, as well as meaning frivolous or cheerful, also alludes to more melancholy translations around the fleeting nature of life and the transitory nature of existence.

Furthermore, the term was also used in the Edo period as a common noun meaning ‘the present’, ‘the everyday world’, or ‘the here and now’. So it is also a word that quite simply means the ‘contemporary’ or the ‘current’ in everyday parlance.

On Pleasure and On Sorrow – The multiple interpretations of Ukiyo-e

These different translations are important to Ukiyo-e artworks, and it is this combination of meanings that particularly holds my interest in the works. Historically, The Floating World was a real district, it was a busy city centre where townspeople lived their lives and conducted their everyday business. However this district was an unusual district; it was an unregulated zone which was exempt from the usual rules of the society. This alone must have given the place a strange sense of unreality. As well as this, the district was home to the illusionistic world of kabuki actors and geishas, two practices infamous for their artifice and lack of reality. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the locals named this quarter The Floating World, which then became the name associated with the woodblock prints created in the district. Ukiyo-e is, therefore, a lineage based on carefully observed drawings of a real world but a world that is regarded by its own population as unreal or fantastical.

Ando Hiroshige The Plum Orchard at Kameido from One Hundred Famous Views of Edo (1856-1858)
Ando Hiroshige Suijin Grove, the Uchi River and Sekiya Village from the Vicinity of Massaki from One Hundred Famous Views of Edo (1856-1858)
Ando Hiroshige Maple Leaves and the Tekona Shrine and Bridge at Mama from One Hundred Famous Views of Edo (1856-1858)
Ando Hiroshige Two Women at an Outdoor Teahouse from 36 Views of Mount Fuji (1858-59)
Additionally, it is a lineage that can be interpreted through meanings associated with translations connected to the ‘pleasurable’ and ‘playful’ as well as, simultaneously, interpreted through meanings associated with translations connected to ‘sorrowful’ or ‘impermanence’. It is the interplay and tension between these qualities that I find compelling. That is, one reading of the world depicted in Ukiyo-e artworks relates to frivolity and pleasure. This version of The Floating World positions ‘floating’ as enchantment or headiness, and proffers a love of playfulness and pleasure. It depicts an elegant world of festivities and freedom. However The Floating World can also be interpreted as The Sorrowful World, and contained in this interpretation is a reminder that time – and pleasure – is fleeting. This conjures up meditations on mortality, on ‘floating’ as impermanence or, even, a Satre-esque ‘nausea’.

Many scholars of Ukiyo-e have described how the two translations are intimately connected. Both describe reality as something transitory or ephemeral however the emphasis is different in each translation. The Buddhist connotation (floating as impermanence) emphasises the need to detach from reality, to remember that reality is ephemeral. The merchant’s connotation (floating as pleasure) emphasises escaping reality through corporeal pleasure, a kind of ‘life is short, live it up’ mentality. Indeed it seems that the transitory nature of life (the Buddhist’s Sorrowful World) is allegorised in the transitory nature of pleasure in the entertainment quarter (the merchant’s Floating World). I would argue that this connection to sorrow or impermanence is crucial when looking at even the most conventional or straightforward of Ukiyo-e works. As Sandy Kita writes:

An excellent metaphor for the inconstant nature of existence in the Buddhist view of it is the Floating World, a world where nothing is fixed. That may be why Buddhists used this term for the here and now. ... What is then crucial to understanding the concept of ukiyo is the close relationship between the ephemeral and sorrow in Buddhism.¹

Mono no aware – sensitivity to things

Ukiyo-e artwork is also connected to the Japanese concept and artistic lineage of mono no aware which can be translated as ‘sensitivity to things’. Although evident throughout Japanese arts and literature for centuries, this concept was particularly articulated by the Edo-period literary scholar Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801), who developed his treatise in a period concurrent with the production of Ukiyo-e artworks. Drawing on a lineage of Japanese arts, in particular the oldest compilation (collected works from the period 600-759) of Japanese poetry, the Manyoshu (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves) as well as classical texts such as Japanese noblewoman Murasaki Shikibu’s The Tale of Genji, Motoori detected a unique quality in Japanese arts and writing that describes an outlook or a way of experiencing the world that is crucial to understanding Japanese culture. It related to an awareness of the impermanence of life, and is sometimes described as a sadness connected to ‘things’, a sense that time is passing and that life is fleeting. Motoori describes this as being moved or overcome (aware) upon encountering things (mono). These ‘things’ are part of a world that has been divinely created and each thing speaks of both itself and the greater whole. A meditation upon this feeling of mono no aware is behind much Japanese poetry, such as this work from 1685 by the master poet Matsuo Basho:

another year is gone
a traveller’s shade on my head,
straw sandals at my feet

In Ukiyo-e artwork images depicting falling petals or sakura (cherry blossoms) are often metaphors for time passing and the transitory nature of existence. Hiroshige often used nature as a metaphor for impermanence. In Maple Leaves at the Tekona Shrine, 1857, the foreground depicts beautifully red momiji (maple trees) in full autumn ripeness about to fall from the tree. Similarly, in an image from Hiroshige’s 100 Famous Views of Edo, we peer through delicate sakura (cherry blossoms) in full, but fragile, bloom. Just as the blossoms or leaves frame the image in these examples, they also frame our thoughts. Whilst looking through the blossoms at the view below we reflect on impermanence; just as we look on this view we realise that it has already ended, it exists no more. Similarly in Distant View of Kinryûsan from Azuma Bridge, 1856, a boat has almost passed from the frame, only a slight slither is visible, and we are left to meditate, somewhat bittersweetly, upon the petals fluttering in its airstream. These motifs allegorise or dramatise passing and impermanence. ♦

And by images, I mean, in the first place, shadows, and in the second place, reflections in water ... And do you know also that although they make use of the visible forms and reason about them, they are thinking not of these, but of the ideals which they resemble ... they are really seeking to behold the things themselves, which can only be seen with the eye of the mind.

That is true.

– Plato’s Republic

Kitagawa Utamaro Young woman applying make-up (c.1795-96)
Chapter 03: The Floating World – Aesthetics

Mimetic and non-mimetic qualities of art – Distinctive aesthetic devices visible in Ukiyo-e artworks such as cropping, aerial perspective, patterning and flatness – The interplay between careful observation of reality and abstraction

On Plato
Plato’s discussion of the relationship between mimetic and non-mimetic qualities of art (see quote overleaf) is useful in relation to Ukiyo-e artworks. For the Ukiyo-e artists also made ‘use of the visible forms and reason about them’ but they were also ‘thinking not of’ the thing in itself but of ‘ideals’ – or perhaps, more accurately thoughts – that they could ‘resemble’ or call up. Part of my interest in Ukiyo-e relates to the way in which artists explored pictorial forms as vessels for communicating ethereal concepts. For instance, much Ukiyo-e art conjures up the Japanese concept of mono no aware (sensitivity to things), which compels the viewer to reflect upon impermanence. I have just described, for instance, the depiction of sakura (cherry blossom), and particularly falling petals or petals floating in the wind, as a symbol for time passing.

