

Kyara-play and the fluid self

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Declaration for PhD Thesis

I, Mari Kamada, hereby certify that this thesis has been written by me, and that the material presented for examination is the record of work carried out by me, or principally by myself in collaboration with others as acknowledged.

No part of this thesis has been used previously in work related to an academic degree.

Signature:

Date:

Acknowledgement

I am grateful for all support given by my supervisors, Luciana Parissi and Rajyashree Pandey.

Abstract

This thesis examines how identity-formation in the context of contemporary Japan can be understood in terms of “kyara-play,” a pervasive and performative practice in which the subject circumstantially defines and enacts multiple-selves mediated by history, language, and technology.

Challenging existent nihonjinron readings of Japanese identity, we open an understanding of kyara-play drawing on James Gibson’s concept of ecological psychology (Gibson, 1950/1966/1986). The concept will be further developed in terms of post-Gibsonian thinking (Fuller, 2005; Golonka, 2015; Hodges, 2009; Knappett, 2005; Norman, 2013), to discuss the media-cultural configuration of the subject, with a specific focus on the performative nature of the concept of Gibson’s theory of “affordance.” This focus allows the thesis to examine the generality and specificity of cultural identities, and will argue for the pragmatic interdependence between subject and environment.

This thesis will also draw on the concepts of “assemblage” and “meme” to underpin its analysis of the fluid self as a vehicle for kyara-play, and focus on the prevalence of “seken,” understood as a normative governing power which opens up the production of the ambiguous self through kyara-play.

Continuing an ecological psychologist perspective, we trace how Japanese language functions relationally as an equivocal determinant, which has an equally pervasive influence on the ways the subject thinks, perceives and references circumstantially-defined multiple-selves in relation to the mediated environment.

Drawing on Gibson further, I will use his theories of perception to discuss how manga and the subject inter-relate, inspiring multi-form, media-mix transformations, traceable through the case studies of artists Murakami Takashi and Aida Makoto. Through their performative engagement with multiple kyara-play in multiple-dimensional spaces, we can analyse the ecological view of perception as central to an understanding of cultural formations, and appreciate how the subject perceives “the self” as a reflection of one’s surrounding environment: the ecology of self, fluidly enacted through kyara-play.

Glossary

All translations from Japanese to English are done by myself unless an English translation was already available.

Where authors' surnames are the same, I have included their initials or given names to differentiate one from another.

A Japanese name is listed as a surname followed by a given name, as is the Japanese tradition.

Japanese words are depicted in italics except for certain words like "manga," which are commonly used in the West. Japanese book and article titles are often obscure, so I have approximated as best I can with my translations.

References follow American Psychological Association formats, and translations from Japanese to English are notated with Hepburn romanization.

Keywords

ba: the characteristic or specificity of a space, which may change according to circumstances.

circumselves: the term I coined to describe the act of playing *kyara* as a means of adapting the self circumstantially.

dōjinshi: a privately published magazine featuring manga/anime fans' amateur derivative work. *Dōjin* literally means "the same person," which refers to one or several persons that have common interests and goals, and "*shi*" means a paper.

garage kit: an assembly scale model kit, usually cast in polyurethane resin. In Japan, kits often portray anime characters.

honkadori: the notion of *honkadori*, is usually invoked in reference to classical poetry, in which a poem makes an allusion to an earlier poem. It has also been used historically in visual contexts.

kyara: character or personality. "Kyara" is written in the *katakana* notation form, キャラ, and its usage for the word "kyara" clearly reinforces its connection to the Western word "character."

manga: although the two terms, manga and comic, have no strict difference in meaning, to simplify the use of relevant terms, the thesis uses "manga" to indicate a comic produced by a Japanese creator, and the term "comic" as created by a non-Japanese comic creator.

media-mix: as an approach to creating derivative works from manga, anime, games, etc. in multi-form productions across Japanese culture.

mitate: a creative awareness that through an improvisatory engagement encourages the subject to invent new perspectives on an existing subject matter. It allows and plays with all things equivocal. The word *mitate* also means a diagnosis or medial opinion, a choice, an estimation (Kōjien, 2018). However, this thesis is concerned with *mitate* as applied in cultural formations.

omote: the front or front face.

the *mitate*-awareness: I coined this term to describe a particular awareness nurtured via the use of the intermediaries in Japanese ecological conditions. It is a sensibility that permeates the Japanese milieu.

seken: an extremely ubiquitous term, *seken* can be described as “the world, the society, and the way to live within it.” It is the yardstick by which one is obliged to conform in society.

sekentei: one’s front face in public view, one’s reputation in *seken*.

soto: outside, others.

telop: “TELEvision Optical slide Projector” was introduced in 1949.

three-dimensional computer graphics (3DCG): 3DCG use a three-dimensional representation of geometric data that is stored in the computer to help gain accuracies of movement, and for calculations used for transforming three-dimensional objects into two-dimensional images.

uchi : inside, us, house. *Uchi* can also mean “myself,” but since we are looking at a pair of words – *uchi* and *soto* --- we do not need to explore this aspect in the thesis.

ura: back, a hidden face

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Chapter 1: Introducing kyara-play

1-1: Introduction

This thesis aims to demonstrate how the subject, in the course of daily life, constantly engages with the ecological conditions --- the mediated environment --- he or she lives in, and that this medial process¹ can lead to the embodiment of multiple-selves — what I call “*circumselves*.” Perhaps the most absorbing and significant vehicle for this is what is known in contemporary Japan as “*kyara-play*.” For convenience at this stage, we can say that *kyara-play* is a more fluid and sophisticated form of multiple role-play, geared to the subject performatively adapting to a perception of circumstance.

Situationally-defined *circumselves*, a concept defining the performativity of various social roles, can of course be found elsewhere and certainly in the West, as no doubt in all societies. People adopt different roles in the course of daily life: a husband becomes the policeman, becomes the father, becomes the friend, and will usually and naturally speak, behave and dress differently according to the specifics of the circumstance. We can readily observe that this person may say, “Dad wants you to go bed...” to his daughter with a soft voice and a smile on his face. But when he deals with a criminal inquiry, may choose to address himself as “DCI Officer Thompson” with a strong voice and neutral expression on his face.

Coordinating the total impression one presents is vital for role performance, and we might conclude that so-called social role-play can be understood as either a form of theatrical performance when it is regarded as a deliberate activity, initiated by the subject’s willingness to participate, or as a situational activity in which the subject recognizes the need to modify the self through the processes of constructing and reconstructing his or her role-making.

Erving Goffman (1959) explores the former point of view, offering us his concept of *dramaturgical personae* in which he states that, no matter the

¹ This thesis refers to Mathew Fuller’s definition of a medial whose power is “made in the ontogenetic, reality-forming nature of a media and in its capacity for connection and use” (Fuller, 2005, p.2).

variation of circumstances, the subject is *able to control* the impression he or she wants to give, just as an actor would perform differently according to whether being in “front” of an audience or being in a “back stage” situation. Goffman’s position defines the tradition of role-play, granting the subject an autonomy that discounts the possibility of actual negotiation with the mediated environment. For another eminent role-theorist, Ralph Turner (1978), however, an enactment of social role-play is inevitably engaged with negotiating various social conflicts. His viewpoint would consequently lean towards the latter interpretation of role-play, because the subject, in his view, is inevitably involved in a kind of role-merger simply by the empathetic processes of engagement and interaction. Indeed both of these thinkers talk about social roles as outcomes of interaction not precondition, but they nevertheless view the subject as capable of managing which role to play with the minimum impact from ecological conditions.

Thinking of the subject as an integral part of the socially-institutionalized medial system, Judith Butler (1988) maintains a position which is not fully convinced by Goffman’s views, and stands, in her references to the mediated environment, in some measure closer to the lines of thought pursued in this thesis. Indeed, disagreeing with Goffman’s belief that the subject is able to handle his or her theatrical performance via *impression management* (Goffman, 1959), she writes about “a self which assumes and exchanges various ‘roles’ within the complex social expectations of the ‘game’ of modern life” (Butler, 1988, p.528).

Irregardless of what one wants, living in a contemporary society inevitably and constantly exposes oneself to the mediated environment in which everything, including of course issues of gender, cannot be disengaged from pre-existent notions of an encode-decode system, indoctrinating the public via mass media circulation. This is the reason why Butler tells us masculine and feminine roles are socially constructed (Butler, 1988/1993/2004/2006), sidelining consequently one’s biological condition, the materiality of body having less or the least relevance.

Taking Butler’s line of thinking further, the thesis will focus on contemporary Japan from the turn of this century --- when the idea of kyara-play became known to the public (Inoue, Y. 2017; Saitō, T. 2011/2013) --- up till to the present time. This period coincides with two critical factors, which have

shaped people's way of life ever since: the invention and prevalence of personal computers and Internet systems (cyberspace activities); and the changes to Japanese demographic conditions. Our aim here is to trace how these widespread changes in the country's ecological conditions had such a pronounced influence on the subject's perception and action as to instigate kyara-play.

In this sense, kyara-play can be considered the viable contemporary version of multiple role-play, having a flexibly inventive, appealing and intensive approach to engaging with the various circumstances happening throughout everyday life. We can see it as a communication tool for social interaction, the vehicle whereby the subject engages with performance --- the adopting of a kyara --- in order to at once harmonize with a set of circumstances and express something of oneself --- to indeed project a "self" into the situation that helps all involved.

The cultural significance of kyara-play has been extensively analyzed by commentators specializing in a wide variety of disciplines. We can read material from the perspectives of psychology, business consultation, sociology, school education, sociolinguistics, broadcast writing, etc. There are dozens of articles and online forums (FNN Prime, 2018; Kojima, 2016; Nakoshi, 2015a/2015b; Yahoo! Japan, 2014/2016/2017) actively discussing the issue, and we are also able to find a large and eclectic mix of published, cross-genre studies. These factors alone suggest that the idea of playing kyara has become integral to the ways the subject may perceive the self. We can see that a number of business consultants, for example, regard kyara-play as a vital business skill, enabling one to take the initiative in a competitive market (Suginuma, 2006; Kamiyō, M. 2005). Psychologists such as Saitō Tamaki (2011/2013/2017), Naitō Yoshihito (2013) and Enomoto Hiroaki (2014/2018), argue that understanding the cultural significance of kyara-play, whereby personal relationships as well as oneself, are formed via playing kyara, is absolutely crucial. Inoue Yoshitaka (2017) also claims that the phenomenon has indeed infiltrated the entirety of Japanese society, drawing adherents from its youth to its adults, including --- most interestingly --- politicians concerned about which kyara they should play.

Rather than thinking that the subject simply represents the self as one likes, irregardless of all, or that it is an expression of inherent Japanese uniqueness per se, this thesis will show that kyara-play has emerged as the result of

negotiating with the 21th century's technologically-mediated environment,² and will analyze the kyara-play phenomenon through the application of James Gibson's affordance theory and the lens of ecological psychology.

The methodology chapter will closely examine several case studies from individuals' real experiences of playing kyara, and explains how ecological psychology helps us gauge the total flow of medial processes the subject engages with. We will look into the relationship between the detection of a particular affordance and the awareness one derives from living within a particular milieu, within a mediated environment with its own intermediaries. In this sense we can recognize affordance as the purveyor of kyara-play, the indicator, the performed decision that announces what the subject has learnt, negotiated, and finally caused to happen through improvising with, or in relation to, the living environment.

To gauge the impact of ecological conditions in shaping the interaction between the subject and its environment, it is important to identify certain ecological intermediaries that influence the nature of that interaction. Within that interaction lies the key of Gibson's affordance, and because that affordance is a situationally defined vehicle, we will investigate those intermediaries most vital to shaping our communications in relation to the 21st century technologically-mediated environment. In this respect, this thesis chooses to investigate the impact of these three major intermediaries --- history, language, and technology. Gibson defines affordance as a relational property, being perceived as offering the possibility of a resourceful or meaningful action (Gibson, 1986). Affordance in this sense becomes the go-between vehicle, instigating action from the subject who has gained a certain awareness through dealing with the environment.

With our focus being on Japan, we have termed this defining awareness, nurtured through engaging with the Japanese ecological conditions, as "*the mitate-awareness*."³ In chapters four, five, and six we will closely look into how *mitate* has indeed been applied to a wide range of cultural activities for

² I define the *technologically-mediated environment* as distinguishable from the *natural environment*, which generally does not take into account the human milieu.

³ *Mitate* is one of the pre-eminent concepts defining a shifting of the subject's perception of a subject matter. I coined the term "*mitate-awareness*" in order to emphasize its integration into the sensibility underscoring those flexible perceptual changes provoked by *mitate*-application.

decades, where its extensive use indicates its cultural significance. In particular, we will come to appreciate that this awareness offers a propensity for perceiving multiple interpretations of a single subject matter, and greatly nurtures as a consequence the elements advisable for kyara-play to exist. An expert on the Edo period's *mitate* culture, Choi Kyeong-kun (2012) reminds us that *mitate* is better understood as a creative awareness that encourages the subject to invent new perspectives on an existing subject matter via improvisatory activities. Having regard for this line of thinking, I am using the term the "mitate-awareness" in order to suggest how deeply ingrained the traditional cultural concept of *mitate* has become with the ways the subject perceives, thinks and behaves.

The central issue in both these fundamental constructions rests in the fact that the *mitate-awareness* has been woven into all perception and communication, nurtured through dealing with the intermediaries that help form Japanese ecological conditions.

The idea of flexibly adaptable selves has been circulated and established throughout *history*, encouraging the subject to regard it as a given. Similarly, the propensity in the subject for absorbing multiple interpretations of a single subject matter, or indeed what Gibson himself terms the flexible percept (Gibson, 1979). In referencing the *mitate-awareness* we are recognizing at its core the ability to allow a flexible shift in one's perceptions about a subject matter, which in turn permeates the manifestation of kyara-play.

As we shall see, the *Japanese language* constantly reinforces an awareness that meaning can change according to the particular set of circumstantial factors. This constant awareness of the equivocal underpins habitual behavior, and invariably influences the ways one sees the self. Integrated socially with those two intermediaries, we find the use of *technologies* is manifested in the exploration of circumselves via kyara-play, according, in our context here, to the communication devices one uses.

In order to demonstrate that the influence of the *mitate-awareness* is not limited to generating situationally-defined multiple-selves, the thesis will also examine this intricate concept from multiple angles.

With Gibson's central idea of perception rather than innate thinking leading action, visual perception is a crucial medium that allows us to investigate central Japanese cultural formations. Manga, anime, theatre

performance, and contemporary art will be examined as evidence helping us to see that the subject constantly negotiates with the mediated environment. In this context, it is important to note that our interest is to examine what kinds of affordance the subject identifies in terms of engaging with visual culture from a pragmatic point of view, so is less about how its cultural production is ideologically executed.

Engaging with cultural activities like these offers full evidence of the impact the *mitate*-awareness has on the ways the subject perceives and acts. We can appreciate here how *mitate* can allow and even train the mind to be alert to the shifts not only in perception but most vitally in action too, and in this links integrally with the essence of affordance and its enactment through *kyara*-play. Reminding ourselves of Gibson's theory that the use of language influences the subject's perception (Gibson, 1939/1953), this thesis argues that *mitate* is not merely a cultural application, but its usage ordains and nurtures a sensibility which fosters the creative possibility of the subject being able to define the self circumstantially. Indeed, it is the very ethos of the equivocal, embodied via the *mitate*-awareness, that colours Japanese responses to circumstance, activating and conducting the nature of performativity as the key expressive for *kyara*-play.

1-2: Chapter plan

The literature review chapter looks into the impact of history in relation to the detection of affordance, and will additionally examine how history disseminates particular views on certain behavioral modes like interdependent personal relationships and the understanding of the self, forming a certain awareness which is shared amongst people. To clarify this point of view, we examine the expansive concept of *nihonjinron*, that theorizes Japanese uniqueness. This bulwark of Japanese-ness formed a kind of consensus picture of Japanese people tending to flexibly switch multiple-roles according to circumstances. We will see how the subject is surrounded by and engages with widely-circulated information which promotes the importance of multiple role-play. These situations encourage the subject to detect the affordance of flexibly adaptable multiple-selves via *kyara*- play.

Our concern here is not to justify whether the myths proposed via nihonjinron offer us the reality of the Japanese. What we aim to do is to address the impact of how history --- through the propagation of nihonjinron and the appearance of circumstantially defined multiple-selves --- has been appropriated to indicate Japanese uniqueness or its cultural significance, and to see the impact of how this imprinted a certain awareness or even mythology onto individuals. Maintaining an ecological psychology position allows us the possibility to accept that history may nurture a certain awareness, but that nevertheless, the subject is constantly in the processes of negotiating with what is thought to be common sense.

This view becomes more apparent in the methodology chapter three, where we analyze how the use of language and technology constantly influences the subject's detection of affordance. Noting how the availability of social media invites the individual to explore the idea of multiple-selves in Japan as well as in the West, it gives the context of flexibly-shifting self-representation to the subject's fluctuating perception of affordance, by pointing to the subject constantly in the midst of medial processes, negotiating and improvising with the mediated environment. It aims to show how exactly Gibson's ecological psychology and his affordance theory help us to spell out these negotiation processes the subject goes through. That is to say, self-representation is not simply an outcome of one's ideological stance, dictating its outcome or the reception of it. Tracing the ways affordance is detected confirms the fact that "perception activates action" (Gibson, 1966/1986). We demonstrate that the subject detects the particular affordance of circumselves as a result of improvising with the Japanese ecological conditions, and in many situations, kyara is consequently enacted. To help trace the complexity of account and concept, this chapter will cross-examine some kyara-play commentators' points of view with individuals who directly express their views on kyara-play, and whether they detect affordance in kyara-play and enact it, or not. These individuals' real life experiences are shown in the form of vignettes in order to put under the microscope the complex nature of the interactions carried out in reality.

Chapter four attempts to show that language is a trans-medium with its functions evolving fast through its use in the 21st century's mediated environment. We will closely examine the crucial factor of equivocality, which is

central to an appreciation of the Japanese linguistic system, and which we can say both sensitises and allows the subject to interpret and negotiate a shifting, fluid relationship with the mediated environment. In Japanese the meaning of words can change radically according to context, and through these interpretive necessities the nature of the language itself persuades the subject to define "the self" circumstantially. Indeed, we will appraise Richard Rorty's positioning of the Japanese language as a toolbox defined by circumstance. However in a departure from his ideas, we will primarily pursue our acknowledgement of the Japanese language as a catalyst in the enactment of kyara-play. As a continuation of Gibson's remarkable thinking, we will also look into specifics of the Japanese language that create ambiguous or bi-stable effects as a result of having many words' visual and auditory cues identical one to the other. This consequently opens the possibility for a word to be perceived more as image than as a simple vehicle of definition.

In support of this point of view, the chapter offers some vivid snapshot examples from the everyday life sequences of certain Japanese people. These will help us explain why the impact of language-use on the subject is so paramount is because the subject constantly has to deal with --- and is surrounded by --- an endless repertoire of multiply-convertible Japanese linguistic systems (Iima, 2013; Stanlaw, 2004), showcased via merchandising commodities, advertisements, books, and magazines etc. This barrage constantly requires the subject to mix-and-match words that can be notated in different ways. We will recognize how dealing with such flexibly-convertible word-functions consequently reinforces the idea that the "look" of a word --- the word actually being perceived as a visual image --- is crucial.

Focusing in our instance on how the Japanese language system influences perception and action, chapter five examines the ways the subject's engagement with the mediated environment shapes and forms a milieu, forming in turn a visually intensive culture. We will see here that advanced technology affords multiple choices allowing the subject to transform or switch a subject matter between two-dimensional flat images to three-dimensional space, blurring or conversely emphasizing a materiality of self. We will look into aspects of the visual culture of Japan through an examination of manga and anime as a way into understanding something of the means by which the technologically-mediated environment both influences and is influenced by the

subject's perception of an image, showing that the Japanese linguistic system is adding further complexities to, and continues to shape, Japanese cultural identities. We will consequently examine how aspects of manga can serve to illustrate how the Japanese language is indeed able to function as an image, and will look closely into the tendency of Japanese people to perceive language as pictograms and ideograms. Amongst so many Japanese it is this perception of language which encourages and enables a focus on manga and the growth of its elaborated media-mixed versions --- the derivative works emanating from manga like *dōjinshi*,⁴ anime and 2.5 dimensional theatre (manga transformed into theatre), and the joint project of robot scientist Ishiguro Hiroshi and theatre director Hirata Oriza: robot theatre.

It is the aim of this chapter, however, to demonstrate that manga inspires the idea and activity of playing *kyara* by encouraging a fluid movement between a two-dimensional image --- a flat image --- and a three-dimensional space --- a live-performance. Fruitful inspiration for *kyara*-play we will see, can oftentimes come from the pages of the manga heroes.

Finally, chapter six will analyse the work of two contemporary Japanese artists, Murakami Takashi and Aida Makoto, but, in keeping with the position taken throughout this thesis, from an ecological point of view. It serves to show that what we may therefore term an "*ecological art critique*" enables us to see artwork as the creative outcome of an artist, constantly interacting or negotiating with his or her environment. And the implication behind this being that one's understanding of a work of art should not be solely a by-product of the artist's ideological statement --- or indeed the critic's. Our equal concern here however is to trace this subject-environment interactivity as the propulsive mechanism for the two artists to activate *kyara*-play as a creative methodology, and to recognize its value in their respective approaches to making and marketing their work.

We will look into how Murakami and Aida extensively use the Japanese traditional visual rhetoric *mitate* in their work --- which feeds into what we call the *mitate*-awareness --- in conjunction with the intermediaries of history, language and technologies. *Mitate* indeed becomes a tool for both artists, because its application enables them to shift or change existing patterns of

⁴ *Dōjinshi* is a privately-published magazine featuring anime and manga fans' amateur, derivative work. This will be discussed further in chapter five.

perception of various subject matters, and so we can see, for example, how they relate to traditional Japanese art and form their own contemporaneous versions of it. Interestingly for notions of kyara-play, the two artists can demonstrate how the individual can be inspired to flexibly transform a two-dimensional flat image into a three-dimensional object. Equally they also offer an engagement with the Japanese linguistic system to show the complexities of interpretational variance. Focusing on the two artists additionally encourages me to examine how the mass media feeds performativity and image-construction into public awareness as an approach to kyara-play. We can observe that in a sense this triggers both Murakami and Aida --- quite differently --- to embrace certain specificities of Japanese cultural identities in an attempt to be reflective of, and, perhaps especially for Murakami, actually market the technologically-mediated environment they live amongst. In short, we will see how Murakami and Aida synthesise the key issues of our thesis into active life.

Chapter 2 Literature review

2.1.1 Introduction: Performatively represented circumselves

The previous chapter briefly explained that this thesis aims to demonstrate how the subject constantly engages with the ecological conditions one lives in, and how these medial processes⁵ result in the embodiment of multiple-selves — what I call “circumselves.”

The subject is thereby able to fluidly adapt to various circumstances through activating an awareness gained from, especially, the most prominent intermediaries of history, language and technologies. My primary position is to apply Gibson’s ecological psychology and affordance theory as the key to unlock an understanding of the defining interactivities between the subject and the mediated environment, which underscores my theory of circumselves.

As a case study, the thesis will examine the phenomenon of “kyara-play,” which is recognized as an activity in contemporary Japan in which the subject performatively defines multiple-selves according to circumstances. Existing studies on kyara-play tend to claim that it “signifies Japaneseness” (Aihara, 2007; Senuma, 2007; Saitō, T. 2011/2013), or that it is “unique to Japan only” (Tanaka, I. 2010; Ogiue, 2009), and perhaps the term itself suggests it is culturally specific.

However, the thesis aims to demonstrate that, though particular in name to Japan, kyara-play is primarily a useful example of cultural behaviour that helps us to understand how the subject constantly engages with the mediated environment through the processes of negotiation, adaptation and transformation, all of which embody subjectivities. Indeed the kyara-play phenomenon also helps us to acknowledge certain behavioural and socio-cultural differences we can recognise amongst ourselves internationally. We might allow that the subject performs multiple-roles in the West that parallel the subject playing kyara in Japan. Both function from a similar basis of integrations, but in our study here, are the outcome of dealing with ecological

⁵ This thesis refers to Mathew Fuller’s definition of a medial whose power is “made in the ontogenetic, reality-forming nature of a media and in its capacity for connection and use” (Fuller, 2005, p.2).

conditions, which are subject to the influence of space-specific Japanese intermediaries.

Considering that the embodiment of subjectivities emerges through the subject's actual physical interactions, rather than by internal meditations about "the self," the thesis is indebted to Gibson's affordance theory as it takes on this pragmatic approach. Valuing an action itself, our aim is to investigate how a particular affordance can be detected in relation to the mediated environment. From this we analyze why it activates the performatively-defined circumselves, whose contemporaneous version, in Japan, is kyara-play.

We looked previously at the thesis' main conceptual proposition: how the subject, being under the influence of "the mitate-awareness," may come to detect "affordance" in the Japanese ecological conditions and activate "kyara-play." In this chapter, we will see how these factors function and connect to each other, and demonstrate how the embodiment of subjectivities emerges through the processes of constant negotiations with the mediated environment. We have consequently been able to trace that this medial process results in the performative embodiment of "circumselves."

2.2.2 Focus period: World War Two to 1990's

Firstly, we will look into how the idea of flexibly shifting self-representation has been historically circulated, and creates a foundation whereby the individual sees it somehow as an ethically correct behavior. To clarify this point of view, we examine nihonjinron, the genre that has sprung up since the 1970s, promoting theories of Japanese uniqueness. Through a kind of common consent, nihonjinron has been purveying the notion that Japanese people tend to flexibly switch playing multiple-roles according to circumstances. We will see how the subject is surrounded by, and engages with, such widely distributed information which promotes the importance of role-play, and is thereby encouraged to identify the affordance of flexibly adaptable multiple-selves via kyara-play.

Engaging with the same subject matter discussed by nihonjinron, the aim of this thesis, however, is to show how ecological psychology and affordance theory put what is self-evidently proposed as Japanese uniqueness into another perspective. We are interested in how the idea of being circumselves is

historically handed down as a Japanese sensibility, so instigating a certain behaviour from the subject.

One may only know Gibson from his well-established fieldwork on visual perception. However, the thesis aims to explore the fact that he always had a strong interest in social science. We see this, for example, in his study of how language affects the subject's perception, triggering a certain action which may not necessarily have come about through any logical procedures (Gibson, 1953/1978/1982; Reed, 1988). To fully comprehend Gibson's view that "visual thinking is shaped by verbal thinking," it is important to note that Gibson asks us to recognize the fact that a certain awareness, or a proclivity, is nurtured through everyday life experiences. He termed this concept "*subjective determinant tendencies*" (Gibson, 1966).

To gain a useful comprehension of ecological psychology, it is important to allow the understanding that a perception, for example, of how a group of people behave, can be passed on from generation to generation, nurturing a particular awareness. This awareness forms the basis to a culture's sensibility despite the fact that people would be constantly negotiating with, and perhaps even challenging, what is thought to be a common knowledge. This view becomes more apparent when we analyze how the use of language and technologies influence the subject's detection of affordance in the methodology chapter.

Keeping this outline in mind, this chapter attempts to demonstrate that the transition of multiple role-play to kyara-play was made in correspondence with the changes to the ecological conditions. It starts by looking into how historically the idea of multiple role-play was set-up to establish Japanese uniqueness via nihonjinron, influencing the ways the subject perceives and acts. We then note how, since the 2000's, the changes of Japanese demographic conditions affect the ways nihonjinron is promoted, and in turn, how such transitions have influenced and are influenced by the ways the subject defines "the self."

It is commonly believed that the idea of kyara-play began to be known to the public around the year 2000 (Aihara, 2007; Saitō, T. 2011), so the thesis's main focus period is from the 2000's to the present time. However, in order to trace how the changes of ecological conditions have elevated the idea of multiple role-play to kyara-play, this chapter extends its focus period, starting

from after World War Two to the present time. The period is roughly divided into two: from post World War Two to the 1990's when Japan experienced an economic boom, and nihonjinron discourse gained its massive popularity. The second period starts from the 2000's to the present time, during which Japan has experienced drastic demographic changes, which would include the bursting of the economic bubble, the prolonged economic stagnation, population decline, etc. (Heinrich & Galan, 2018). It is also important to note that the period coincides with the time the general use of personal computers and the internet system began to spread amongst the public (Microsoft Corporation, n.d.; A. Yamada, 2014). We will see how nihonjinron-related comments and activities made from the 2000's to the present time continuously grow alongside the progressively developing idea of commodifying otherness, in order to articulate Japanese uniqueness.

Although the idea of playing multiple-roles can be found elsewhere (Gottschalk & Whitmer, 2013; McDowell, 1995/2009; Schwalbe, 2013; Waskul & Vannini, 2013), certain academics claim that interpersonal relationships --- the ways the subject defines the self in relation to circumstances --- is significantly important in terms of understanding Japanese cultural identities, and it is often believed to signify Japanese uniqueness (Benedict, 1946; Nakane, 1967). It is consequently important to analyze whether this historically-handed down idea of the Japanese embodying the concept of flexibly-adaptable multiple-selves, would make the individual more susceptible to the idea of playing kyara.

Tracing the transitional processes of the subject shifting self-representations from multiple role-play to kyara-play also help us to understand why the idea of kyara-play became prominent, and began to be appreciated as a practical way of engaging with various circumstances. On one hand, as a way of coping with the insecurities or uncertainties typified in commentaries on contemporary society, kyara-play helps the subject to substantiate a stand position that is clearly and easily recognized. We are talking here about the basics: what one is good at, one's goals, the nature of one's character, what can be expected from one, etc. Meanwhile, the act of switching a suitable kyara to play enables one to demonstrate one's flexible adaptability in a far more complex and perhaps sophisticated form. The next chapter will closely analyze how the availability of the increasing number of communication platforms manifests this tendency.

To examine the validity and relevance of nihonjinron commentators and academics specializing in Japanese studies, the following four key concepts --- which are all inter-related and form a constant incentive for playing kyara --- need to be looked at. *Ba* as a definer of the specificities of a circumstance; the circumstantially changeable boundary definitions of *uchi* (us) and *soto* (other); a spatial concept known as *seken*, which consists of a myriad variation of circumstances called *ba*, whose specificities, finally, are detected by the act of "reading air" --- hence the act of "reading the air of *ba*" as a means of assessing the specifics of a situation.

In conjunction with these four concepts, we will lay out how modern technologies afford the subject to define multiple-selves flexibly, which in turn elevates traditional social role-play to kyara play. Extending awareness of the influence and inspiration of contemporary technologies, we also aim to explain how and why the changes to Japanese demographic make the idea of kyara-play appealing to the subject.

The primary aim in this literature review is to offer insight into what kind of socio-cultural factors might motivate nihonjinron commentators to portray a sense of "Japanese uniqueness." We can acknowledge that nihonjinron can hold a perspective on the individual, as a collective social being, whereby the self is inescapably defined in relation to others. We might say that the individual in this sense is being viewed as a national --- or even racial --- stereotype. Nihonjinron typically represents a particular remit, telling us indeed "this is how the Japanese think or feel," and perhaps like much populist conceptualizing, being somewhat eager to appeal, it offers only a fraction of the full picture.

However, we do not seek to justify whether a chosen subject matter can stand as a proof of Japanese uniqueness or not. Instead, our aim is to investigate the impact of this historically persistent view, particularly focusing on the idea of the subject shifting self-representation according to circumstances. This helps us to gauge the milieu of an era that certain nihonjinron was written in, and most crucially allows us to see what the recent introduction of a new style of nihonjinron, inclusive of the digital media, can tell us about the *imagined* Japanese self today.