Interplay between reality and fantasy
Within the Ukiyo-e aesthetic there is interplay between, on the one hand, the careful observation and recording of reality and, on the other, a delight in playing with or abstracting this reality. The aesthetics of Ukiyo-e incorporate a tension between reportage and fantasy – between careful, almost scientific recording of details and events as well as a desire to abstract reality. There are dual desires operating: to record daily, corporeal life but also to represent the unrepresentable (to depict, for instance, mortality). This tension is, of course, absolutely appropriate for a lineage of art that needs to resonate with the multiple interpretations associated with the term Ukiyo.

Certain distinctive aesthetic devices are visible in Ukiyo-e artworks, which are important to creating this interplay between reality and fantasy.

Cropping
Cropping is used, somewhat playfully, to obscure what conventionally would be the important content – or focal point – in an image. In Hiroshige’s Distant View of Kinryûsan from Azuma Bridge, 1856, the conventional image is perhaps a portrait of a woman in a boat against the bridge. However Hiroshige has given us a heavily cropped version in which only a mischievously slender glimpse of the women is visible because the boat has passed out of the frame. It is an unexpected and unconventional view, almost like a failed photograph in which the photographer has pushed the shutter too late. As mentioned, this image, rather than appearing as a conventional ‘portrait’, forces us to contemplate passing and temporality. We are left to meditate upon the fragile petals fluttering in the wind; they are a trace of an event that has passed, an index of time passing.

Furthermore, this intense cropping undermines the sense that the frame is encircling ‘important content’. It rejects the authority of the frame, and self-reflexively — and humorously — points outside itself. The image presents a viewpoint and simultaneously articulates that this is not the only viewpoint. This process quite consciously undermines its own authority to contain – to frame – the world and prefers to state itself as ‘representation’ or ‘idea’.
Ando Hiroshige Distant View of Kinryuzan Temple and Azuma Bridge from One Hundred Famous Views of Edo (1856-1858)
Ando Hiroshige The Entrance of the Sanno Festival Procession to Kojimachi from One Hundred Famous Views of Edo (1856-1858)
Ando Hiroshige Mannen Bridge and the Fukagawa District from One Hundred Famous Views of Edo (1856-1858)
Ando Hiroshige Ushimachi, Takanawa from 36 Views of Mount Fuji (1858-59)
Obscuring elements
In a similar manner subjects are sometimes hidden or obscured within the frame. In Hiroshige’s *Ushimachi, Takanawa*, 1857, from *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*, for instance, the subject matter is only available in pieces. The cart drawn in the foreground is so slenderly represented and so large in the frame that it has become abstracted, and the two animals behind it are mostly obscured. Even the watermelon in front is incomplete. These incomplete views also play with the conventional artistic practice of ‘focal point’ (i.e. the convention that the artist, through compositional devices, will deliberately lead the viewer to the ‘important content’ in an image). This has the effect of equalising all subject matter (i.e. all represented things are equal, nothing is privileged) and also, as discussed, of undermining the authority or completeness of the view.

Importance placed on absence as well as presence
In these instances, the artist is placing importance on the invisible as much as the visible. This quality is an important feature of Japanese aesthetics, and this is in sharp contrast to traditional western aesthetics, which have historically privileged centrality and presence. Hokusai’s *In the Hollow of a Wave off the Coast at Kanagawa*, 1827, with its depiction of a vast, curling wave that is mirrored in form by the void of the sky, is a classical example of the balancing of – or equal authority given to – both positive and negative areas in an image. Absence is just as important a concept as presence in Japanese aesthetics, which is a major point of difference between the historical lineages of western and Japanese art. I admire the significance and attention given in these works to what we in the west call, somewhat tellingly, ‘negative’ space. *Ukiyo-e* works proffer a metaphysics of absence as well as of presence: that is, in contemplating the nature of being and reality, absence is just as compelling an idea as presence.

Blank space
This focus on absence is also evident in the Japanese practice of leaving the area surrounding a subject empty. In many latter *Ukiyo-e* works the western practice of one-point perspective was adopted, which situates the subject firmly within a realistic location, but in earlier works the subject was depicted ‘floating’ in the frame. In western art lineages, it was customary to have a horizontal line to ‘ground’ the image. However, the Japanese tradition was to leave it afloat. In Kuniyoshi’s *Tryptych*, for example, subjects float in space. Similarly in Miyazaki Shikin’s *Scroll for preparing fish and fowl according to the Ikuma School*, 1800, the items are presented floating in space and adhering to no horizon line or spatial orientation. This is interesting when interpreted against the Japanese concept of *mono no aware*. I would argue that it makes it easier to contemplate a concept or a thing — to practice ‘sensitivity to things’ — when that ‘thing’ is isolated and pictured on its own. It means the viewer’s attention is undivided and makes it possible to pay attention to the unique qualities of a subject rather than view it as just another thing — a prop – in a complete universe.

Unique vantage points or perspectives
*Ukiyo-e* artists delighted in depicting surprising vantage points and perspectives. Hiroshige’s *Yotsuya: The New Station at Naito*, 1857, from the series *A Hundred Views of Famous Places in Edo*, places the viewer in a crouched down position behind a horse (and uncomfortably close to its dung). We are made to peer through the horses’ legs and squint to see the scene in the background. Similarly in Utagawa Hiroshige II’s *View of Akiba and Fukuroi-kite*, 1859-1864, the viewer is given the vantage point of one of the beautifully decorative kites in the sky. In a sense the viewer becomes a kite — we float and look down on the tiny villagers below from a vantage point unfamiliar — and enchanting — to us. These viewpoints are less about a search for realism and a steadying of the world and more about playfulness and abstraction. These unanchored vantage points and perspectives offer another kind of ‘Floating World’.

Patterning and flattening as well as perspective and ‘scientific detail’
While the *Ukiyo-e* artists placed importance on carefully observing their subjects and accurately recording them, they also possessed a tendency towards abstraction and placed a premium on imagination. This is evidenced, for example, through an aesthetics that ‘flattened out’ the image. For instance in Toyohara Kunichika’s (1835-1900), *Scene in a Villa*, line and decoration is more important for describing the image than rendering subjects through shading and tonal graduation, which had been the western art practice at the concurrent period. The artist is less interested in realistic rendering of subjects (in how they might be drawn in a three-dimensional manner) than in how shapes, patterns and lines could be placed together to ‘build’ an image and suggest a concept.
Katsushika Hokusai  *Under the Tsunami Wave off Kanagawa* (1829-1833)
Ando Hiroshige II  *View of Akiba and Fukuroi-ide* from the series  *One Hundred Views of Famous Places in the Provinces* (1859-1864)
Ando Hiroshige  *The New Station of Naito at Yotsuya* from  *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo* (1856-1858)
Kunichika Toyohara  *Scene in a villa* (c. 1862)
This is closely related to a love of patterning, of constructing images through combining a series of exquisitely patterned interlocking parts. This can be clearly observed in the depiction of garments in Toyohara’s image: the kimonos are constructed through locking together pieces of astonishingly beautiful designs. Flowers, dragons, birds, plants and shapes are flattened out and arranged over image parts that are overlaid and spliced to allow a sense of depth. This patterning and excessive description of surface is unnecessary to the subject matter but it connects to the Japanese lineage of ‘sensitivity to things’. It is also appropriate for a lineage of artists who were not only interested in realism but who were also interested in how the world can be imagined or ‘arranged’. Significantly, Ukiyo-e artworks are as much about imagination as they are about accurate depiction. In keeping with the meanings behind the term, Ukiyo-e privileges the artist’s ability to accurately record reality as well as to playfully abstract it. As Sandy Kita writes: ‘Fantasy and play are crucial elements of the Ukiyo-e style in one view of it, and a strict, nearly scientific reporting on it in another.’