2.2.1 Nihonjinron: Japanese uniqueness

When dealing with the matter of shifting identity in Japan, nihonjinron commentators, analyzing the flexibility with which an individual can change opinions and behaviour according to circumstances, often choose to mystify their observations (Benedict, 1946; Doi, Takeo, 1976; Hamaguchi, 1985/2003; Nakane, 1967). However, they might alternatively, also apply the convenient binary yardstick of the West-Orient dichotomy as a means of expressing what they consider to be profound differences existing beyond rational explanation or appraisal (Isaiah, 1972; Vogel, 1979; Wolferen, 1989/2000).

One of the most influential nihonjinron publications, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946), a book written by Ruth Benedict, describes these behavioural unpredictabilities as though on a national scale, exhibiting an overly formularised perplexity on recognizing Japanese gentleness coexisting with brutal behavior. Both this and --- for example --- Ōe Kenzaburō's self-revelatory *Japan, The Ambiguous, and Myself* (1995), can be used as convenient subject matter for accessible essentialist discourse if the commentator chooses to discount the complexities integral to space and circumstance, in and with which the subject actually engages.

Whilst the concept of Japanese society as a "group sensitive" society was introduced by Doi Takeo, known for his influential work, *The Anatomy of Self* (1976), Nakane Chie's, *Tateshakai no ningen kankei* [Personal relations in a vertical society], (1967) also share a similarly anchored viewpoint. They speculate that the reason why Japanese people avoid unnecessary confrontation is because they want to maintain harmony within a group or community, restoring the proposition that one's actions indeed reveal how one thinks of oneself.

Significantly, certain cultural practices and thinking and behavioural patterns, offer extensive material for those observers of nihonjinron whose thinking is based on discourse analysis. Dozens of studies insist that what they call the "Japanese mind" can be recognized in several themes, such as "*bushido*" (the way of samurai life) (Nitobe, 1938), "*kokoro*" (the heart of Japan or the Japanese) (Hearn, 1977; Yamakuse & Cooney, 2011), or "*seishin*" (the Japanese spirit) (Maruyama, M. 1961; Watanabe, Shyōichi, 2019), all giving authenticity to the indigenous Japanese. These kinds of traditional assessment of Japanese uniqueness tend to recur and are often conceived as essential ways of dealing with current affairs or of making sense of how the Japanese should

think or behave (Fujiwara, 2005; Kobayashi & Horibe, 2008).

The ways the Japanese individual shifts self-representation is often considered indicative of a thinking sensibility intent on being harmonious (Midooka, 1990; Yoneyama, 1976), group care (Iwata, R. 1980; Doi, Takeo, 1971/1985), and avoiding conflict (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Indeed, the aspect of “self” interdependency is one of the recurrent themes used by *nihonjinron* commentators to substantiate Japanese uniqueness. The psychologist Kimura Bin, believes that an individual’s existence is defined by relationships, stating that, for the Japanese, selfness is not a constant like the ego, but denotes a fluid concept which changes through time and situations according to interpersonal relationships (Kimura, B. 1972, p.144).

Extending Kimura’s idea further, Hamaguchi Eshun develops the idea of “*kanjin*”(a person-in-human-nexus). He sees that *kanjin* is embodied in high-context culture, and relates that the ways Japanese language functions offers “strong evidence that the Japanese think of man in his relationship with others” (Hamaguchi, 1985, p.301).

In some ways, *nihonjinron* can be understood as an eclectic assemblage of comments whose aim is to claim that the Japanese are different from others. Peter Dale (1995) draws the conclusion that the myth of Japanese uniqueness is nothing but a reflection of the Japanese people’s desire to be special. Over-articulating what it takes to be uniquely Japanese, its home-focused rhetoric is questioned and criticized for being an ontological Japanization of “the self.” Dale submits that the myth’s motivation is to declare that many Japanese identify “the self” and imagine “the other” solely through a filter of self-regard.

Witnessing the massive publication of *nihonjinron*⁶ material as a “self-fulfilling prophecy” (Mouer & Sugimoto, 1986, p.8), Ross Mouer and Sugimoto Yoshio scrutinize the common assumptions on Japanese collective identity. “Japanese society as an integrated and harmonious whole assumes that all or most Japanese possess the same national character” (Mouer & Sugimoto, 1986, pp.43-44).

Nationalism and identity also form the central focus of Rotem Kowner’s

⁶ The Nomura research institute (1978) stated that around 1970, the number of *nihonjinron* books published annually doubled. In 1977, there were five times as many books as in the 1960s (Iwabuchi, 1994).

attentions. He points out that nihonjinron provides the “ideological support for Japan’s nationalism through its ethnocentric emphasis on the nation as the preeminent collective identity of the people” (Kowner, 2002, p.169).

Questioning the validity of the maze of ontological claims, certain academics such as the Japanese cross-cultural theorist Koyano Ton (2010), or the sociologist, Iwabuchi Kōichi (1994), argue that nihonjinron literature became increasingly popular as a way of boosting the national spirit after World War Two. Nihonjinron consequently covers an eclectic range of disciplinary fields that includes philosophy (Kuki, 1930/2008; Uchida, T. 2009), psychology (Kayama, 2002; Kawai, 1976), cultural studies (Ōkubo, T. 2003; Satō, C. 2019; Watanabe Shyōichi, 2016/2019), culinary culture (Okakura, 1906), sociology (Aoki, T. 1990) and journalism (Ise, 2016) etc. etc. --- all upholding “everything and anything” that can be deemed to support Japanese uniqueness.

2.2.2 Uchi and soto: “Ba” defines its boundary

Whilst specificities of a space can be defined normatively, the concept of *ba* is increasingly considered to refer to a momentary state of a space (Naitō, Y. 2004; Wada, Hideki, 2007), specifically defined by circumstantial factors (i.e. who, when, and what interacts with the space). And this is conspicuous in the present time as kyara-performers typically declare that *ba* --- the specificities of a space --- is the initial barometer advising them to play a particular kyara.

The following examination of Nakane Chie’s, *Tateshakai no ningen kankei : Tanitsu shakai no riron* [Human relations in a vertical society: Theory of a homogeneous society] (1967), which defines *ba* as a normative space, allows us to see that the changes of ecological conditions affect the ways the subject perceives the self differently.

We can find that the cultural anthropologist Funabiki Takeo (2003), who reviewed more than 2000 nihonjinron publications, demands attention. Funabiki claims that Nakane’s definition of the term “*ba*” as a territory distinguishing a group of people (*uchi*) from others (*soto*), reflects the milieu of the era when Japan experienced economic growth after World War Two.

Nakane posits the family as the minimum unit of society, and so attempts to describe the subject shifting self representations according to a type of normative space. She points out that the “*ie*” (family) system has its roots in the

Confucian tradition, and is therefore allowed to frame *ba* and dictate the boundary between us and others.

Arguing that the Japanese style of business management takes the form of an *ie* system, which also links with the ways the Japanese traditional household is structured, Japanese business management is therefore able to form a strong bond uniting the individual with the corporates. Stabilizers of Japanese style management are known as the three sacred treasures which secure an employee's living standards: lifetime employment, seniority wages (the pay-scale system based on seniority), and enterprise unions (Nakane, 1967; Yakabe, 1977). These factors are highly regarded and highly influential, leading Japanese corporations to be considered as extended families, in which the workers were given long-term security and stability in return for their loyalty, hard work and firm-specific expertise (Dalton & Benson, 2002).

As a corollary to this, it is also important to note that such socio-economic factors consequently induce certain views on role-play and indeed, on the legacy of gender issues in Japan. A heterosexual family man working for a corporation is expected to portray the ideal of masculinity, whilst a woman playing a full-time housewife, takes care of her family (Dasgupta, 2015).

To some extent, we may agree with the sociologist, Iwabuchi Kōichi, who argues against Nakane's claim of the Japanese as homogeneous beings, asserting that Nakane's insistence that Japanese social relationships are predominantly vertical or hierarchical is not a cultural given (Iwabuchi, 1994). Notwithstanding, we can take her observations from another perspective, taking it as indicative of how the totality of ecological conditions --- milieu, issues of political economy, socio-cultural factors, etc. --- coaxes a certain view on how to represent the self. That is to say, the idea of multi role-play became desirable through engaging with various circumstantial factors.

Later in this chapter, this point of view becomes more apparent when we look into how individuals' working environments have changed since the 1990's. The drastic economic downfall collapsed the system and, increasing job insecurity, abolished corporate lifetime employment. These drastic ecological changes allow us to see more clearly that the mediated environment does indeed influence the ways the subject perceives the role one plays.

2.2.3 *Uchi and soto: Movement*

Jane Bachnik (1994) explains that the characterisation of the Japanese self and social life as “contextual” involves the characteristic of “shifting,” which links with the use of *uchi* and *soto*. Referring to Doi Takeo’s statement that “*soto* and *uchi* are different for each individual, what is *soto* for one person may become *uchi* for a person included in that *soto*” (Doi, Takeo, 1986, p.29), Charles Quinn (1994) suggests that Bachnik’s use of *uchi* and *soto* is complicated because their referral meanings change according to which context the words are used in, or which circumstance the subject engages with. An example of this might be that they can be used for drawing a boundary between us and others, although the boundary between the two may shift elastically according to relational factors, such as who one is with and where and when.

Chapter four will take a closer look into the equivocal nature of the Japanese linguistic system, detailing how it all comes to nurture the *mitate*-awareness. However, in this instance it is important to understand how the multiple meanings of the words *uchi* and *soto* can change according to circumstances, igniting a shift in one’s perception (J. Fischer, 1964; Suzuki, Takao, 1986; Bachnik, 1994), and additionally complicating situations in which the subject has a need to identify the self in relation to *ba*.

One could argue that the major complication behind all this is because there is no Japanese grammar book --- let alone therefore a psychology book --- offering strict instructions on how to define the self and its various formulations and components (Kigawa, 2011; Shibata, M. 2003/2010). One has to constantly learn from one’s everyday life experiences. The self can only be defined in relation to *ba*, and because *ba* --- as an underpinning constant in one’s everyday life experiences --- can consist of a multiplicity of shifting elements that reflect back onto the subject, it thereby influences who or what he or she is able to be.

Let us remind ourselves that the Japanese linguistic system affords multiple options for defining “the self” and its relationships with others, and it is therefore inevitable for many Japanese to constantly analyze not only how to use the language efficiently, but how in fact to interpret what people are actually saying. This cannot be over-emphasized. We are again meeting the shifting ambivalences we encountered above with *uchi* and *soto*, and indeed

the intrinsic equivocality of the language. Once more we are discovering that the fluid movement of identities becomes the prime issue.

Predominantly in keeping with the majority of studies speculating that movement between inclusion and exclusion emerges simply as a result of the changes of social domain, Makino Seiichi's anthropological linguistic work on *uchi* and *soto* notes that almost all scholars specializing in Japanese studies have presented examples of Japanese people, defining and re-defining themselves and their social groups in relation to the distance or differences between them (Makino, 2002). Makino points out that the use of *uchi* and *soto* strongly correspond with space and social relations, and offers some useful examples of how two separate sets of kinship terms existing in Japanese are used, depending on to whom and about whom one speaks. We can see, for example, one needs to change a personal pronoun when one calls one's mother *uchi* versus introducing one's mother to others --- which is considered as common sense.⁷ In a similar vein, Reizei Akihiko (2006) points out that each *ba* comes with its specific elements, and how the subject perceives *ba* necessitates a change of one's standpoint, which is often associated with the use of *uchi* (us/inside) and *soto* (others/outside).

Concurring with this, Takie Lebra (1992) and Inoue Tadashi (2007) also point out that Japanese people do indeed tend to change their perceptions of the boundary between *uchi* (inner-group) and *soto* (outer-group). Notably, distinctions are made not so much by personal subjective choice, but by situational circumstances. The tendency seems to be to indicate, as statistical evidence, that these changes show which *circumstance* highlights a particular element of one's many socio-cultural identities and status, defined, for example, at the office as an employee, at home as a mother. However the validity of this perception masks the issue at the heart of this thesis, and the ecological psychology that supports it. That is to say, changes of self-representation in fact demonstrate how flexibly the subject is able to engage with the surrounding environment, rather than indicating that the individual acts autonomously,

⁷ The sociolinguist Ishiguro Kei (2013) points out that an appropriate pronoun is determined by its referential use. For example, a daughter may address her parents or a friend by using the third person pronoun, "*okāsan*," but when talking with her teacher, would use "*haha*" --- which is also a third person pronoun meaning "mother" --- but omits an honorific title.

making representational decisions as though entirely separate from the fluid changes of daily circumstance.

These mandates are carried out throughout people's everyday lives. The fact that the Japanese linguistic system offers multiple choices to define the boundary between *uchi* and *soto* according to whom one is speaking to, and where exactly and when the encounter takes place, dictates the impact language-use has on the subject's need to switch perceptions about the same person being a part of *uchi*, whilst in certain other circumstances perceiving him or her as being *soto*. As an example we can refer to a company in which those working can be in separate departments, and will refer to their own department as *uchi* (us) and that of someone else's as *soto* (other). However, when these people are dealing with others outside of their company, they refer to their own company in its entirety as *uchi* and that of the others' as *soto*. These distinctions, it must be observed, are made case-by-case so that the individual may have to change the ways he/she talks or performs even though dealing with the same person, if they are in a different situation (Ishinabe, 2005; Enomoto, 2012/2014). As a part of civilized daily behaviour, the individual is expected to read these situational issues and make the correct judgments accordingly. If one is deemed to fail one may consequently invite the severe criticism of being ethically incorrect (Hazama, 1971).

Some commentators specializing in Japanese studies offer insightful observations on the ways the individual keeps on "redefining self" (Rosenberger, 1992/1993; Kondō, D. 1992). Nancy Rosenberger (1992) describes how a female teacher and housewife established her identities in relation to both the long-accepted ideologies of women's familial roles, and the postwar ideologies of women working independently. Rosenberger's work demonstrates that the multiplicity of self is embodied via the intersection of various facets of the world --- personal experiences, relationships and group contexts, political and economic ideologies, etc. Tobin Joseph (1992), on the other hand, observes this multiplicity in the shifts between the contexts of work and play within the preschool environment.

Their work offers the insight of carefully depicting the constant movement of flexibly shifting self-representation. However, it is difficult to know the instigator of these movements: how does the individual come to identify an appropriate way of representing the self? What is the core factor activating the shift of

self-representation? Does one see that these requirements are duty-bound, or do they indicate an action possibility which therefore allows choice?

The information we need is in fact not available. The prime focus hitherto has been to analyze the end result of individuals' interactions, rather than tracing how one negotiates and improvises with action possibilities, which essentially is how one detects affordance. Ultimately, this can help us discover whether the embodiment of subjectivities is a unified self, or whether the negotiations in fact embody the ongoing process of *becoming* subjectivities.

2.3.1 *Seken*: Its rules function as surveillance cameras

When we think about the impact our living environment has in shaping the totality of our personal lives, "society" is generally conceived as the name given to specify an abstraction obtained by human interactions and organization. In the case of Japanese social organization, it is vital to examine the prolific reciprocal relationship the subject maintains with a spatial concept known as "*seken*," an extremely ubiquitous term with a set of variable definitions. Unlike "society," which is often imagined as a normative space, *seken* can perhaps be best described as "the world, the lives and ways of life" (Cambridge online dictionary, 2018). One should note that the *Luminous Japanese-English Dictionary* (2008), on the other hand, defines *seken* as "the public," "others," "everybody" and "society," whilst *Weblio* refers to the word meaning "society, public, people and world." The availability of multiple interpretations of *seken* points to an elusive existence hard to convey by words.

The prevalence of the term might incline us to best describe *seken* as "air," as in the air of a situation, the governing incentives, yet, it is also used for explaining the Japanese mentality (Kōkami, 2009; Inoue, T. 2007), because it is often conceived as the implicit rule-book that gives Japanese society its harmony. But conceptions of how *seken* operates can offer multi-complex and intriguing disclosures on how the subject represents him or herself appropriately (Ōishi, C. 2009; Hidaka & Kosugi, 2012). We can observe the necessity of the subject coordinating multiple factors such as speech style, body gestures, clothing, etc. to support and maintain its osmotic powers. However, *seken's* power extends far more into the realms of decision, affecting behaviour and action.

The historian Abe Kinya (1995/1996/2001/2006), who is considered to be the pioneer on *seken*-commentary, tells us that the phenomenon of *seken* can be traced from around the 9th century right up to the present time, loosely translating it as a society in English. But his argument gains complexity when he reminds us that its two component terms --- "society" and "individual"--- were imported from the West towards the end of the 19th century, there being no equivalent words or concepts in Japan up until that period.⁸ He surmises that this factor alone indicates that the concept of *seken* must be understood as significantly different from the Western concept of society (Abe, 1995/2004/2006).

It remains an interesting if seemingly contradictory factor, that the word *seken*, not in itself easily translatable, can be readily used as a stamp of approval for "Japanese uniqueness." Nevertheless, the fact that *seken* is *not* a word simply meaning "society" needs to be addressed, because as Satō Naoki (2001/2004/2008) points out, *seken*'s function can best be understood as a phenomenological entity that places its ethical demands on the populous.

Existing works on *seken* often attempt to identify the "correct" interpretation of related comments and behaviour based on a discourse analysis. This directive intends showing us that *seken* is still perceived as a powerful influence, ideologically dictating to Japanese people's minds (Nakamura, H. 2011; Inoue, T. 2007; Kōkami, 2009/2001). Inoue Yoshitaka (2017) points out that the Japanese tend to define the self in relation to others, and that within such tendencies can be found the ways the subject relates to *seken*.

Seken inhabits the mind of people, yet can be thought of as an observer having "no legitimate social infrastructure to support its operation" (Abe, 2001/2006; Kōkami, 2009). The concept however is nevertheless hugely influential, because "the existence of this phenomenological entity is imagined as well as represented by the Japanese individual" (Satō, N. 2001/2004/2008). Indeed, this issue of *seken* being imagined as well as represented is a vital clue to our understanding of it. *Seken* exists as a kind of ethical overlord more by the

⁸ Abe notes that Western people used to operate a community similar that implied by the concept of *seken*, and offers as an example that Iceland Sagas depicted people living similarly to the ways Japanese people live in *seken* (Abe, 2001, p.22). However, he tells us that the majority of died out after Christianity introduced the confession system, promoting individualism after the 12th to 13th centuries.

will of the populace than by any formality, certainly in law. We can say that it floats like a surveillance drone over the populace. Indeed, its subtle scope can be further illustrated by the social psychologist, Oshimi Teruo (2013), who points out that *seken* can be understood as “social climate” or “group atmosphere.” In a similar vein, Brian McVeigh considers that *seken* is invisible, but because it governs the minds of the people it is best described as “the official gaze, a powerful Foucaultian normalizing scan (1979), that exerts its effect over the individual and constantly inspects one’s actions and appearance” (McVeigh, 2002, p.94).

2.3.2 *Seken* consists of a vast quantity of *ba*

Whilst acknowledging the complexities involved in defining the word *seken*, it is important to note that the word also ties in with the fundamental equivocality of the Japanese language. Indeed the language nurtures a familiarity with the notion of flexibly changing perceptions that most importantly can include “the self.” Due to the fact that the Japanese language keeps on reminding the subject to make an appropriate choice according to *ba*, the identification of the specificity of a space becomes crucial. This again is where Gibson’s affordance helps us to see that it is the environment itself which directly affects the ways the subject comes to perceive a particular meaning or value, and acts upon it. Language is inextricably fused therefore with shifting perceptions of the environment.

Thinking the individual gains a certain awareness through everyday interactions, *seken* can also be understood as the Japanese milieu, demanding and encouraging the individual to fulfil certain social obligations. In this way it recognizes the fluidity of multiple choice, and as society’s conceptual surveillance camera, both advises and administers, offering directives through the social maze whilst --- importantly for us --- guiding the subject through the equivocality of circumstance.

An awareness of shifting self-representation is essential, and works hand in hand with the equivocal nature of the Japanese linguistic system. Via the use of technologies, this awareness comes into its own, clearly appealing to the public. It activates the idea of multiple role-play having cogency as a way of adapting to circumstances, and in so doing is able to fulfill the demands of *seken*. *Seken*,

therefore, is determining the enactment of *kyara-play*. We can register this as the ethos of *circumselves*, which lies at the core of *kyara-play*. In order to detect the specificities of a circumstance, the subject attempts to attune with its milieu, which can be understood as an atmospheric air of *seken*, the overriding nature of social entities. In the following section of this chapter focusing on the years from 2000 onwards, we will see how this activating of the social antennae became rhetorically called "reading (the) air" of *ba*.

Takeie Lebra (1992) emphasizes that *seken* endorses the idea of "the interactional self," which is socially contextualized and critically interdependent with others. Lebra uses an analogy with the theatre, and we could possibly think that the ways the subject performs multiple-roles as an actor in the social theatre of daily life, might possibly fit into Goffman's dramaturgical personae concept, referred to in the introduction chapter of the thesis. However, as Lebra argues, Japanese social, day-to-day drama is not limited to simple face-to-face communication, because *seken* requires that the "self as an actor in the social theatre needs not only audience but producers, co-actors, and stage staff" (Lebra, 1992, p.107). One is always self-scrutinising, because how one is perceived by others is central to *seken*. One is simultaneously the judge being judged.

Offering a synopsis of the all-encompassing qualities of *seken*, Lebra writes that:

The *seken* constituency varies in accordance to where self happens to stand, and in which direction it faces. It may include one's kindred [...], neighbors, schoolmates, colleagues [...], known and unknown to self. [...] Two features of the *seken* make the self especially vulnerable to its sanction. In parallel with the "face"-focused self, the *seken*-other is equipped with its own "eyes," "ears," and "mouth," watching, hearing, and gossiping about the self (Lebra, 1992, p107).

The understanding that *seken* advocates inter personal relationships and interdependency, is also evident in the publication entitled *Anatanara dousuru, seken* [What would you do, seken?] (1999). Published by the newspaper group Asahi, it features a wide range of 31 social topics, covering funerals to harassment, which specifically concern *seken* protocols commented on from a

pool of twelve thousand readers. We can observe the serious concern over whether their behaviour or thinking is in line with *seken*. Significantly, the way this book has put their comments together made it explicit that individuals indeed struggle to cope with paradoxical situations. Offering no authoritative answers to anything, Katō Akira tells us that “people do not know what makes one plus one not equal two, in terms of dealing with *seken*” (Katō, A. 1999, p.2).

With a proposition that also has wide-ranging connotations, the legal specialist, Satō Naoki, argued that whilst society aims to build a rational state, *seken* has a tendency to dispute the rational and instead values one’s behavioural good-will, regardless of outcome (Satō, N. 2001/2004/2008). Amongst numerous examples, Satō offers some legal-battle cases which were actually taken to court in order to show how the concept of *seken* can overshadow the power of the Japanese judicial system itself.⁹

Evidence like this reveals that in certain situations, *seken* can indeed exceed what it is generally expected to govern, and that it is therefore accepted that it can create totally unexpected and even irrational outcomes.¹⁰ What we can recognize here is that the idea of imagining “the self” as other, constantly reinforcing *seken*’s status quo, more importantly helps form a state of mind pre-equipped and ready-oiled for involvement in *kyara*-play. The compulsion to preserve social harmony and to fit --- even to conform --- demands the tuning-into and perception of circumstance, the prerequisite to circumselves.

2.4 The new internationalization

Returning to the question of how to identify “us” from “others,” we can appreciate that changes to Japan’s international status threw that dichotomy into a new perspective. Indeed, another recurrent, and to a certain extent inevitable, popular theme of *nihonjinron* became widely discussed in the

⁹ To support his argument, Satō quotes Hoshino Eiichi, a Japanese lawyer, who makes the comment that “a village mentality” still governs contemporary Japanese society and ‘a living law’--- which is only effective and meaningful to a selected group of people --- holds a strong enough power to co-exist with the judicial system introduced from the West (Hoshino, 1994).

¹⁰ Even popular TV programmes feature this kind of “living law,” an indication that *seken* still holds an authoritative power in people’s minds. The extremely popular TV series, *Legal High* (2012–2014)[Fuji TV], re-enforces this issue when frequently featuring incidence of people acting on behalf of *seken* to pronounce judgements over and above the judicial system.

context of the “us” as the Japanese, versus the “others” being the West or non-Japanese (Atkinson, 2017; Satō, C. 2019). It was clear following World War Two, that the Japanese government saw as a prime duty the need to boost not only the economy, but the nation’s sense of itself, its identity and self-esteem. Nihonjinron was of course an accepted and readily digested means to doing this. But after the economy had indeed been hugely boosted, the nation had to take its place in the international market. Information was conceived that not only formulated the qualities of the “us,” but gave rise to the imagined otherness of international populations. *Uchi* and *soto* took on altogether different implications, even if their basis remained the same.

Iwabuchi provides an extensive critical analysis of the complex constructions of Japanese-ness via nihonjinron, concluding that there is no substantial proof to support their claims. Offering an array of socio-political data, in order to assert that nihonjinron is merely a reflection of the Japanese people’s desire to believe that they are unique and special, Iwabuchi argues that those theories of Japanese uniqueness tend to exploit “the Western gaze” --- how the Japanese are seen by the West. He points out that some Japanese nihonjinron authors pretend to be Western, using Western names¹¹ as a means of self-aggrandizement, increasing readership and pushing ideas. Iwabuchi thinks that the majority of nihonjinron is primarily written for and read by Japanese people, rather than for the West or non-Japanese living outside of Japan, a tendency that carries its own form of insistence, pitting the Japanese against the other typified as the West (Ise, 2016; Moriyama, Steve, 2018; Satō, C. 2019).

There are certain claims made about the idea that the rapid, post World War Two rise in Japanese economic success gave proof to ideas about these somewhat unique and special Japanese people, and their socio-cultural identities. Examinations of the Japanese-style business management, decision-making processes, group-orientation, and life-time employment etc. are considered to shed a light on this enquiry into Japanese uniqueness, and is another aspect explored via nihonjinron (Glazer, 1973; Kahn, 1973; Vogel, 1979).

¹¹ Yamamoto Shichihei used a pen name, Isaiah Ben-Dasan, when he wrote *The Japanese and the Jews* (1981).

The theme of how-to-act as a *kokusaijin* (an international person) is one of the most extensively written about and widely read topics of *nihonjinron* (Ikeda, Kenichi, 2016; Sakakibara, 2010). Commentators such as the journalist Ise Masaomi and the lawyer Yamaguchi Mayu typically offer some tips for engaging with the global economy and for forging business relationships with Western corporations, detailing suggestions on how to perform when one communicates with foreign business partners using the English language, and understanding that Japanese customs are not in fact universal, etc. (Ise, 2016/2019; Mouer, 2015; Yamaguchi, M. 2017).

Seeking to identify a reason for *nihonjinron*'s widespread appreciation, Yoshino Kōsaku's ethnographic research, which investigates whether one's occupational type influences one's reception of *nihonjinron* (Yoshino, Kōsaku, 1992), offers some useful information. Yoshino discovered that 75% of businessmen consider *nihonjinron* to be an important influence, whilst only 27% of educators acknowledge its impact (Yoshino, Kōsaku, 1992). He declares his reasons for the difference in response being because of its usefulness, in terms of dealing with certain circumstances that might arise in their relative professions. Yoshino points out that whilst educators tend to work in a relatively closed domestic environment, Japanese businessmen actually aspire to be *kokusaijin*, partly because they have to prepare for communication with non-Japanese as a part of their business practice.

Whilst Yoshino investigates the subject matter from an ideological point of view, his findings can alternatively be taken as an indication that some *nihonjinron* can be taken as a useful information resource for the problem of how to play a role (i.e. in Yoshino's case, *kokusaijin*) in order to interact with circumstances effectively.

Dealing with what we can term the equivocality of society, it can be argued that the individual may indeed start valuing the *act of performing* multiple-roles itself, rather than *thinking* how empathetic one feels about situations by playing multiple-roles. This shift of the frame of reference necessitates a re-examination of the pre-conceived notion of the "Japanese being homogeneous" or flexibly switching self-representations as a living proof of Japanese uniqueness, and urges us to analyse what an action itself means from a pragmatic point of view.

2.5 Performatively-defined circumselves appear to be homogeneous

We may question whether the existence of socially-established protocols are reflections of a so-called inherent Japanese mind that binds people together to create the semblance of homogeneity. However, referring to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's "assemblage theory" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), we may come to appreciate that individual experiences dealing with Japanese intermediaries may constitute an *assemblage*, whereby heterogeneous beings can appear to be homogeneous.

They use their theory to explain how heterogeneous entities link together and constantly evolve through the processes of *assembling*, to form a homogenized whole. The value of this proposition for us is that it offers an insight into how the concept of "society" is able to embrace the possibility that individuals can engage with their environment similarly.

Indeed, we can think of *seken* as a community binder, an understanding furthered by Manuel DeLanda's development of the assemblage theory (DeLanda, 2016). His theory helps us grasp more completely how the "milieu of society" maintains its social reality and materiality, even though the constituents of a space may evolve through fluidly changeable *assemblages* and are then promoted by the milieu, which consequently activates certain behavioural propensities.

Bachnik offers some insightful analysis on the ways the Japanese individual shifts self-representation, and urges us to recognize the fact that instead of thinking "I" is transcendently distinguished from the environment, the Japanese "self needs to be understood as "typological [...] which involves constant transformations"(Bachnik, 1992b, p.154). Bachnik sees the concept of "*kejime*" as an instigator of constant self- transformation. The concept stands as a kind of meta-level knowledge about "the process of shifting" (Bachnik, 1992b, p.152), whose resourcefulness one learns to appreciate through everyday life interactions. In this respect, Bachnik's take on *kejime* can be understood as an equivalent of affordance, detected in the momentary state of a space (i.e. *ba*) which activates one's certain reaction. Bachnik expresses great concern over the fluidity of shifting self-representation, reminding us that it is crucial to recognize it for revealing how the Japanese self aspires to reflect a topology rather than a decisive ideological state.

She continues, pointing out that,

The crucial question for defining self here is to look away from “fixing” a unified typology of self to the process of “fixing” a series of points along a sliding scale for a self which is defined *by* shifting. [...] [F]or Japanese, appropriate personal and social behavior is identified, not as a general set of behaviors which transcends situations, but rather as a series of particular situations which generate a kaleidoscope of different behaviors *which are nonetheless ordered and agreed upon* (Bachnik, 1992b, p.155).

Perhaps we may choose to go along with her claim, but then, there is a problem. If everything is case by case according to circumstances, how could the subject gauge the specificities of each circumstance? This leads us to look into the kind of osmosis that is attuning with *ba*, which might possibly sound like a simple thing to do, but is in fact the complex concept of “reading the air” of *ba*.

2.6 Reading the air of *ba*

The transactions between the subject and circumstance that lead to multiple role-play or what we will see in the next section as its contemporary extension, *kyara*-play, are made viable by the constancy of “reading the air” of “*ba*.” Simply put, one needs to “read air” in order to respond to certain circumstances and make the complex nature of human interaction as harmonious and successful as one would wish it to be. The Japanese dictionary, *Daijirin*, states that “reading air” means “to sense what an individual is supposed to do or is expected to be, and intuitively guess what others wish him or her to do or not to do” (Matsumura, 2006).