Further interpretations of The Floating World
I want to argue that there are additional interpretations of The Floating World available through these aesthetic devices. Definitions of The Floating World can, for instance, incorporate interpretations connected to destabilising or problematising ideas of completeness in an image: there is never an authoritative ‘worldview’ presented in the artworks, rather there is an interplay between imagination (patterning, abstraction and so on) and scientific recording (accurate rendition of subjects). For me one of the most compelling subtexts of Ukiyo-e artwork is the message that reality is floating and not able to be definitively caught and ‘framed’. This is an artistic lineage that opens up considerations around perceptions of reality, rather than presenting a complete and authoritative picture of the world. Ukiyo-e images philosophically attest to their own incompleteness and force contemplation of the ethereal and invisible as much as to the visible and conventional. ❧

Chapter 04: The Floating World – Contemporary Adaptations of Ukiyo-e

Part of the research for my Masters related to considering how contemporary Japanese artists contribute to the lineage of Ukiyo-e. Artists like Takashi Murakami and Chiho Aoshima, for example, directly reference Ukiyo-e work but combine it with a contemporary and distinctly post-War outlook. Murakami, for instance, has adopted some of the illustrative tropes of Ukiyo-e but uses them to depict fantastical scenes full of outlandish morphing appropriate to post-atomic Japan. Similarly Aoshima’s delicately arranged illustrations share similarities with the Ukiyo-e tradition but they depict temporality and considerations of mortality in a contemporary manner. As well as continuing certain Ukiyo-e aesthetic practices, I would argue that the anxiety-inducing instability of Aoshima’s work, and outlandish metamorphosis and transformation evident in Murakami’s work, adds a richness of new contemporary meanings to the term The Floating World.

The-Hiropon-Factory
Takashi Murakami, famous for hyper-designed painting that riffs on the iconic language of the Hello Kitty marketplace, oversees the ‘Hiropon Factory’, an engine room for new media and art production in the outskirts of Tokyo. The Hiropon Factory members, like the Ukiyo-e artists before them, are ambitious and market savvy: a generation complicit with consumerism and heavy on merchandising. In a manner similar to Ukiyo-e artists, the high art/low art distinction is irrelevant to the Hiropon Factory and the artists happily market their work in both fine art and commercial or corporate spheres, cheerfully flaunting their ability to traverse both the pop culture and fine art environments. As Murakami chirruped about the reception of their well-attended blockbuster exhibition Superflat: ‘This was like a dream come true. It was like a rock show, people waiting in lines to see art.’

Hiropon Factory artwork enjoys high visibility throughout Japan including, somewhat notoriously, Takashi Murakami’s artwork for Louis Vuitton handbags or Chiho Aoshima’s store branding for Issey Miyake. The internationally touring exhibition Superflat, which toured throughout Japan and America in 2001, established the Hiropon Factory phenomenon in the west and added a new word to the vocabulary for describing aesthetic and conceptual tendencies in contemporary Japanese art.

The-business-of-art
The moniker of the Hiropon Factory is an obvious nod to Warhol’s production line / art-studio / party-palace ‘The Factory’. Warhol, notorious for unapologetically turning the ‘art of business’ into ‘the business of art’, is clearly a prototype for Murakami’s model of production. For Murakami is unapologetic regarding his aim of exploring the nexus between art and the market. On the Hiropon Factory website he writes of his task to ‘create art shows as spectacle to bring in the money’, his ‘campaign of enlightenment to create art fans at all levels in Japan’ and his desire that young artists be bought by ‘people of the same generation as cheaply and easily as a CD or DVD’. At Hiropon they covert a pop media position and:

‘play with and against a specific pop subculture, bound less by nationality than by obsession...[this is] a peculiar kind of practice that should appeal as much to Cowboy Bebop anime freaks in Milwaukee as to Commes des Garcons fans in Chelsea’

1 Takashi Murakami quoted in Eric Nakamura ‘The Year Otaku Broke’ artext No. 73: p 39
2. Murakami writes on the Hiropon Factory website at http://www.kaikaikiki.co.jp: ‘At shows around the country, exhibited work has sold like hot cakes and largely to visitors in their teens ... [Artists] have succeeded in achieving a rare bridging between high art and sculpture.’
3 Susan Kandal in ‘Oops! I Dropped My Dumplings’ artext No. 73: p 42
Hiropon are marketing pros – at www.hiropon-factory.com you can buy T-shirts, books, posters, videos, plastic toys and the ubiquitous key-ring. When I travelled through Japan Murakami's artwork was highly visible; his daisy designs covered buses, his work was sold in stores everywhere and his characters comprised the branding for a major new department store development called Roppongi Hills. I admit that this furious marketing and conflation with capitalism makes me queasy, but nevertheless I also find the work interesting for precisely this collusion. Murakami writes that Hiropon's art is fuelled by 'a consistent, primal revolutionary thirst for reinvention'⁴ a description that also quite brilliantly describes consumerism and, as such, sheds light on Hiropon's commercial success. Like Keith Haring's pop shop, or Jeff Koons' entire back catalogue, Hiropon perhaps do deliver on all levels and indeed, as David Rimanelli says, 'It's heartening to see a culture that takes its inauthenticity so seriously.'⁵

Superflat
The term ‘Superflat’ is a good description for ‘the levelling of high culture and subculture, the dissolving of borders between genres’⁶ effected by Hiropon. In a sense they proffer an artwork and an outlook that is ‘floating’. That is, there is something inherently hybrid and unanchored about the work – it is not tied entirely to specific genres, nationalities or even particular temporalities. Refusing purity and borrowing from everywhere, perhaps this is an artwork appropriate to late-capitalist, multinational, global economies and a world where the borders between (some) nations are flattening.

Superflat, however, is also a useful description for the artistic preoccupations of Hiropon members such as Murakami and Aoshima. It perfectly articulates their fixation with ‘flatness’, with levelling out images into pristine, two-dimensional surfaces. Created with an artistic disposition reminiscent of Ukiyo-e, Murakami and Aoshima’s images are figurative and narrative but, equally, they are meditations on flatness, abstraction, decoration and patterning. In a statement that could just as easily describe an Ukiyo-e print, Susan Kandal writes that Aoshima’s work: ‘is manic beauty tamed – quite literally flattened – by the mechanical eye such that it becomes a jigsaw puzzle of interlocking parts, each more beautiful than the next, but utterly – inevitably – abstracted from the real.’⁷

Takashi Murakami: “I’m jealous, everyone is more talented than me.”
Murakami specialises in the Nihon-ga tradition of art: that is, a conscious melding of Japan’s fine art heritage with external and often non-Japanese motifs. The first to receive a Ph.D. in Nihon-ga from Tokyo National University, his process involves the deliberate cross-pollination of different historical sources and artistic genres, and many of these sources and genres reflect the Ukiyo-e tradition.

Cosmos, for instance, lends from the tradition of painting on Japanese scrolls and screens with its tri-part ‘screen’ format and graceful, carefully balanced composition. Emblematic of Murakami’s craft, it is exquisitely preformed using a concise and controlled visual language with each element meticulously placed under the taut control of a perfectionist. It is an illustration in the sakura (cherry blossom) tradition but one underwritten with a definite post-war, pop culture mentality: pink, fluttering blossom has been replaced with mutant hysterical acid house daisies. Although both meditate upon the nature of time passing, Hiroshige’s sakura image has been updated by Murakami to include ‘80s smiley faces, pop art fluorescent colours and the shiny nature of plastic fantastic consumer goods.

Kaikai Kiki introduces Murakami’s cast of gloopy, balloon-like characters. They are a weird little clan – all wearing blissful pop smiles but undeniably mutated and deformed, kinda like Chernobyl-inspired Cabbage-Patch kids. They blob, ooze and morph around the composition, ogling each other with hundreds of groggy, wonderland eyes. These drowsy eyes are a recurring motif and, with their disinterested non-specific manner, they do indeed appear as the antithesis of the colonising gaze. They also continue (but invert) the Ukiyo-e tendency to open up considerations around viewing and spectatorship: for these multi-eyed creatures, perspective and viewing position are radically multiple, floating. For the Kaikai Kiki characters there is no one-point perspective or single viewing position; they enact a subject identity that has multiple (world) views and points-of-view.

---

⁴ Takashi Murakami at www.hiropon-factory.com
⁵ David Rimanelli ‘Takashi Murakami: Bard Centre for Curatorial Studies’ Artforum November 1999: p 135
⁶ Superflat catalogue writer Hiroki Azuma quoted in Raphael Rubinstein ‘In the Realm of the Superflat’: p 111
⁷ Susan Kandal in ‘Oops! I Dropped My Dumplings’ artext No. 73: p 42
The character Mr DOB appears continually in Murakami’s work. Mr. DOB is Murakami’s cartoon alter-ego and his ‘signature’. As such, Mr DOB is a mascot for Hiropon production: he symbolises the inauthenticity inherent in the reusable vector-inspired appearance of the Hiropon art object. Furthermore, Mr. DOB is obviously (and amusingly) a sibling of Mickey Mouse and he represents the ‘Disneyland as utopia’ manifesto, which includes a happy singing of his lack of origin, lack of responsibility, and immortality (DOB = [no] date-of-birth?). Mr. DOB wants for nothing it seems but, given Japan and America’s relationship, this hybrid character is underwritten with ambiguity. Mr. DOB is explicit recognition of the (cultural, historical and economic) imperialism of America: Mr. DOB is also much-loved Hiropon nemesis with an indefatigable, infectious sense of play. *DOB on Mountain* depicts a somewhat lonely looking Mr DOB perched on the summit of Mt Fuji (no ‘I have reached the summit’ mastery over nature meta-narratives here). The image is an updating of Hokusai’s classical woodblock print *Mount Fuji in Clear Weather*, c1823-29, for a contemporary audience. It just does not seem possible for a contemporary audience to gaze serenely and earnestly on a mountain anymore: Murakami’s image ripples with satire and irony, awkwardness and uncertainty, and it features a backdrop depicting a brilliant ‘enhanced’ sunset just like the ones after a nuclear explosion.

Mr. DOB is often accompanied by another of Murakami’s recurring motifs: a cluster of strangely morphing mushrooms. These whimsical and enchantingly patterned mushrooms would grow under the magic faraway tree but:

> For a Japanese artist to chose to paint a field of mutant, sometimes rather malign, mushrooms can’t help but summon up the ‘mushroom’ clouds that rose up above Hiroshima and Nagasaki half a century ago, and their aftermath of disease and deformity.7

Just as in *Uyiko-e* artworks, death is never far away from the Hiropon world. Murakami continually juxtaposes his (non-mortal and immortal) characters with huge and beautifully presented skulls. The grim reaper never looked so good. Strangely, it is difficult and easy at the same time to imagine the rotting of flesh on this skull, shown with a delicate posy wreath set deep in its sockets normally the preserve of worms. Something about the shiny surface and hyper-happiness of the work speaks inevitably of death. For me this meditation on beauty and impermanence connects the work to the *Ukiyo-e* tradition and this, combined with Murakami’s quotation of *Ukiyo-e* motifs and aesthetic tropes, makes it possible I would argue to position some of Murakami’s work as a contemporary incarnation of the *Ukiyo-e* tradition.

**Chiho Aoshima: Do you know what it feels like for a girl?**

Parasitical mushrooms also figure in Aoshima’s moribund stories of ‘eternal girlhood’. In *Mushroom Room* a poor *Sailor Moon*-esque girl slowly becomes fungus fodder as her pretty room becomes the scene for a bad bad trip. Aoshima illustrates the seedy side of *kawaii* (‘cute’) imagery: her girls are impossibly tender and framed by pretty flowers but their experiences are sometimes bad: their eyeballs pop out in *Golden Fish*, 1999, they eat disastrous food in *Poisonous Dumplings*, 1999, or they are blood-sucked to death by a chemically deformed nature in *Mushroom Room*, 2000. Hers is also a meditation on death despite the clinical, sanitised surface of her work.

Like Murakami, Aoshima’s compositions have a specific Japanese historical context. The spatial configuration of her large mural prints lend from Japanese narrative art, particularly the showing of many scenes happening concurrently on one ‘canvas’. This different pictorialising of time and space is anathema to Western art, which is slave to a linear narrative and, arguably, this feature adds to the hallucinogenic quality for the Western viewer.

Aoshima girls – so sweet, so blithely and prettily unaware – are doomed in their delirious worlds. In some images everything seems uncomfortably in flux: subjects float dizzily in the frame, skyscrapers compress on hapless young girls, pathways seem to wobble and disappear. All this lends an hallucinogenic quality to the world – a sense of uncontrollable dizziness and nausea-inducing floating. Some subjects – like Aoshima’s deteriorating schoolgirl with ‘don’t die’ scrawled on her mildewed textbook seems stuck in tableau that narrativise time fleeting and the anguish of mortality. At other times, Aoshima’s subjects seem to surrender and luxuriate in this quality of flux or floating: for instance, in *Mujina*, 2002, the subject seems free and light. In this sense I believe that interpretations of ‘sorrowful world’ and ‘floating world’ can be connected to Aoshima’s work.

---

7 Raphael Rubinstein ‘In the Realm of the Superflat’, p 111
The Morph: Boundary riding in an accelerated world

Morphing is a recurring preoccupation for many Hiropon artists: that is, pictorial elements shape-shift, melt and reconfigure, or exist fundamentally as composites. For example, in a typical Murakami piece, mushrooms expand into Mr. DOB who then expands to incorporate animal, natural, cartoon and/or human features (and vice versa). Mr. DOB and Co. exist in a ‘Wonder Twins Activate!’ world with no boundaries.