One could propose that “reading air” is similar to the Western idea of “reading between the lines” in order to understand circumstantial specificities. We would tend to think that “reading between the lines” implies the gauging of meaning behind what has been said --- and one could conceivably act upon the consequence of that, and therefore be said to relate to circumstance at a specific time. However, one should perhaps note that the majority of Japanese imagine “air” metaphorically, as though it were a certain atmosphere which conducts both the conversations and the circumstances in which they take place.

In other words, “reading air” primarily focuses on the reciprocal relations between the subject and the environment, gauged via multimodal perceptions, and seeks to identify affordance and *have it acted upon*. Its focus therefore is to “follow a flow of movement in the present situation” (Hamada, 2006; Tatsukawa, 2010), and detect “how the subject’s engagement may cause some changes. That is to say, a shift of the air of *ba*” (Hidaka, 2012), by which and on that account, the subject is able to assess what needs to be paid attention to. In this context, we can see that this is the act of detecting affordance in the environment.

The novelist, Yamamoto Shichihei, who is known for his pioneering work on the concept of “reading air,” does not actually say that “the act of reading the air of *ba*” is a crucial constituent part of *seken*. Nevertheless, his comment on the ways “the individual knows what is the righteous thing to do, yet puts aside his personal view to support the majority’s point of view (i.e. *seken*) in order to avoid confrontation is illogical” (Yamamoto, S. 1983), clearly indicates that he is specifically looking at the ways *seken* rules.

In *Kūki no kenkyū* [The study of air] (1983), he offers an analysis of dozens of historical and political events that demonstrate the power that “reading air” can have for individuals in specific instances, with some of them sometimes making irrational decisions which have led to serious national-scale disasters.¹²

Yamamoto confirms that the way the Japanese let the air have authority over their minds, causing seriously irrational behaviour, can be startling. He references incidents where so much concern for reading the air condemned the nation to situations of huge turmoil during World War Two (Yamamoto, S. 1983). Individuals in positions of public and political power have been considered as deliberately making what, retrospectively, have been judged as irrational decisions by “reading air,” despite there being at the time enough scientific data to prove that the decisions taken were grossly incorrect. Yamamoto’s argument announces himself as someone who is fundamentally against the

¹² Yamamoto, for example, relates the infamous *Tokkō shutsugeki* (Suicide attack sorties), which put the war submarine, *Yamato*, into a totally and lethally irrational battle situation. The vice chief of the Naval general staff, claimed that “by reading air, not only at the time of the attack but also in retrospect, the *Yamato* attack was necessary” (Yamamoto, S. 1983, pp.15-16).

practice of “reading air” as though it is per se a destabilizing factor, a deflator of the public's intelligence or sense of logic.

To perceive that the surrounding air carries value and meaning for us is a persuasive-enough argument for the skill of “reading air” to be understood as a type of social affordance that is clearly useful --- even essential --- for the individual, when it comes to identifying how to shift self-representations. In this way “reading air” is understood as a term incorporating reading both *seken* and *ba*, both being activators of circumstantially-defined circumselves. We can see then that the perception of *ba* requires that the subject focuses and engages with it in conscious ways, acknowledging the relationship between the subject and the specificities of the space he or she is in.

Due primarily to the limiting nature and approach of the scholarship, existing appraisals in Japanese cultural studies and *nihonjinron* focus on the ways individuals communicate, rather than addressing the medial processes that the subject-environment axis of complex subjectivities inevitably creates. We consequently get descriptions of Japanese communication as “situational ethics” (Bachnik, 1986), or “interactional relativism” (Lebra, 1976/1992), approaches which seem to delineate an awareness of change within circumstance.

Reflective of the temporarily emerging specificity of a space, a vast number of *ba* is conceived as emerging and fading away throughout one's everyday life sequences. *Seken*, in this respect, can be imagined as an assemblage of a vast quantity of *ba*, which controls ethical activity, insisting that the subject flexibly changes his or her definition of “the self.” This constant re-defining is therefore mirrored in how the Japanese linguistic system refers to the self. The use, for example, of certain personal pronouns indicates the social or psychological distance between the speaker and the listener.

Dozens of studies analyzing the impact of “reading air” typically claim that the idea of attuning with an air which has no substance is indicative of the Japanese sensibility (Hidaka & Kosugi, 2012). Mishima Azusa (2017) tells us that individuals struggle to find adequate answers to questions raised by foreign students visiting Japan, curious to know how Japanese people learn to read air. Existing studies may regard the widely-renowned concept of reading air as an emblem for the Japanese sensibility, yet it is nevertheless recognized as a mandatory ability in the present time (Nihon Keizai Shunbun, 2017). These

works generally offer case-studies to explain meticulously detailed tips and tactics on how-to-read air, by analyzing the subtle cues of facial expression or body gesture as signals to respond to efficiently (Enomoto, 2012; Naitō, Y. 2004/2006/2007; Sakurai, 2007). We note as an example that the Japanese linguist, Ishiguro Kei (2013), who makes a link with it and Shintoism, points out that “reading air” is socially essential to know how to address the self differently according to context.

However, these commentators tend to offer no feasible reasons why the air is perceived as such a powerful carrier of affordances. It is through the detection of the specificities of circumstance --- the immediate or the general --- that the subject perceives the affordances of the environment and then chooses how to act accordingly. Reading the air of *seken*, which consists of an ever-shifting quantity of *ba*, one then shifts self-representation, therefore forming a coherent behavioural practice, reflective of the subject's perceptions and responses to an engagement with the contemporary environment. From this, we can clearly recognize that the concept of *kyara-play* becomes a social phenomenon.

Attuning with *ba*, whatever decisions it may activate, can be considered paramount in the management of life for many Japanese, and such is the power of reading air to the subject's awareness of contemporary Japan, that it extends into all the dimensions of social life --- communication, business tactics and political negotiations.

2.7.1 Demographic changes: Multiple role-play into *kyara-play*

It is crucial to note that the turning point where multiple role-play is transformed into *kyara-play* coincides with several important changes of ecological conditions, forming the notion of space as the *assemblage* of fragmented, diversified spaces.

The individual is encouraged to perceive the different specificities thrown up by each space having its own agenda, its own circumstantial factors. This perception of *ba* consequently influences the ways the subject perceives the self and engages with the situation at hand.

There are two issues that need to be examined in our understanding of how multiple-role-play has been elevated to *kyara-play*. The changes to Japanese demographic conditions, and the influence of the advancing

technologies, especially the invention of the computer system, are both absolutely crucial.

The first factor of demographic changes inarguably affects certain aspects of *seken's* characteristic of common sense. The stagnation of economic growth led to the deconstruction of traditional corporate culture, drastically changing the working environment. Although the government promoted various schemes to try to reform the work system (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2019), the prolonged economic stagnation led to a shortage in corporate investments for employees, abolishing the so-called lifetime employment scheme. Whilst women's status in working environments might have gradually improved somewhat, there has been a steady population decline in an ageing society. The individual increasingly feels uncertainty over his or her future prospects (Sugimoto, Y. 2010; NHK Close-up Gendai Plus, 2019). Dealing with the milieu of this era, the ways the subject perceives the self becomes increasingly site-specific. One is often required to demonstrate one's in situ ability or adaptability, and this is where the idea of *kyara-play* as a resource is appreciated. Without question, it allows the subject to demonstrate both the essentials: a quick and clear communication ability, and a flexible adaptability.

The second factor --- the advancing technologies --- was also instrumental in advancing multiple role-play into *kyara play*. Due to the increasing availability of multiple communication platforms supported by various technological devices, the use of technologies greatly influences and is influenced by the subject. We are now able to pick and choose how to interact with others via our mobiles, by email, and via Facebook, Twitter, etc., and with whom, when, and where we are communicating now make us far more conscious of our choice of medium. The time has long passed when people had face-to-face as the predominant means of communicating with others. Indeed the availability of multiple media makes us more specific about how we want to interact. One may choose the mobile because it is handy and convenient, but others may find Facebook as the more attractive communication tool, affording the means to connect with an imagined audience (Sheldon, 2008; Special & Li-Barber, 2012). Due to the fact that each medium comes with its materialistic limitation, configuring the ways we communicate accordingly, we are constantly negotiating with the use of these technological devices, and detecting a particular affordance.

In this respect, the practice of kyara-play gains status because it is recognized as a versatile trans-medium, allowing the subject to flexibly transcend traditional communication boundaries, and thereby express one's fluid adaptability in relation to the mediated environment.

"*Playing kyara*" can be considered as the contemporary version of multiple role-play, but these two conceptual entities have a different focus. Multiple role-play, we must note, aims to achieve a certain goal, with the subject's intention being to play roles purposefully and successfully. On the other hand, kyara is a context-dependent existence, and its defining elements of *ba* --- circumstantial factors --- are the crucial components making the kyara alive. In other words, the played kyara is embodied via *ba*, so it is not entirely belonging to the self. In a sense, the function of kyara-play is that it is the vehicle primarily focusing on a demonstration of one's flexible adaptability to various circumstances. For this reason each played kyara applies codified behavioural modes in order to denote with clarity how one flexibly switches multiple kyara.

Acknowledging the specificities of Japanese social circumstances, this, then, is a term used to define how the subject may adapt to particular situations by playing a form of multiple roles (Shirota, 2005; Senuma, 2007; Saitō, T. 2011/2013). "Kyara"¹³ is written in the *katakana* notation form, キャラ, and because the Japanese language system uses *katakana* notation specifically for words imported from abroad, its usage for the word "kyara" clearly reinforces its connection to the Western word "character." The term "kyara" (pronounced as "kyaraa" in Japanese) is the abbreviation of "character/kyaracter" (pronounced "kyaracutā" in Japanese). It is believed to have been introduced into the Japanese language by the Disney corporation's film-release contract form, that listed the "fanciful characters" appearing in their films in Japan around the 1950s.¹⁴ Saitō Tamaki (2011) tells us that this term used by Disney was originally translated into Japanese as "fictional characters," a term itself

¹³ Whilst the Japanese *katakana* form for this word, キャラ, would never be mispronounced or misconceived by the average Japanese person, its English form, "chara," may be mispronounced by those Japanese who mistake its function or do not recognize its context. I use the word "kyara" as the majority of Japanese commentators do, pronouncing the word as [kara]/"kyara."

¹⁴ Disney's animation, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1938) was released in 1950 (Tsugata, 2005).

soon to be shortened to the word “character” (キャラクター), and then abbreviated further to the word, “kyara” (キャラ).

There is little evidence to indicate when the term kyara-play began to be actually used to describe the ways individuals play multiple roles circumstantially (Saitō, T. 2011; Shirota, 2005). Some commentators --- such as Shirota Hideaki --- believe that the word was circulated amongst the public before the beginning of the 1990s (Shirota, 2005). But *Gendai yōgo no kiso chishiki* [The dictionary of words in current use], gave reference to it in 1999, and it was also apparent that the word was being used extensively in Japanese newspapers published in the same year (Aihara, 2007; Chishima & Murakami, 2017).

In relation to the 21st century technologically-mediated environment, the individual became aware of the idea of kyara-play through being surrounded by the wealth of information widely circulated by the mass media, offering a vast array of guidelines and advice about kyara-play activities. We will look into this more in the next chapter, but the significant point that needs stating here is that the subject became aware of the fact that the act of kyara-play enables one to adapt to circumstances with a flexibility that at once offers expression and protection.

2.7.2 Kyara-play’s target age, and gender issues

Whilst traditional multiple role-play aims to perform social roles which function in various socio-cultural domains, kyara-play incorporates fictional characters which appear in manga/anime, TV programmes, and featured celebrities. (Asai, M. 2012; Inoue, Y. 2017; Nakoshi, 2015a/2015b; Doi & Saitō, 2010). We can also note that whilst traditional multiple role-play’s target ages are generally restricted to working generations, the age of those enacting kyara-play has radically expanded to be between 10 to 60 year olds. This would include youth as student (10years old, junior- high school to high school, and university students), and individuals who belong to the active working generation of 20-60year olds. Kyara-commentators, such as Saitō Tamaki, Nobuta Sayoko and Morikawa Suimei, point out that it is invariably the adult in working and private environments, and the youth in education that tend to be involved with kyara-play (Saitō, Nobuta & Morikawa, 2018).

Taking their comments into account, this thesis focuses on the analysis of the individual responses to the idea of kyara-play at institutional places. These environments generally expect the individual to follow certain protocols and behave in particular ways, and in so doing we are able to gauge a clearer picture of how the individual negotiates with the idea of kyara-play.

In addition, certain kyara-play commentators' observations, and individual real-life case studies indicate that issues of gender are inarguably influential factors influencing reactions to the idea of kyara-play. We will examine how questions of gender are inevitably associated with one's kyara-play, but since this thesis aims to specifically demonstrate how a detected affordance helps us to trace mechanisms of kyara-play, it does not offer further speculation on action possibilities. Limited space and chosen restraints governing the thesis mean that an analysis of what kind of ecological factors influence gender issues, and affect the subject's detection of affordance, will need to be carried out in a future study.

2.7.3 Detected affordance leading to an enactment of kyara-play

From the standpoint that affordance needs to be realized by one's action, our aim is to trace what kind of affordance is detected in the course of communicating with others, and analyze the reasons for enacting kyara-play.

As Inoue Yoshitaka claims, it is absolutely crucial to understand the cultural significance of kyara-play in which the self and personal relationships are formed, since the phenomenon has infiltrated the entire Japanese society. He reminds us that "everyone from the youth to the adult, including politicians, are concerned with their kyara" (Inoue, Y. 2017, p.44).

Kyara-play is a relational property --- just like affordance --- identified and enacted by the subject according to circumstance. And it is for this reason that we have chosen Gibson's ecological psychology and his affordance theory to elucidate why kyara-play is identified as the way of engaging with the mediated environment.

It is important to affirm that there is a wide array of works proposed by dozens of loosely-termed kyara-play commentators specializing in various disciplines. Business-marketing analysts think that kyara-play allows individuals to demonstrate their communication ability and job skills (Asai, M. 2012; Uhira

& Harada, 2011; Yoshida, 2016), whilst certain psychologists such as Enomoto (2014), Naitō Yoshihito (2013) or Saitō Tamaki (2011/2013/2018), analyze kyara-play as a coping mechanism for enhancing communication. From a cultural studies point of view, kyara is analyzed as a culturally significant Japanese phenomenon, and so the aim is to identify its essential factors (Aihara, 2007; Senuma, 2007). For sociologists and educational psychologists, kyara-play is the one of the critical and complex issues which may provoke harassment or bullying at schools, and as a consequence some schools teach how to play kyara more effectively (Hashimoto, Sanae, 2016; Doi, Takayoshi, 2008/2009; Suzuki, S., 2011).

2.7.4 Reading air of *ba*: The success or failure of kyara-play

As we briefly looked at in the previous section, the turning point when multiple role-play was elevated to kyara-play coincided with several important changes of ecological conditions, registering a notion of space as the *assemblage* of fragmented or clustered spaces.

Being heavily influenced by these demographic changes, the detection of affordance in terms of representing the self became further complicated. Multiple role-play was transformed into kyara play because kyara-play allows a more specific focus on time, place, and occasion (TPO), and allows one to display personality traits with greater precision. Additionally, kyara-play has a sense of performativity that carries with it the possibilities not only of expression, but also of reward, and even fun. An understanding of the term “reading the air of *ba*” helps us trace the reasons why such a transition was triggered, and we can also appreciate why “reading the air of *ba*” is indeed the instigator of context specific kyara-play.

With such a paramount concern taken over *seken*, it may perhaps at first be thought strange that Japanese society seems so aware of the social boundaries which are maintained through language and behavioural decisions. One learns to read the placement and possible displacement of division, and learns that the interpretation of circumstance and what it affords gives rise to the necessity of kyara-play as a means of adjustment. *Seken* can act as a mediator in all this, helping make clear the ways to behave in circumstances where awareness of one's position in relation to others is crucial. Perhaps we should recognise here

the relevance to questions of subjectivity and perception that this thesis is primarily concerned with, that are implicit in these constant positional assessments made in relation to circumstance. In this respect, kyara-play can increasingly be appreciated as the trans-medium, which allows the subject to flexibly trespass precariously changeable boundaries, and transform into practice one's fluid perceptions about the mediated environment.