Since its appearance in the early 1990s, computergraphic morphing seems to have captured public imagination. In the West we seemed fascinated with the seamless, slick morph as seen in Michael Jackson’s *Black or White* video, James Cameron’s *The Terminator*, and countless car ads. Perhaps our fascination was – and is – not merely based on a technical ‘gee whiz’ response, but because the morph presents to us a metaphor for contemporary identity. Vivian Sobchack positions the digital morph as ‘cultural imaginary’:

Morphing and the morph are both novel – and specifically historical – concretisations of contemporary confusions, fears and desires and both, whether visible or invisible in their use, allegorise the quick-changes, fluid movements, and inhuman accelerations endemic to our daily lives ... the morph reminds us of true instability: our physical flux, our lack of self-coincidence, our subatomic as well as subcutaneous existence that is always in motion and ever-changing.8

There is nothing new about morphing per se – the concept of metamorphosis appears throughout history (and throughout the history of animation) – but the digital morph, rapidly subsuming everything in our non-stop culture, is. The morph is a useful description (and a powerful artistic language) in a world where boundary distinctions – whether social, political, economic or personal – are lapsing (superflattening) and we understand ourselves as inherently hybrid, global and the product of synthesis.

For the morph is a floating subject, one that is constantly changing and in flux. It is an identity with no fixed qualities, no clear beginning or end or, indeed, temporal origin. I believe that the morph is an appropriate signifier for contemporary identity and superflat narratives and, furthermore, a pertinent allegory for a world in which change seems the only constant. I enjoy the way in which the morph allegorises a floating subjectivity and a floating world, and enacts the Lacanian conundrum ‘I am not where you think I am, I am where you think I am not’.9

---

The male journey in popular cinema tends to be action-driven, externally oriented, linear; and its hero is often a loner who forges communities, but is also free (or cursed) to abandon them in the end (like Mad Max or Ethan Edwards in John Ford’s classic Western The Searchers, 1956).

The Female Gothic voyage, by contrast, is a fragile palimpsest, where a multiple layering of times and places, memories and desires, ever threaten to collapse upon the precarious, splintered subjectivity of the protagonist. And it is far more internal in its workings and promptings than the classic male journey; stressing emotion and mental processes as much as intimate bodily states and sensations, the female voyage admits to a whole range of determining neuroses and psychoses at the very heart of the grandest, most public world events. Space is a terrifyingly reversible thing in the Female Gothic, always uncertain and in flux. The physical world is both something outside of women – an emblem of their alienation – and inescapably inside them, unstoppably eating them away.

Adrian Martin
— ‘Lady, Beware: Paths Through the Female Gothic’ from Senses of Cinema (Issue 12, Feb-Mar 2001)
Chapter 05: Gothic Romance and Associated Genres

Other metaphorical and abstract representation practices: gothic romance, the uncanny, surrealism and magic realism – Horror and self-reflexivity – Death becomes her: gothic and the female imaginary – Victorian splendour: local traditions

Although the research for my Masters was primarily connected to the theme The Floating World I also acknowledge that my work intersects heavily with gothic aesthetics and concepts – in particular the ‘female gothic’ – as well as with associated genres such as magic realism, surrealism, the uncanny and horror. My interest in these genres can be connected to exploring both the mimetic and non-mimetic qualities of art (as discussed previously). That is, I am interested in the process of signification, in how forms come to hold content or how systems of meaning (signifying systems) are constructed. Like Ukiyo-e, gothic and horror representational practices rely on careful interplay between reality and fantasy. They ‘promote a sliding’ between mimetic, naturalistic forms (‘the house’) on the one hand and non-mimetic or imagined qualities (‘the haunted house’) on the other. Speaking broadly, this investigation is connected to an interest in semiology, in how meaning is constructed and articulated.

For me the aesthetic and conceptual devices considered under the thematic Gothic Romance closely intersect with my interest in The Floating World. I have described earlier my belief that Ukiyo-e is an artistic lineage that opens up considerations around perceptions of reality, rather than presenting a complete and authoritative picture of the world. I discussed how Ukiyo-e images philosophically attest to their own incompleteness and force contemplation of the ethereal and invisible as much as to the visible and conventional. I believe that these descriptions could just as easily describe other metaphorical and representational practices such as gothic romance, the uncanny, surrealism and so on.

Horror and self-reflexivity
Part of my interest in the gothic and horror genres is that they are particularly self-reflexive genres. This is nicely enacted by Philip Brophy in an article which discusses contemporary horror films:

The contemporary Horror film knows that you’ve seen it before; It knows that you know what is about to happen; and it knows that you know it knows you know. And none of it means a thing, as the cheapest trick in the book will still tense your muscles, quicken your heart and jangle your nerves.¹

For the horror and gothic genres are self-reflexive, they are ‘genre[s] about genre’. Both genres are comprised of devices and codes that quite consciously ‘play’ with their audience – the forms are not interested in portraying ‘realism’ but rather they delight in engaging the viewer in a dialogue of textual manipulation.² For me this is also something that the Ukiyo-e artists quite consciously perform – it relates back to a delight in mingling observational drawing with abstraction and imagined spaces. Furthermore, the medium of animation has a history that could arguably connect to the gothic. From its early incarnation as ‘magic lantern’ shows that frightened their audience through ghostly apparitions of moving-but-not-alive subjects, through the whole concept of ‘animating’ something that is not alive.

My work often draws on the gothic palette. I like to reconfigure vessels that come pre-haunted – such as bats, cornucopia, twilight states and full moons, lightening, lilies, skeletons and zombies – into gothic tableau. My work is less about creating an actually scary environment than about cataloguing the signifiers of horror. My project is about ‘performatve’ horror, about carrying out an inventory of emblems that have been culturally invested with the gothic. As such, it is a project about iconography, about how forms historically come to hold content and, in particular, how some forms can represent the un-representable.

² ibid. p 46.
Death Becomes Her: Gothic and the Female Imaginary

In discussing a series of ‘impulses’ that he clustered together under the term ‘Female Gothic’, Adrian Martin described Female Gothic films as those that present:

‘narrative, psychic and emotional confusions ... in which victimisers and victims, abusers and abused, dream lovers and demon lovers, those who can manipulate hard reality and those who succumb to wild, ravishing fantasy, can find themselves trading places in an instant. The Female Gothic is, at its core, a genre based on instability, ambiguity and ambivalence, in relation to the very status of reality as much as to questions of identity politics.’

The Female Gothic is concerned with presenting subjects, spaces and narratives that are in flux, unstable or ambiguous. In my artwork I try to enact a movement between the beautiful and the nightmarish, to invoke a sliding from beauty into terror. I am also compelled by concepts connected to ‘the uncanny’ – things that are everyday or ubiquitous but that have become strange or malevolent. Many writers have described how malevolent forces within the Female Gothic genre often happen in domestic settings or within relationships close to the protagonist (within the ‘family romance’ or a love relationship). Always an ambiguous space, within the Female Gothic there is no easily drawn line between good and evil, safe and unsafe. Indeed, within the Female Gothic terrain both are present at once; safe and unsafe, good and evil are twin and concurrent states – it’s just that the scale may tip more heavily toward one, or continue to hover uneasily between the two.

All this talk of ambiguity and instability recalls Kristeva’s notion of ‘the abject’; for, as she writes, ‘abjection is above all ambiguity’. The concept of the border is important to her discussion, with the abject an impulse that ‘does not respect borders, positions, rules’ and in transgressing these boundaries ‘disturbs identity, system, order’. With the border overturned, the abject is the place where meaning collapses. It is a disordered, ambiguous state. I am fond of using creatures that transgress borders: the zombie, the vampire, the skeleton – all are creatures that do not respect the boundary between dead and alive. They ride roughshod over our comforting conceptions of life and confound our systems of meaning (how can it be dead if it is alive?). I like the figure of the zombie and the vampire as creatures that, through their very presence, deconstruct our systems of order and meaning.

Victorian Splendour: Local Traditions

Much of my work relates to growing up on a farm in Central Victoria. The farm has a large English garden built by my grandmother and the house, in its architecture and furnishing, is reminiscent of the Victoria era. The house and garden are very feminine spaces but somehow also very haunted spaces – they are evidence of an attempt to reconfigure the landscape in a manner that creates the illusion of an English tradition. This wistful fiction is completely at odds with the reality of the Australian landscape outside, which is mostly arid and parched. This attempt to recreate England within Australia is visible all over Australia, and there is something that relates to the gothic or the haunted about this tradition. My work connects back to a local Australia tradition or history of gothic aesthetics that could perhaps be described as ‘Victorian splendour’.

---

2 Adrian Martin ‘Lady, Beware: Paths Through the Female Gothic’ from Senses of Cinema (www.sensesofcinema.com) Issue 12, Feb-Mar 2001
The Guide to Projects section has been divided into four sections – drawing, animation, curatorial projects and research trips – each representing a different aspect to my art practice.
Drawing
‘The Floating World’ and ‘Wormwood’ prints

The Wormwood and The Floating World prints were the result of my research into Ukiyo-e concepts and aesthetics. In particular I was exploring aesthetic devices and concepts connected to Ukiyo-e and ideas connected to the theme The Floating World. This included, for instance, using representational practices such as patterning, cropping, lack of picture depth and flattening. It also included creating my own local vocabulary of aesthetic metaphors for time passing and impermanence, including representing the Australian landscape and exploring narratives from my own history.

The Wormwood and The Floating World prints were also the result of my research into themes connected to Gothic Romance. In the images there is a deliberate tension between beauty and the uncanny. For instance, in many drawings much of the pictorial space is given over to decorative flourishes and abstract cornucopias. However these decorative motifs encircle frames that depict narrative and figurative scenes that are often nightmarish or, at least, melancholy. I was interested in exploring the nexus between decoration and the uncanny, which is behind much gothic artwork.

The images are autobiographical – they relate to events that happened in my life – as well as being explorations of abstraction and referencing motifs evident in Ukiyo-e artworks as well as motifs from gothic artworks and narratives. The autobiographical content relates to growing up in Langley in Central Victoria on a farm with a large garden. My grandmother was well known as a country gardener and breeder of plants. After moving to the property in 1933 she transformed an empty and dusty paddock into a large and beautiful English garden. The garden was (and is) always in a fragile state – under siege from locusts, bushfires and droughts – and I was always aware of its fragility. Particularly now, it seems evidence of an older time and outlook and a heritage connected to England. The garden is a part of Australia that is partly ‘Forever England’ and the different environment means that the plants are always in a fight for survival.

Some of the tableaux relate to events in my life (although abstracted) and others are drawn from stories about the region. The region was rife with strange – and often surreal – stories. Tales of horrible gun accidents, sightings of wild black panthers living on ‘Black Hill’, of ‘weird’ religious sects practising their strange arts in secrecy, of eternal droughts and fires and paddocks littered with bones. It is also an area close to Hanging Rock with its myths of missing girls and strange happenings.

I would argue that the landscape of Australia is rife with gothic potential. The birth of the nation ‘Australia’ was accompanied by violence and dispossession. For me the idea of overlaying the dry and brown Australian countryside with English country gardens and verdant pastures, as my grandmother did, is a kind of ‘Floating World’. It is an attempt to create a lost Arcadia, a softer ‘mother country’. The garden is a very beautiful place and interesting as a hybrid place but it’s also a motif from a difficult colonial history. It is also always threatened; plants used to the mild climate of England are always on the brink of extinction when faced with the blistering northerly winds and scorching 40-degree days that are common in Central Victoria. For me, this incredibly beautiful garden – one that I love to work in – which is planted on ‘Terra Nullius’ is a tale of two histories that perhaps can never co-exist peacefully.

Please see the Appendix for documentation related to Wormwood and The Floating World including catalogues and publicity material.
Wormwood
Option Escape (West Space Gallery, Melbourne, 2004)
The Floating World

Address Book (Bus Gallery, Melbourne, and Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart, 2005)

Videolovematevideo (PhatSpace Gallery, Sydney, 2005)

Salon des Freehands (Seventh Gallery, Melbourne, 2005)

RMIT Sieman’s Art Prize (RMIT Gallery, Melbourne, 2006)
Animation
We Gotta Get Outta This Place
Descore II (ACMI, 2005)
Concept

*We gotta get out of this place* is an animated portrait of ‘Stevie’, a character living in a small Australian town, who is unhappy and yearning for a different life. As the narrative progresses this yearning and dissatisfaction builds in him to the point where, much like in a musical, there is a shift in momentum and a song begins. The song marks a shift into different territory for the animation – again, much like in a musical, the song symbolises a space where anything is possible.

The song is essential to the animation; it gives Stevie an ability to express what he cannot say. As he is propelled into this transformed space, a distinct metamorphosis occurs which changes him and his world. As he sings, he inhabits a phantasmagorical space created within the medium of animation.

*We gotta get out of this place* has a neo-gothic aesthetic – it is filled with icons and motifs from fantasy and horror. This is partly a nod to the subculture of the protagonist, but it also works to create a semiological space in which dystopian themes resonate. There is a predominance of black – a spookiness appropriate to a down-on-its-luck place full of unhappy characters.

The animation continues my interest in *Floating World* aesthetics such as flattening, lack of depth, patterning and abstraction. The animation also explores the idea of ‘floating’ in both a literal and metaphorical sense. The character literally floats over his world, but also he is a character in flux – he yearns for change and transformation and the work tracks the movement of his desires.

The project continues my interest in artforms and narratives in which transformation and metamorphosis occur. I am interested in animations and drawings as complex pictorial spaces that encourage a kind of ‘suspension of disbelief’ – spaces where we accept that the rules of the physical world don’t apply, and where, in contrast, metamorphosis or abstraction can occur unhindered.

The animation references songs that were popular when I was growing up. For instance, the title takes its name from The Angels’ desperado song *We gotta get out of this place*, and the project is based on a re-score of Dragon’s song *Rain*. These are musical scores dear to the hearts of many in small Australia towns, however the versions performed in *We gotta get outta this place* radically remove them from their original context.

*We gotta get out of this place* was created for Descore II, a series of screenings curated by Philip Brophy for ACMI. Philip and I collaborated on this project, in which I did the writing and animation and he created the score as well as acting in the role of producer.
Story

_We gotta get out of this place_ is a portrait of ‘Stevie’, a male character stuck in a rural place with little sense of his own agency and no opportunities to grasp onto. His life is constantly on pause and, although he yearns for something, he doesn’t know quite what it may be. He has never had a chance to express himself and doesn’t even know how to begin to do so.