We can recognize that the emphasis on *ba* --- the specificities of a space in a temporary state --- places it as one of the most critical factors influencing the subject. This act of detecting a set of sequential elements defining its specificities, as we have seen, is known as the act of "reading the air" of *ba* (Yokoyama, 2014; Takano, F. 2007; Uhira & Harada, 2011).

Kyara-play is generally preceded by a conscious decision, an indexing or tagging of multiple-selves according to circumstances. However, it is crucial to note that the subject plays kyara in order to communicate with others, so the act of kyara-play harnesses reciprocal relationships. We can conclude that this is why one's reception of kyara-play fluctuates according to circumstances.

Attuning with the air has become such a valued tool in the modern urban environment that there is even a term, "KY" (*kūki ga yomenai*),¹⁵ for those who are unable to "read air,"¹⁶ or unable to profess any mastery in the process. Individuals are known to suffer anxieties over being KY, and being on the receiving end of heavy social-inadequacy criticism as a consequence (Aikawa, 2007; Tanaka, D. 2008).

Interestingly, and somewhat ruthlessly, we may think, the well-known business magazine, *President* (2008), published a special issue featuring sales people who were KY, and were considered consequently to jeopardize business opportunities for their company (Katsumi, 2008). Psychologists such as Enomoto (2018), Tomita Takashi (2007) and Aikawa Atsushi (2007), examine real examples of how and why those sales people failed to engage with clients or customers by reading air "too much" or incorrectly. We can certainly sympathize with those Japanese business people who are clearly made to be fully aware of the stigma of being labelled KY (Katsumi, 2008).

¹⁵ A person who is labelled as KY can be similarly understood metaphorically as a tone-deaf person, unable to comprehend the different nuances of a given situation (Takanaga, 2010).

¹⁶ KY was selected as one of the most widely-used popular terms in 2007, researched by the well-respected Japanese dictionary *Gendai yōgo no kiso chishiki*.

Newspapers and TV programmes, furthermore, actively claim that the skill of “reading air” is essential for politicians, and consequently criticize those who do not manage it well. Even the Japanese prime minister, Abe Shinzō --- whose nickname “Mr KY” was given by the mass media --- is criticized for constantly letting the nation down by seeming to be incapable of “reading air” (Ennis, 2014; Yomiuri Weekly, 2007; Sakuragi, 2008; Tokyo Sports, 2014; Murphy, 2014).

It would seem then that no one is above judgment. Tim Ray (2018) tells us that when a person is perceived as KY, even the president of a large corporation, like Olympus, can be so abruptly treated as an outsider that his very life feels threatened (Ray, 2018; Taggart, 2015).

As a vital part of the reading air-kyara-play axis, Gibson tells us that affordance can be perceived as negative or positive or even neutral (Gibson, 1986, p.137), and we examine this further in the methodology chapter. But in this context, it is useful to look into the typical guides for the modern Japanese on attunement, such as the psychologist, Naitō Yoshihito (2004/2007) offers a wide range of case studies that provide a practical guide on why one fails to “read air,” how to intuit others’ needs or thoughts, how to control “the air” of a certain space at a specific time, how to polish the skill of attuning to the environment, and how to communicate with KY.

In fact, reminding us of the essentially performative nature of kyara-play, Kōkami Shyōji (2009), the popular theatre director and the author of several books offering tips on “how to (*direct oneself to*) learn to be attractive” (by training the voice, body language, speech tones), takes on board Yamamoto’s view about “air,” and refers to “reading air” as a kind of barometer of communication, helping to identify the other party’s unspoken thoughts.

2.8.1 2000’s to the present time: Indexing of kyara

As we briefly mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, we are now ready to examine how two key socio-economic and technology factors have transformed multiple-role play into kyara-play.

To cope with the prolonged economic stagnation, it is observable that Japanese corporations have begun to favour a work force that is not only *soku-senryoku* --- an immediately available power (employee) --- but can

demonstrate instant and efficient business skills (Nakamura, T. 2018a/2018b/2018c).

Kyara-play, in this context, is extremely useful, enabling the subject to demonstrate a suitability for the job. One's personal kyara's traits can be public knowledge, it is perfectly possible for the individual to offer an instant summary of them to a potential employer. As Asano Tomohiko (2013) rightly points out, easily understandable self-representation reduces the risk of uncertainties or ambiguities in the communication and situational demands of the work place.

Naming the kyara one plays is a way of indexing multiple-selves, and can remind one of its personal traits as well as offering others a blueprint of expectations from that kyara. Individuals generally share marginally similar views of kyara prototypes, since huge quantities of published material, online information, and popular TV programmes circulate information regularly. One can even get advice about which kyara is suitable, or what kinds of behavioural modes may fit into which kyara (Laurier, 2016) from online discussion platforms (Excite News, 2015/2016; Yahoo! Japan, 2014/2016/2017).

Whilst the mass media may continually introduce a new type of kyara, there are already dozens of well-established kyara prototypes known to the public. Detailed descriptions of kyara traits are generally available, and one can access information on a kyara's personality type, its clothing, behavioural modes, speech tone, facial expressions, and even occupation suitabilities. The fact that some established dictionaries offer kyara-clarification puts our understanding of its socio-cultural significance into perspective (*Gendai yōgo no kiso chishiki*, 2003/2013).¹⁷

Some commentators, such as the theatre director Betchaku Shinji (2017), or the business-marketing analyst Aihara Hiroyuki (2007), claim that the existence of these complex directives illustrates the fact that many Japanese tend to aspire to a kind of personality visualization, adopting an iconic image as a vehicle for successful communication. Although there is room for self-developing the kyara one plays, it is less likely to be regarded as a creation of one's own --- especially as a pre-eminent, one-and-only kyara. However, the

¹⁷ *Gendai yōgo no kiso chishiki* (2003/2013) defines that "tennen kyara" is a person who is always absentminded and/or a person who is prone to make silly mistakes, and "ijirare kyara" is a person who is targeted for being made fun of, or harassed.

subject's played kyara is generally expected to be understood as clearly as a signboard message, by both the performer and the observer. Hence the inspiration to mimic verbal speech styles and tonalities, to embrace the visual modes of dress codes, physiognomical expression and body gestures, all of which are known to signify a particular kyara prototype. In a sense, no kyara name means no existence, and this indexing-as-affordance by the technologically-mediated environment is detected by the subject and leads to the enactment of kyara-play.

Indeed, one has to learn how to interpret a coded personality in order to *activate* one's played kyara. As president of a fashion-sales business consultancy, Kamijyō Miyuki, for example, provides a list of ten different kyara-types. We have "*anego kyara*" (big sister's kyara), "*nekura kyara*" (kyara exhibiting a depressive personality), or "*manzai kyara*" (a comedian's kyara), all identified in the ways listed above (Kamijyō, M. 2005, pp.134-139). The majority of kyara typically come with figures taken from real life, and being publicly known figures --- celebrities and politicians --- or characters appearing in fictional stories from television dramas, manga and anime, it is possible for the individual to check them out to see what fits (Naitō, 2013).

It might all sound clear and effortless, but that is not to say the individual plays kyara happily with no sense of ambivalence. The fact that the dictionary, *Gendai yōgo no kiso chishiki* (2013/2006/2003), references the stress caused by kyara-play in the context of mental health makes us realize that it is a recognized social phenomenon.

Over the past two decades, together with the prolonged economic stagnation after the collapse of the economic bubble in the mid 1990s, incidents like the Tokyo subway sarin attack, and major earthquakes like the Great Tōhoku Earthquake, have been observed to significantly build up anxiety levels in individuals and society alike (Allison, 2013; Pendleton, 2011/2018).

The book published by Laurier Henshūbu (2016), informs us that companies became eager to generate quick and safe profits, and the labour market consequently valued the individual who is able to fit into a role efficiently, and deal with the job in the correct manner. We can understand why the traditional idea of circumstantially-defined role-play morphed into kyara-play, because of the latter's practical way of advertising immediately one's relative predictability and reliability as a communicator.

For initiating a clearer precision to self-representation, introducing a new persona through kyara-play is now often conceived of as an effective in situ skill. In work and gender-related situations, one can readily imagine its effectiveness in breaking pre-existing stereotypes (Nakano, M. 2017a/2017b/2018a/2019). Additionally, for individuals negatively affected by the changes to the Japanese demographic, the concept of kyara-play has proved to be one of the most effective coping mechanisms, whether dealing with employment hazards or social complications. (Akiyama & Iwanami, 2011; Ishinabe, 2005).

The pressures of all this are invariably registered in the so-called “lost generation” --- those born between 1971 and 1981 --- who are constrained by the stigma of being contract employees, having less financial security than other generations (NHK Close-up Gendai Plus, 2019; Yasuda, et al., 2009). In Japan it is considered that this generation experienced the drastic changes to the job market, following the breakdown of the conventional, hierarchical employment system that resulted from the bursting of the bubble economy.

Those who belong to the lost generation seem to consolidate two opposing outlooks on life. There are those who took the initiative to break down traditional work ethics and systems as an opportunity to explore the freedom to create their own work and lifestyle (Mandujano-Salazar, 2017). And then there are those who became so-called “NEET” --- Not in Education, Employment, or Training --- working instead as temporary employees, unable to find secure or steady jobs, and struggling to survive (Asahi Shinbun Lost Generation Shuzaihan, 2007; NHK Close-up Gendai Plus, 2019).

We can see how for both sectors, these problems can be registered in attitudes to married and family-life. The journalist Watanabe Hiroko, who specialized in work-related environmental issues, points out that the majority of female workers of the “lost generation,” including herself, find that working and having a family is extremely difficult (Yasuda, et al., 2009).¹⁸ Indeed the twin demographic pressures of a low birth rate and an ageing population led to severe work shortages and the ensuing collapse of Japan’s pension and welfare system through a lack of tax revenue (Chiavacci, 2014).

Linked to these changes within corporate culture, the collapse of the

¹⁸ The editor of R25 magazine, tells us he asked a man why he has not got married, and got the answer, “my salary is so low, I am afraid of never being able to afford to have a family” (Asahi Shinbun Lost Generation Shuzaihan, 2007,p.233).

traditional lifetime employment scheme undermined the pre-existent notion of the “family relationship” between a corporation and its employees, which shifted to a partnership (Iizuka, 2018; Hoffman, Casnocha & Yeh, 2014).

Hoping to improve such turmoil, the Japanese Business Federation (Nippon Keidanren), and the Japan Association of Corporate Executives (Keizai Dōyūkai) are attempting to promote “diversity”(tayōsei) and “an independent-type employee” (*jiritsugata jinzai*) (Minashita, 2019; Nihon Keizai Shinbun, 2015). However, as David Rear (2016) and Ōkubo Hideo (2015) point out, there are clear problems in adapting the pre-existing Japanese-style management to the present economic situation.

These changes to the working environment significantly affected individuals’ lifestyles, transforming the earlier role-models of husband, mother, family, etc. to something new. Similarly, of course, such ecological changes have also critically affected the youth and how they communicate.

2.8.2 Youth playing kyara

In relation to these ecological changes especially, the idea of playing kyara became both an influence and a necessity amongst the young. It is argued that demographic changes, like the increasing number of nuclear families and fragmentation within communities, have made it more difficult for youth to learn just how to communicate (Laurier Henshūbu, 2016; Shirata, H. 2005).

Attempting to investigate the problem, the Japanese Ministry of Education started to work with the Japanese theatre director, Hirata Oriza, who believes in designing total communication strategies (Hirata, 2007/2012). Since 2002, his educational manual on learning how to communicate has been included in a national language education book, which is an official supplement for both elementary and high schools (Hirata, 2000/2013). We should note that this school manual explicitly reflects Hirata’s belief that directing an actor’s performance for a theatre stage, means finding a way of recreating realistic human interactions. It conducts a theatre performance style, communication-learning method, and pupils are therefore encouraged to perform chosen roles and create dialogues in front of others.

In the current climate, communication ability is one of the most crucial factors both adults and the young are concerned to improve (Nihon Keizai

Dantai Rengōkai, 2018; Ōshima, 2014), and kyara-play, in this sense, is considered to be an effective method one can apply (Chisima & Murakami, 2015).¹⁹ Nevertheless, there is a mixed view on kyara-play. A school counselor, Hashimoto Sanae (2016), for example, recommends school pupils learn how to increase the number of kyara they can play. There are even school educational manuals offering practical guides on how-to teach pupils to “read air,” and identify which kyara to play (Shimada & Aida, 2008). Schools may actually provide lessons where pupils can practice how to read the air of *ba*, just like an actor learning to play a role in a theatre (Yoneda & Taniguchi, 2015; Kaneko, 2009). Furthermore, there are several organizations offering workshops to both adults and teenagers, to learn how-to-communicate via performance, even training individuals to qualify as communication facilitators.²⁰

2.9.1 *Uchi/soto*: The contemporary version

The demographic changes that have overhauled parts of Japan have also invariably affected the understanding of the distinctions between *uchi* and *soto* in very complex ways. We can firstly see that the increasing number of foreign residents draws ambivalent distinctions whereby the boundary between *uchi* and *soto* cannot clearly be stated (Serizawa, 2018/2019). Broadly speaking, legal residency would imply the status of “*uchi*” in a workplace, yet being a foreigner indicates the permanency of “*soto*.”

Secondly, the gradual improvement of women’s status quo, especially their working environment and access consequently to an income, enables them to choose their lifestyles more freely (Allison, 2013; Nakano, M. 2019; Shirakawa, 2016; Kanno, K. 2018). This consequently changes how the notion of family --- which was previously what *uchi* actually denoted --- can be understood. An increasing number of unmarried women, called “*ohitorisama*” (singletons)

¹⁹ Targeting university and high school students, Chishima Yuta and Murakami Tatsuya (2015), offer a substantially data-based, psychological study on kyara-play.

²⁰ The organization called “Dramacation” was set up in 2005 by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology to create an educational promotion plan for special training schools. The Japan Communication Ability Association offers training and seminars for adults who want to make use of communication skills for their work as well as in their private lives.

(Dales, 2014; Iwashita, K. 2001), live alone or share their homes in sharehouses with strangers (Nakano, L. 2014).

These factors obscure the distinctions that define *uchi* as opposed to *soto*, leading to the speculation that it might indeed be decided entirely by how the subject perceives the situation.

Examining a little closer the first point we looked at in the previous section, the increasing number of foreigners who have started to live in Japan has shifted the previously understood conception of Japan as a homogeneous nation, to one more widely recognized as a multinational nation. The increasing number of foreign workers with full legality, who mainly come from East Asian countries, create an uneasy tension towards those Korean and Chinese people who have been residents for decades, but do not carry the same legalities (Chapman, 2008; Sakamoto, 2011; Sezer, 2019; Sneider, 2019).

Looking at the second point, it is worth noting that the notion of *uchi*, which was understood as *us/myself/family*, has been used as a way of explaining Japanese uniqueness. Commentators like Inoue Tadashi (2007), Doi Takeo (1971) and Nakane Chie (1967), claim that Japanese people tend to think of the family as the fundamental social unit signifying Japanese cultural identity, rather than the individual. However, changes to Japanese economic conditions have shifted the hitherto normative concept of the family (Iwashita, K. 2001; Miura, A. 2013; Ueno, 2011), clearly challenging this view (Dales, 2014; Kawano, Roberts, & Long, 2014).²¹

The Japanese notion of “home” in relation to *uchi-soto* distinctions may still indicate “a cultural perception of space” (Ronald, 2009). But with the changing demographic, the status of women and the rise of the singleton, it is important to allow the fact that the boundary between *uchi* and *soto* has become increasingly ambivalent. Changes in attitudes to domestic space are increasingly apparent, and the increasing number of singletons living with their parents, alone or sharing a living space with strangers re-focuses perceptions of *uchi* and *soto*.