Stevie is around thirty-five to forty54years of age. He does not feel he ‘has his whole life in front of him’: he feels that his chances are diminishing and that his hopes have turned out to be pipe dreams. He is desperate but not in a frenzied way: he is philosophical about his unhappiness – it has been with him his whole life and he is used to carrying it.

The first section of the animation describes Stevie’s life to us. It is primarily one of waiting, frustration and emptiness. There is a crippling sense of inertia and boredom surrounding him. Overall there is a mix of the heroic and the pathetic about Stevie: we want to see some change in him, we want him to break free but his inability to do so also frustrates us.

If the first section is a description of yearning and restlessness, the second section is about rupture – of jump-starting an otherwise flattened-out energy. The setting moves from a relatively naturalistic one into a more heightened theatrical mode. The pacing moves from slow and dragging, to energised and vibrant, pushed along by the surround-sound musical score which is a deconstructed version of _Rain_ by Dragon.

The second section of the animation turns into a kind of mock rock opera in which Stevie performs the song _Rain_ and manages to leave his life of frustration and dissatisfaction behind. As the character sings, there is a swelling of mood and an important shift happens within Stevie. He is not the defeated character that we were first introduced to. Stevie recognises that this euphoric interlude is to help him see that things could be different and, indeed, must be different. He realises that he needs to leave this place – he has never been happy here. He leaves to seek his fortune elsewhere. He is out of this place.

Aims

Through creating _We gotta get out of this place_ I aimed to:

- create an animated portrait that could be configured in an installation format and/or a linear narrative for screening
- explore the idea of ‘expanded cinema’ as a process and a model for contemporary art practice
- explore the audio-visual relationship in an innovative way and as the basis for a collaboration
- explore animation as a pictorial space that encourages suspension of disbelief and as a space where metamorphosis is possible
- explore animation and drawing as semiotic codes – that is, explore an aesthetic that prefers highly coded symbols to realism. In particular, explore the motifs and icons connected to the gothic
- explore song as a narrative device that builds up a portrait of a character, including using devices like a ‘chorus’, ‘bridge’ or ‘coda’ to further extend the narrative meaning
- create a series of portraits that are based on and feature local Australian context and culture
- further my animating skills

Please see the Appendix for documentation related to _We gotta get out of this place_ including a DVD of the animation.
A branch, a leaf, the sky
A branch, a leaf, the sky

A *branch, a leaf, the sky* is an animated work that comprises a series of movement and composition studies that explore qualities of ‘floating’ and ‘abstraction’. The project enabled me to practice and explore different methods of animating in Flash. I consciously approached the project with an experimental attitude – that is, I wanted to try various different techniques of animating and also of drawing abstract compositions. I explored a few different compositional styles and methods of animating before selecting the illustrations and compositions I thought worked best as the basis for animating the final piece.

Throughout the process of making the work I also carefully considered the audio-visual relationship. The animation is choreographed to the sound. I used a composition by local artist Cornel Wilczek (performing under the alias *Qua*), who is also a current masters candidate at RMIT. I chose the piece *The Air is Thin in Here* because I felt it had an appropriate melodic ‘floating’ quality. The original work is seven minutes long so I choose a segment of the song that I thought had interesting edit points.

The work is also the result of researching and closely studying the lineage of early non-objective European animators such as Oskar Fischinger, Walter Ruttmann, Viking Eggeling and Hans Richter. In particular I was inspired by Walter Ruttmann’s hand-coloured film *Lichtspiel Opus 1* (1920) and Oskar Fischinger’s brilliantly animated charcoal and paper works *Study Number 6* (1930) and *Study Number 7* (1931). These artists, who came from a background of abstract painting, seized on new technologies surrounding the advent of film to create new possibilities for painting. The artists combined their abstract painting practices with the temporal qualities afforded by film to create inventive and beautifully animated compositions. They also often created a live audio accompaniment or, later, a recorded soundtrack for their works. They variously – and excitedly – described their practices as ‘painting in time’, ‘art in movement’, ‘visual music’, ‘symphony of light and sound’, ‘eurythmics in space and time’ and ‘cinematic painting’. The artists were seeking to challenge and push the boundaries of painting and were innovative in their techniques often, for instance, hand painting slides or film to enhance the compositions or creating multiple projections. As Walter Ruttmann writes, they were conceiving of ‘a new type of artist ... somewhere between panting and music’.

The artists were also inspired by the idea of Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk* – or ‘total artwork’ – which encouraged the synthesis of multiple artforms into one immersive and dynamic whole. I see these artists as early ‘new media’ artists practising early forms of immersive multimedia and installation art. Oskar Fischinger, for instance, called his elaborately configured rooms with their multiple light projections *‘Raumlichtkunst’* (‘Space Light Art’) and inventively configured spaces so that they offered immersive experiential opportunities for viewers. Using unabashed poetic language, Fischinger described his 1927 work *R-1* as ‘... an intoxication by light from a thousand sources. A happening of the soul, of the eyes, of the eye’s waves, wave streams, sun flowing, a level vanishing, a sudden eruption, an awakening, ceremonial, sun rising, effervescent, star rhythms, star lustre, a singing, surf breaking over chasms, a world of illusions of movements of lights, sound and song tamed.’
1. Oskar Fischinger Still from Study No 6 (1930)
2. Viking Eggeling Still from Symphonie Diagonale (1924)
3. Oskar Fischinger Still from Study No 6 (1930)
4. Walter Ruttman Still from Lichtspiel Opus 1 (1926)
5. Hans Richter Still from Rhythmus 21 (1921)
6. Oskar Fischinger Still from Study No 12 (1932)
Curatorial Projects
Producing Option Escape was a difficult experience for me but one that offered valuable learning and development opportunities. I had never worked in a curatorial or production role before, and the process behind creating a show like Option Escape and working with a larger arts organisation incorporated a huge learning curve.

Option Escape was accepted into Next Wave’s developmental KickStart program, which mentors projects a year before the festival to help them develop. Through KickStart I learnt (previously non-existent) skills related to setting up and managing budgets, developing curatorial frameworks, marketing and publicity skills (such as writing media releases), securing venues, and managing legal and OH&S obligations. It was, at times, a difficult process to navigate but hugely valuable in terms of the professional skills that it gave me. This involvement with Next Wave encouraged me to apply for and successfully undertake a role as an Associate Producer for the following festival.

Initially I curated the exhibition on my own but a few months in I asked a participating artists, Madeleine Griffin, to co-curate with me. This was partly so I could delegate tasks (because I was finding the project so time-heavy), but also because Madeleine brought greater experience with regards to production skills to the project.

Overall the project was successful with good attendances and feedback. We successfully applied for and secured finances beyond what we had hoped for, which meant that we could pay the artists a (relatively decent) artist fee as well as covering all production costs (gallery rent, hire of presentation equipment and printing costs). I learnt much about working as a curator/producer and how to conceptualise curatorial frameworks through which to consider other artists’ work. Furthermore, I had the opportunity to make my own work under the theme The Floating World and then consider it in relation to other artists whose work I believed had interesting resonances and perspectives on The Floating World.

Please see the Appendix for documentation related to Option Escape including the catalogue and marketing materials.
Option Escape (installation view), Westspace Gallery, 2004
Containers Village

Next Wave ‘Empire Games’ Festival, Shed 14, Melbourne Docklands, 15th - 26th March 2004

Scale model of Containers Village
Next Wave Containers Village

The Containers Village was a public art exhibition that was a major project of the 2006 Next Wave Festival and the Youth Program of the Cultural Festival of the Commonwealth Games. The Containers Village brought together artist-run galleries and groups from across Australia and the Commonwealth as part of a major group exhibition. The exhibition was housed within Shed 14, a large warehouse situated on a pier in Melbourne’s Docklands, in a cluster of temporary exhibition spaces created from forty-three 20-foot shipping containers stacked up to two-high and connected via walkways and stairs. Each collective of artists was given a container in which to exhibit or create work.

Submissions for the Containers Village were invited in response to the Next Wave festival theme ‘Empire Games’, the original name of the Commonwealth Games. Projects included installations, exhibitions, collaborations, performance art and studio practice (that is, some artists chose to use the containers as a work space in which to create work or to collaborate with each other). Preference was given to works that involved ongoing occupation of the space. The Containers Village was also a site for workshops and forums across a diverse range of topics and practices.

I held the role of Associate Producer for this project. This entailed responsibility for: developing curatorial structures and themes with the Artistic Director, selecting work through participation on curatorial committees, producing and developing artistic content (particularly from the 23 Australian groups that participated), seeking funding, working closely with the Production Manager to negotiate the particular logistical challenges of the space, and co-managing the day-to-day operation of the space.

The Containers Village as ‘Floating World’
The Containers Village intersected with the theme The Floating World and this theme was something I reflected upon often throughout the development of the project. That is, I thought of the Containers Village as a ‘Floating World’ and regarded the project as an experiment based around creating a transient, temporary and somewhat ephemeral world filled with inhabitants of different nationalities and from different parts of the globe.

When thinking through the conceptual rationale for the Containers Village I was constantly reflecting upon the notion of ‘world’ and interested in such questions as:

- What is the status of nationality in the contemporary world? How important is nationality as a connecting device?
- How true is the rhetoric that the world has been flattened by globalisation? Are the local and the vernacular as present as the global and the multi-national? How do they relate? Can they co-exist comfortably, or does one impinge upon the other?
- Is there such a thing as an authentic nationality or identity? Was there ever? Are we all hybrids? How does hybridity operate?
- How does each container, filled as it is with a particular nationality, become a mini-embassy for a country? Is it – indeed, can it be – representative of a culture? Or is it more representative of an artistic or aesthetic practice?
- Are the artists connected more by outlook and attitude and, of course, artistic practice than by nationality?
- In the development and populating of the structure were boundaries established? Were these boundaries real and/or of a more ephemeral ‘cultural’ nature? Conversely, how were boundaries flattened?
- How does our local environment shape our identities? How are our identities shaped by global influences?
- What is the role of America? Although there were no Americans participating in this project, American cultural and economic imperialism was ever visible in themes and motifs. Why is American cultural and economic imperialism so pervasive? Is America the new empire?
- As artists of different nationalities do we have a common vocabulary? What is shared? What is segregated?
- How was Containers Village segregated through artistic concerns? For instance, how did Warren, a rambling cubby house made out of discarded mattresses and blankets, become regarded as the ‘shanty town’ at the ‘bottom’ of the Containers Village? Do hierarchies of wealth structure even the most temporary of societies?
The idea of a Floating World also influenced the production design of the Containers Village. As its name suggests, the project was structured to create an environment similar to a ‘village’ that the audience navigated through different pathways such as narrow laneways, cul-de-sacs, major thoroughfares or highways, and dead ends. Similarly the space was divided up in ways recognisable from villages – there were residential areas as well as large open ‘city squares’ with shops or areas for the public to congregate. The containers were configured within the shed in different arrangements, sometimes stacked up to two containers high and connected by walkways constructed out of scaffolding. The overall effect was part tree-house and part village. As well as projects housed within the containers, artists were asked to configure work around the containers so that, as you approach the end of a laneway for instance, a site-specific installation or projection might be encountered.

The Containers Village was interesting to observe as a temporary society – a floating world – that was inherently cross-national and hybrid. Happily, despite some neighbourly disputes and fervently articulated differences in opinion, our society was a relatively utopian one. Many different (artistic and political) viewpoints and beliefs were represented and articulated but, on the whole, the inhabitants co-existed peacefully.

Please see the Appendix for documentation related to the Containers Village including the festival guide and marketing materials.
Research Trip
Australia Council RUN_WAY Grant Research Trip to Japan
November 2005

Map of Kyoto

Flyer for the Digital Art Festival
In order to conduct primary research towards my masters I applied to the Australia Council for a RUN_WAY Young and Emerging Professional Development Grant to visit Japan.

My RUN_WAY grant was for the purpose of attending the Digital Arts Festival, an annual festival held in Tokyo that charts new developments and themes in digital art, as well as for visiting galleries and organisations that comprise important sites of activity for digital and new media production. This included visiting contemporary art galleries such as the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Art Tower Mito and La Foret Gallery, as well as galleries that house collections of historical works such as Tokyo National Museum and Edo-Tokyo Museum. I was fortunate to be visiting Tokyo at a time when the Tokyo National Museum was holding a large survey show of the artist Hokusai, and also when the Yokohama Triennial of Contemporary Art was being presented.

I spent two and a half weeks in Japan, which included travelling to Kyoto, Yokohama and Hakone. It was a valuable opportunity and I feel that my ideas, understanding and art practice developed as a result of this opportunity.

The research trip was valuable because it enabled me to:

• Undertake primary research: It was invaluable to view original artworks in the cultural context in which they were produced – whether this was seeing a Meiji-era Floating World screen in a temple or Takashi Murakami’s ‘Mr. Dob’ character painted all over buses or Louis Vuitton bags. I felt like I had a real chance to properly consider the works of art that inspire my own practice.

• Build up a library of original prints, audiovisual material and books/DVDs: Japan has an amazing library of audiovisual materials and books. There seemed to be endless collections and I bought some valuable resource materials. I also bought some Ukiyo-e woodblock prints from different eras.

• New audiences: Soon after I was in Japan my animation Brace, Brace was shown at Design Festa as part of Bus Gallery’s exhibit. This was part of an exhibition that Bus had previously shown at PhatSpace in Sydney but I think that my work was also chosen because it has a particular dialogue with Japanese art.

• Inspiration for new artworks: Although I didn’t have much time or space to work, I did a lot of preparatory sketches, drawings, synopsis and thinking-through of ideas for work in response to the artwork I was seeing.

• Understanding of new technology: Visiting places like the SONY Building, which presents ‘future’ technology, gave me a sense of different technological configurations I could use. In particular I was interested in monitors and screens.

• Exploring different curatorial models for the presentation of digital art: There is so much audiovisual material screened in Japan – whether advertising blaring on the streets or digital art installed in galleries. It was helpful to look at different configurations, the different technology used and different ways of spatialising work. I felt I came away with better ideas about how to install my own artwork as well as future curatorial projects.

• Consideration of installation models for the Next Wave festival: The Yokohama Triennial, which was housed in a warehouse on the docks at Yokohama, was particularly interesting for me because it related to my role as an Associate Producer working on Next Wave’s Containers Village. It was insightful for me to walk around the warehouse and look at how work had been installed and the warehouse space configured.