²¹ Dales’ careful observations of the prejudicial treatment of sexuality in Japan are crucial for an understanding of the lack of equilibrium between genders. We have a limited space here, and intend exploring this issue further in the near future (Dales, 2014). Owing to certain improvements in working environments (Nakano, L. 2014), the public perception of a female singleton has gradually shifted since Yamada describes those singletons living with their parents as “parasite single” (Yamada, M. 1999).

According to the *Sharehouse Guidebook* (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, 2018), the number of singletons living in sharehouses has steadily been increasing due to the rising housing costs in cities, flexibilities of employment, and the fortunate addition of attractive spaces for expanding social networks. Existing data indicates that approximately 70 percent of sharehouse residents are female. The reasons given for this are that the gradual improvement of women's working environments allows them to be financially independent, enabling them to have more lifestyle choices offering a move away from the traditional norms of motherhood and marriage (News Post Seven, 2017; Saitō & Katō, 2018).²²

We can ask how these fundamental attitudinal and practical changes affect the notion of *uchi* and *soto*, and would they indeed create a "third place" which does not belong to either (Nishikiyama, 2012)?

Caitlin Meagher, who worked on some ethnographic studies on how *uchi* and *soto* are constructed in Japanese sharehouses, suggests that this newly-introduced concept of space adds further implications to the previously established understanding of *uchi* and *soto*. Meagher explains that because "the sharehouse clearly violates the integrity of these spheres by bringing *soto* into the *uchi* (...) (because) its logic of gender equality, lack of hierarchy, and freedom from interference is deliberately opposed to the structure of the family home"(Meagher, 2017, pp.117-119).

Our concern here is to note that the divisive notion of *uchi* and *soto* is perceived to be in an added state of fluctuation, which in turn adds another layer onto kyara-play's platform. This new complexity, now integrated into an already ambiguous social concept, illustrates the trope that the subject's perception of the self is in a constant state of metamorphosis, driven by the complex nature of Japan's contemporary urban environment. The traditional roles of the father working and the mother maintaining the household is gradually shifting, as there are, clearly, successful role changes of the full-time housewife to the full time househusband (Nakano, M. 2019; Shirakawa, T. 2016; Kanno, K. 2018). Also, some TV programmes reflect the changes of women's

²² With the impact of a decreasing population and aging society on consumer culture, the marketing analyst, Miura Atsushi, tells us that by 2035 the number of singleton households is expected to be 18,460,000. On the other hand, the previously predominant household type of 'parents and their children' is expected decrease to 11,530,000 (Miura, A. 2013).

status and lifestyle, opening up further role-playing possibilities (Kusaba, 2019; Nakano, L. 2014).

One may argue that the use of an already equivocal language, focused here on the use of *uchi* and *soto*, makes the subject doubly aware of the lack of a fixed, stable boundary because perceptions within the day-to-day are configured through the medial processes.

2.9.2 Breakdown of the myth of homogeneous Japan

Emphatically, the changes to Japan's demographic status quo over the past two decades gradually converted the view of the Japanese as homogeneous beings, a subject which has long been actively discussed amongst *nihonjinron* commentators. Statistics show us a population decline, which has been noted steadily over the past nine years (Hirabayashi, 2018). This, together with an ageing society and low birth rate, have led to a fundamental shortage in workers, so much so that the government introduced a new immigration policy aiming to bring over 500,000 workers by 2025.²³ Currently, according to the official data provided by the Ministry of Justice, the number of foreign, middle to long-term residents peaked at 2,232,026 --- the highest number ever recorded --- with an increase of 7.5% (Year-on-year rate). This means that one out of ten twenty year-olds living in Tokyo city is a foreigner (Nihon Keizai Shinbun, 2018), and one out of twenty employees working for convenient stores are non-Japanese (Serizawa, 2018/2019). Iwabuchi (2015) places the gradual shift of homogeneous Japan to cosmopolitanism as a result of the increasing number of immigrants able to live and work in Japan, legalized by changes to the government's immigration policy.

Whilst there are a number of reasons we can speculate about, this might be firmly linked with globalization movements happening both inside and outside Japan. In the present time, there is not enough evidence available to indicate exactly how such a change to the sense of localized globalization via face-to-face communication might influence the ways the subject defines the self. But a shift within the strategies of self-presentation and self-identification

²³ To put the number in perspective, in the construction industry alone, there will be a shortage of between 780,000 to 930,000 workers by 2025; and in the agricultural industry, due to ageing workers, there will be a projected shortage of between 46,000 to 103,000 (Isoyama, 2018).

seems inevitable.

With the Japanese demographic changing so noticeably with the influx of foreign labour, and a burgeoning tourist industry being touted by the government (Japan National Tourism Organization, 2019), the need to elevate not just pride in the nation's status, but a national sense of confidence in the face of potential social pressures has become apparent.

2.10.1 The emergence of a new type of nihonjinron

Despite the fragmenting of belief, we can still see that the strong hold of the binary, contrasting view of Japanese versus the Other is continuously running through the nihonjinron regime. We can see that the recent, best-selling nihonjinron is written by the well-known critic, Watanabe Shyōichi (2016), who claims that "the Japanese have a special DNA." Several politicians also making some exorbitant claims on how wonderful it is to be Japanese, are proven to be well-received (Fukaya, 2017; Sakurai, Y. 2015; Takeda, 2010).

The million seller, *Kokka no hinkaku* [The dignity of the nation] (2005), written by Fujiwara Masahiko, is not shy of praising every possible angle on the idea of Japanese special "emotions/expressions/jyochō," and its "katachi" "sensitivity," and, of course, *bushidō* spirit "completely different from other countries." For Koyano Ton (2010) or Stephen Vlastos (1998), this cultural uniqueness discovered in the recent fabrications of "age-old" Japanese traditions is nothing but artificial contrivance. Such "invented traditions" (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) can have no significant cultural value or meaning either.

In addition to this traditional approach to nihonjinron, an increasing number of Japanese living abroad publish nihonjinron-style memoirs, commenting on cultural differences between Japan and the foreign countries they live in (Amamiya, 2018a; Kumagai, 2015). This self-essentializing nihonjinron rhetoric has become more evident, and can easily be seen in the new type of nihonjinron appearing since the 2000's up to now (Hayakawa, T. 2016; Amamiya, 2018b).

Nevertheless, even today, nihonjinron is so persistently popular that the fact that "the history of the best-selling books in Japan equating to the publishing history of nihonjinron" (Okazaki, 2007) has become common

knowledge.

Nihonjinron, as we have seen, can be considered to serve a parallel function by articulating Japanese uniqueness. However, as we have seen, it is important to pay attention to the fact that there are remarks made by commentators and academics, indicating a curiosity about why nihonjinron remains open to new perspectives on what Japanese uniqueness can indeed be or become. As Hayakawa Tadanori tells us, “an idea of Japan and the Japanese yet to be discovered, can perhaps be one of the main reasons for nihonjinron publications to be so popular” (Hayakawa, 2016).

The journalist, Okazaki Takashi, speculates further on “why nihonjinron persistently tells us that concepts of Japanese cultural identities are rather inconsistent”(Okazaki, 2007). One could argue that this seeming inconsistency, aligned to an attraction to the equivocal that manoeuvres assessments, consequently, of national identities, reflects an inclination towards that complexity we term circumselves.

As a way into understanding the nature of the complex self-identification process within Japanese socio-cultural contexts, it might be advisable to put all these ideas and concepts under the magnifying glass of postcolonial theories. Stuart Hall, who is one of the prime authorities in this field of study, would tell us that identity is about the move towards the stabilization of the concept of “the self,” pointing to the ways “‘Englishness’ was formed in the context of imperialism” and “how the colonized other were constituted as a part of English cultural identity” (Hall, 1997, p.11).

We can absorb Hall’s thinking into the suggestion that the ways “Japanese uniqueness” is formed in the context of “Westernization” are similar to the ways Englishness was constituted. The concept of Otherness actually helps Japanese people to identify their similarities, whilst recognizing how different they are from the Other.

Millie Creighton draws on the concepts of *uchi* and *soto* to explain how images of the foreigners are “part of the process through which Japaneseness is constructed as normative in contrast to foreigners who represent universal ‘Otherness’” (Creighton, 1997, p.212). As Kondō Dorinne (1997) suggests, “performing race” in the context of auto-exoticism and Japanese neocolonialism is played out in Japanese advertising. Creighton also sees that images surrounding racial categories are projected in Japan, particularly

through advertisements, arguing that “images of foreigners are prevalent in Japanese advertising. By providing an oppositional contrast, these images help construct and perpetuate an imagined Japanese self-identity” (Creighton, 1997, p.212).

The logic that imposing a stereotypical view on others enables us to be different, is appreciated as a way of understanding Japanese behavior. But it is also used as a practical way of making sense communicating with foreigners in business situations, or indeed in the business of becoming a *kokusaijin* (an international person). For the past three decades, one of the major Japanese corporations, Nippon Steel, has been publishing educational books for employees doing business with foreigners (Nippon Steel Human Resources Development, 1987; Nippon Steel Research Institute, 2016).²⁴ These publications offer guideline information not only to help individuals represent themselves to foreigners, but to represent Japan.

As Iwabuchi (1994) acknowledges and we concur, it can be helpful to read *nihonjinron* for practical reasons --- broadly for getting advice for dealing smoothly with the West. As with the *kyara*-play identikit, advice publications we have been looking into earlier, we can speculate that the popularity of these books suggests that individuals find the information useful for performing the *kyara* of an international person. Nevertheless, the books offer stereotypical descriptions underscoring us as Japanese, versus the imagined otherness of the West. The other is being conveniently used to define the roles the Japanese play.

This tendency becomes more explicit when one is no longer able to actually control “the otherness,” due to open access information and increasing physical interactions with foreigners. It becomes a complex situation, triggering the idea of securing one’s “*kokusaijin kyara*” (internationally appealing personality), but also far more darkly, shoring up racism via a fixed commodification of otherness, as we can observe in the present time.

2.10.2 Fantastic Japan

²⁴ The names of the companies have changed, but both are owned by their parent company, Nippon Steel.

Known for its multi-angle claims made on Japanese uniqueness, *nihonjinron* still gains in popularity in the present time (Jarman, 2018; Shiraishi, 2014; Stanzel, 2015). Primarily, it has taken a book-publishing form, but we now find that a new style of *nihonjinron* is promoted via TV programmes like “*Nihon sugoidesune*” (fantastic Japan), “*Cool Japan*” (NHK, 2008-), and certain magazines like “*Japan Class*”²⁵ and a series of magazines irregularly published by Amazing Japan Researchers,²⁶ all of which became prominent in the past decade (Chūnichi Shinbun, 2015; Hayakawa, T. 2016; Koishigawa, 2015; Otium, 2015; Sezer, 2019). We can even conclude perhaps that the Japanese government’s very own project, “Cool Japan,” has joined the bandwagon.

Unsurprisingly, this striking form of *nihonjinron* promotion is seen as “the resurgence of cultural nationalism” (Fukuda, C. 2018), and, as we have noted above, we recognize that Alexandra Hambleton (2011) places the causes for this new trend firmly in the changes to ecological conditions reflected in Japanese demographic shifts, which have accentuated a sense of insecurity or anxiety.

This new trend might simply mirror a change of medium, but in addition to the drastic demographic changes, we have witnessed a shift from the dominant post-war discourse of Japan as a homogeneous nation to that of a “multiculturally coexistent society” (*tabunka kyōsei shakai*). The ambivalent recognition of the “other” --- the immigrant population and foreign residents --- has had to be acknowledged within the society (Flowers, 2012; Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication, 2017). Crucially, the new style of *nihonjinron* helps us recognise more clearly the following two critical issues which influence self-identification. Firstly, a *nihonjinron* presentation is expressive of a commodification of “others,” which inevitably serves to define “us.” Secondly, the encoding-decoding discourse preferred by *nihonjinron* commentators allows for both the contextualized image of others and of the self. This rhetoric of self-identification, helps us to understand why the idea of *kyara-play* expands its socio-cultural impact.

How the subject defines the self in relation to circumstances becomes an increasingly complex issue. On the one hand, the individual engages with a forever-expanding global cyber space where one senses anonymous “others,”

²⁵ The magazine has published twenty series since December 2014.

²⁶ These magazines have sensationalist titles such as Japan: *Gaikokujin ga kantanshita! sekai ga akogareru Nippon* [Japan: Foreigners are astonished! Nippon is Adored by the World !] (2016).

by definition impossible to specify. On the other hand, an increasing number of people feel dubious about the previously praised spirit of Japan (Koishigawa, 2015; Otium, 2015; Matsuoka & Brown, 2010). The reasons offered for this would include such socially-deflating events and incidents as the Aum Supreme sect's nerve gas attacks in the Tokyo subway system in 1995, the Great Tōhoku Earthquake of 2011, and ongoing criticism from China and Korea (Gilbert, 2017; Sakamoto, R. 2011; Yomiuri Shinbun, 2019), etc. These types of occurrences serve to undermine confidence in national identity, and cause reflection on how it is portrayed.

Significantly, this type of *nihonjinron* fully takes advantage of what the 21st century's technologically-mediated environment has come to afford. We acknowledge that with the exploration of cyberspace-production researchers are googling the online comments foreigners make on various aspects of Japan related subject matter. Also we notice the promotion and feedback on Japanese products online internationally, and adverts advising where to visit, eat and live like locals for foreign tourists. These adverts we should note, are *curated* creations, circulated to create and promote the image of fantastic Japan (Chūnichi Shinbun, 2015; Igata, 2014; Inoue, A. 2019).

The emergence of this new type of *nihonjinron* confirms the complex medial processes that embody subjectivities. The trajectories of dealing with conflicting views of the subject as an independent heterogeneous being conflate with being Japanese it seems. Carrying the full compliment of issues around uniqueness becomes apparent even to those individuals whose work is represented by the government soft-power project, Cool Japan, for example.

There are now thirteen adulation-style TV programmes per a week promoting fantastic Japan and all related issues --- its people, nature, customs, food, etc. These programmes tend to announce themselves as offering snapshot views of the world, introducing eclectic subject matter mixed with an international feel (Hambleton, 2011; Hagiwara, 2003; Inoue, A. 2019; Yano, 2010). But rather than actually educating us about the planet, we can sense that the main focus is to compare and show how Japan is uniquely different from others. There is a new twist to *nihonjinron* promotion here, seeking to distinguish "us Japanese" from foreigners via visual differences that are

explicitly on display, flagging commentators' nationalities²⁷ through national costumes, and so on. Conveniently defined as "ordinary foreigners" (Iwabuchi, 2005/2010), one can readily see programmes that are often keen on showing how foreigners misunderstand and or misrepresent Japan and its customs and foods, etc.

Surprisingly, Iwabuchi (2010) tells us that the director of *Kokoga hen dayo nihonjin* [You Japanese are so bizarre](KHN) (TBS, 1998-2001) made clear that he was indeed inspired to create a TV version of *nihonjinron*. This became one of the early variety *nihonjinron* programmes, featuring a panel of 25 foreigners in an attempt to represent the ordinariness of the foreign. Considered successful for somehow presenting a fair worldview, a contract was created to secure the programme's commercial future.

Commenting on what increasingly appears to be a racial mandate, Fukuda Chie (2018) and Hambleton acknowledge that Japanese variety TV programmes play a role in creating and strengthening ideas of Japanese cultural identity. Hambleton argues that "employing a *nihonjinron*-style discourse of comparing Japan with the outside world, they conclude that Japan is indeed 'uniquely unique' and depict foreign panelists in such a way that they become a spectacle, rather than a threat to the dominant ideology of a homogeneous Japan" (Hambleton, 2011, p. 43).

It is interesting to observe that the distancing effect of "a spectacle" renders foreigners usefully safe, but more important to recognize that the influx of foreigners into Japan --- as we can assume into most countries ---- can be read as a threat to the nation's culture, indeed motivating this re-shaping of *nihonjinron*.²⁸

²⁷ Iwabuchi comments on the "cultural politics of multinationalism" in the programme, pointing out how foreign discussants were required to wear the national flag of their countries on their chests. He writes that, "the [KHN] producer consciously includes foreign discussants from as many countries and regions as possible, so that the programme can pretend to represent the whole world" (Iwabuchi, 2010, p.36). Similarly, in the currently broadcast programme, *Sekai kurabete mitara* [Comparing with foreign countries] (TBS), 26 foreign panelists' nationalities are clearly displayed by them wearing traditional/national costumes.

²⁸ Hambleton pin-points the issues here, and interviewed three foreign panelists appearing on *Cool Japan* (2006-) --- the longest-running "Fantastic Japan programme" broadcast by the national broadcaster NHK --- and found out that although the programme requires the foreign panelist to be living in Japan for more than one year, there is "an unspoken rule on the show that foreign panelists only speak English and do not use Japanese, even if they are able to" (Hambleton, 2011, p.35).

The presenter of *Cool Japan*, Kōkami (2015), believes the show indicates how the Japanese are capable of combining foreign culture and traditional Japanese culture to create a hybrid uniquely Japanese. However, the viewers writing online reviews²⁹ are not entirely convinced, believing the programme takes the form of *nihonjinron*, using non-Japanese residents to judge and value Japanese culture so that it may be “re-discovered” and appreciated by younger generations of Japanese (Uno, T. 2011; Oguma, 2011/2016). The idea of offering a kind of travelogue guide to the nation’s particularities is attacked by Hayakawa Tadanori, the author of “*Nihon sugoi*” *no distopia: Senjika jigajisan no keifu* [The dystopia of “fantastic Japan”: The lineage of wartime self-admiration] (2016). As a further indictment of Japanese self-promotion, he argues that instead of promoting nationalism ideologically, those TV programmes attempt to achieve a similar effect by offering a collection of beautiful stories and trivia about the nation.

These observations of the recent *nihonjinron* trend certainly support Yoshimoto Mitsuhiro (2010), who reiterates the point he made in 1989, that the boom of internationalisation does not necessarily mean that the Japanese are now more open to accepting the differences of other cultures (Yoshimoto, 1989/2010). We can see that the recent trend of TV series featuring fantastic Japan, only offers pre-packaged, commodified images of foreigners which in turn stabilized the status quo of Japan, its people and its products, and, most importantly, the imaginary myth of Japanese uniqueness. Analyzing the trend, Yoshimoto questions whether the assumed status of globalisation is “a new state of the world that makes obsolete the old paradigm of scholarship centered around nation-states as a fundamental unit of identity” (Yoshimoto, 2010, p.4). He argues that global consumer culture’s aggressive gaze at Japanese popular culture has led to “the reorientalizing tendency of Japanese studies” (Yoshimoto, 2010, p.2). Globalisation has not yet brought a genuine threat to Japan’s fixed identity; in fact it is re-enforcing it.

This biased, stereotypical casting or commodification of otherness used for promoting Japanese uniqueness can also be found in magazines like *Japan Class* (2015-), *Japan: Gaikokujin ga daizessan shita sugoi Nippon 100!* [Japan: 100 things about Japan, the country foreigners find astonishing] (2015-), and

²⁹ See <https://matome.naver.jp/odai/2141318293834147001>

some irregularly published magazines.³⁰ Those magazines typically feature the online comments of foreigners praising fantastic Japan with reference to just about everything --- the landscape, product-making, food, culture, people, etc. However, it is crucial to note that those foreign commentators are treated as commodities, their nationalities alone listed, with no name or gender specification. They are being used as a means of defining one's imagined uniqueness for one's own sake (Hayakawa, T. 2016; Igata, 2015; Koishigawa, 2015).³¹

There was a time when we were unable to assess whether the huge sales' record of *nihonjinron* books could simply be taken as proof that the reader believes in what is written. But since online users actively exchange their opinions, and opinions can evolve with meme-mode speed, we are able to see that there are a number of websites in which commentators heavily criticize certain published magazines and TV programmes for promoting "pornographic nationalism," disguised as "nationalistic propaganda" (Amamiya, 2018b; Koishigawa, 2015)

2.10.3 The popularity of the new *nihonjinron*

It is still nevertheless debatable how these Japan-praising magazines can sell over one million copies, or why certain programmes can constantly achieve a high viewing rate,³² if both are also held in such a critical light? A *Mainichi* newspaper journalist commented that if those books were to purely admire Japan in a nationalistic way, they would not sell 160,000 copies (*Mainichi Shinbun*, 2015). Are we indeed witnessing a kind of national ego boost, massaging the nation's confidence in the face of the foreign influx?

From online reviews, we can register that "foreigners' recognition of Japanese products fosters an elated feeling after so many negative incidents had happened."³³ Others purchased those "*nihonjinron*-ised" magazines

³⁰ Similar types of magazines are infrequently published from *Japan-Best Henshūbu* (2015-) and *Discovery Japan Henshūbu* (2014-).

³¹ A foreigner's nationality is more important than an individual's personality. Iwabuthi, for example, points out that foreign panelists who appeared on KHN are often referred to by either their country name or nationality, but not by their actual name.

³² See <https://globalnewsview.org/archives/9080>.

³³ See http://www.peters.jp/ba/future_direction_for_youth/26.html.

simply because they were curious to know “how foreigners think about Japan.”³⁴ It is, however, important to recognize the fact that those magazines also directly function as advertising boards, helping the consumer-related entities like product manufacturers, the tourist industry, food businesses, etc. to promote their products and services.

Recognizing the fact that “featured by mass media” is considered to be one of the most effective sales-talk mechanisms in Japan (Ōuchi, 2018), as well no doubt as internationally, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry also uses it extensively in order to promote soft-power projects, which, like “Cool Japan,” are designed to promote an interest in selected creative industries, culture and lifestyles (The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, 2010). It aims to increase international opportunities for the export of Japanese cultural goods, enhance awareness of the uniqueness of Japan, increase tourism and stimulate the domestic economy (Inoue, A. 2019; Valaskivi, 2013; Fischer, R. 2014).

One may regard this as another *nihonjinron* approach, promoting the form of what is known as an apolitical marketing strategy --- “nation branding”--- which targets “external markets to establish and communicate a specific image of national identity” (Varga, 2014, p.825). And of course many other countries are or have been also involved in this form of national branding their nations, reconstructing exclusively national identities (Aronczyk, 2013; Valaskivi, 2013; Iwabuchi, 2015). However, it is difficult to justify whether nation brands are conveyed by internationally disseminating media culture (Anholt, 2013; Fan, 2008/2010; Inoue, A. 2019), since nation branding has a crucial “inner-oriented” feature, which needs to be activated by the citizens who are the “playmakers,” “called upon to live the brand” (Varga, 2014, p.836). In a sense, there is a dilemma here of both representing and consuming the contextualized image of a nation-brand.

Both Furuya Tsunehira (2014) and the contemporary artist Murakami Takashi (2012d), who is regarded as one of the most prominent figures presented via Cool Japan, have criticised this government project as nonsense because its approach primarily underscores self-praise only. The Japanese

³⁴ See <https://matome.naver.jp/odai/2141318293834147001>

government simply represents Japanese individuals who are admired in Japan without trying to find out how to improve international communications.

2.11 Conclusion

There are certain demographic changes beginning to affect the nihonjinron that is now so often clearly criticized for thinking Japan is exclusively for Japanese people. Economic changes, immigration, a declining population, and the huge impact of new technologies and the internet, have all influenced attitudes to the myth of a homogenous Japan. The individual may reject certain ideological statements propagated via TV programmes, whilst the media industry may persist in presenting certain products as signifying Japanese cultural identities.

But what we gain from interacting with the mediated environment is an awareness of these diversified opinions. We witnessed that everything goes through these medial processes, allowing us to appreciate cultures constantly in negotiation. Above all, this gives us the perspective to witness here a diversity that questions the cliché of Japanese uniqueness.

In the next chapter, we will be using Gibson's ecological psychology and affordance theory to further examine the paramount impact Japanese language complexities, together with the new technologies, have placed on the subject whose responses to these ever-fluctuating circumstances is to play kyara.

Chapter 3 Methodology: Gibson's ecological psychology and affordance theory

3.1 Introduction

In the previous literature review chapter, we looked at how the progression of history has informed the subject's self-representation. We saw how Japanese uniqueness and notions of the "fluid self" were mythologised and passed-on throughout the nation's history to retain an impact on the subject. It is often thought that granting such qualities as an indigenous Japanese spirit or a Japanese ethos are key factors in signifying Japanese uniqueness. We also confirmed that the traditional idea of multiple role-play was elevated to *kyara*-play in response to the changes within Japanese ecological conditions that were triggered by two factors: the demographic changes occurring since 1995, and advancing technologies signposted by the invention of especially personal computers.

The governing force of *seken* permeates the idea of playing *kyara*, and proves useful in managing one's life tasks. Being exposed to the vast amount of information circulated via mass media, the subject comes to understand that the *mitate*-awareness underpinning shifting-personal representations is essential. The subject is thereby encouraged to detect certain affordances offering a flexible adaptability, which through the intuitive strategies of reading the air of *ba* within the milieu, may activate *kyara*-play.

Individuals specializing in the disciplines of --- for example --- psychology, sociology, business marketing, media studies, socio-linguistics, and journalism tell us that *kyara*-play is a versatile communication medium (Aihara, 2007; Inoue, Y. 2017; Saitō, T. 2011). Although they attempt to reach a wider perspective on the *kyara*-play platform, they tend to only emphasize certain aspects of *kyara*-play. Some, such as the social scientist Inoue Yoshitaka (2017) or the psychologist Enomoto (2014), even claim that *kyara*-play is something of a Japanese *spécialité*, an assertion that could potentially align itself to *nihonjinron*.

There are those, on the other hand, who specialize in Japanese studies, and offer some careful observations on how the subject flexibly shifts

self-representation. The work done by Backnik (1986/1992a/1992b/1994), Kondō Dorinne (1992/1997), Lebra (1976/1992/2004), and Rosenberg (1992), is extremely valuable for delineating the different responses individuals can show to situations. Nevertheless, in positioning themselves as careful observers, the aim is primarily to document just how such shifts in response are registered by individuals, making it difficult for us to gauge how the individual comes to identify “affordance” as a necessary component of the flexible adaptation to circumstances. It can be difficult to discern whether one perceives multiple role-play as a socially obligatory act, or simply as an action possibility for improvising with circumstances.

3.2 Methodology

The fundamental directive of this methodology chapter is to demonstrate that Gibson’s ecological psychology and affordance theory can open up and clarify the means by which the subject comes to detect a particular affordance in the processes of interacting with the mediated environment. We should note here the constant reminder that whatever medium we choose to use to communicate with others in our everyday life, it is filtered through medial processes. Nevertheless, it is through these daily experiences that we consequently gain a certain awareness that can potentially deliver both knowledge and an ability to predict the probable outcome of one’s actions. This building of interactive life-experiences educates and enables the subject to perceive meanings and values in whatever subject matter the environment or circumstance contains. This is the basic tenet in what James Gibson terms “affordance.”

Suffice it to say, every individual has personal preferences governing choices or decisions that affect the affordance one may identify. However, individuals living in similar environments invariably share common experiences which would encourage conventions of resourceful methodology for communicating with others. In other words, according to the specificities of the environment one has engaged with, affordances with similar profiles are more likely to be detected.

This chapter argues that the embodiment of subjectivities emerges through the course of the subject’s actual physical interactions with the environment, rather than through any internalized contemplation. This advances the reason

why the thesis is in debt to Gibson's ecological psychology, as it values a pragmatic approach in explaining that the subject's perception of meaning or value in a certain subject matter can best be analyzed by the detection of affordance. The thesis stands in line with Gibson's belief that any meaning we perceive in a subject matter is not innate: everything is mediated through our engagement with the environment (Gibson, 1953/1966/1986).

This chapter's aim, therefore, is to investigate how a particular affordance is detected in relation to the mediated environment, activating a performatively-defined expression of circumselves which is known in Japan as *kyara-play*. Gibson defines "affordance" as a relational property which is derived from the ecological relationships between the animal (as human or organism) and the properties of the environment. He states that:

[A]n affordance is neither an objective property nor a subjective property; or it is both if you like. An affordance cuts across the dichotomy of subjective-objective and helps us to understand its inadequacy. It is equally a fact of the environment and a fact of behaviour. It is both physical and psychical, yet neither. An affordance points both ways, to the environment and to the observer (Gibson, 1986, p.129).

Of central importance to us is that Gibson's affordance theory supports the understanding that we all have the same ability to perceive, but that the differences we find amongst ourselves are the result of us dealing with the intermediaries that constitute our ecological conditions. In other words, a detected affordance reveals that the unlikely pair --- universality and relativity --- coincide with each other. The ways the subject deals with the environment are fundamentally universal, but our differences exist as a result of the subject dealing with the particularities --- the relativities --- of the ecological conditions formed over time. Carl Knappett (2004) confirms that affordance is neither solely an independent property of the object itself, nor is it exclusively an intentional state within the mind of the person engaging with it, but it is a relational property shared between object and agent. Knappett is saying that instead of narrowly focusing on a subject matter detached from its related environment, ecological psychology aims to trace how dynamic interactions are carried out via reciprocal relationships between the subject and the mediated

environment.

With that principle in place, we can observe that ecological psychology studies specifically focus on the influential factors that are vital to shaping the nature of reciprocal relationships, and attempt to show that such relationships constantly evolve through the processes of interaction (Bickhard, 2015; Stoffregen, et al., 2006). Using the affordance theory, a study may, for example, analyse how the subject detects the affordance of “climbing up the stairs,” or “coordinating one’s body movement by perceiving 20 hand-holds allocated on an indoor climbing wall,” and will require the researcher to identify certain factors critical to influencing the nature of physical interaction in relation to a given sequence or circumstance (Seifert, et al., 2018; Travieso & Martin, 2015). The researcher may choose to investigate the nature of the subject’s physical condition and history of relevant experiences, and then examine the situationally-defined factors that may include the type of wall surface, visibility, temperature, ambience, etc. (Richardson, et al., 2018). The study will aim therefore to address how the subject negotiates with those specified factors and comes to detect affordance accordingly.

In line with this interactive matrix, we need to investigate how a particular affordance is detected in its social context, because the precise focus of this thesis is to analyze how the subject’s self-representation is influenced by his or her interaction with the mediated environment. This issue has already been taken up and investigated by several ecological psychologists --- Edward Reed (1988/1996/2009), Alan Costall (1995/1999/2012) and Knappett (2004/2005), distributed cognitive scientists (Norman, 1999/2013), and distributed language groups (Cowley, 2007; Golonka, 2015; Hodegs, 2007/2009; Hodges & Fowler, 2010/2015; Thibault, 2005). This thesis will incorporate and also respond to some of their ideas whenever it is plausible, and attempts thereby to contribute to the further development of affordance theory.

We briefly discussed in the previous chapter that an analysis of detected affordance in the processes of self-representation needs to examine the three primary intermediaries --- history, language and technologies. The previous chapter specifically looked into the impact of history on the ways the subject perceives a particular affordance in flexibly adaptable multiple-selves, leading to an enactment of kyara-play.

This chapter will extend this thinking to investigate how such a historically embedded awareness is further mediated through the use of language and technologies. This investigation will then enable us to demonstrate how exactly Gibson's affordance theory helps us to see that the subject detects the particular affordance of circumselves as a result of improvising with the Japanese ecological conditions.

An examination of the impact of language-use is crucial, not only because the act of representing the self relies heavily upon what one says, but also because it induces a particular kind of affordance the subject comes to identify with. In the following chapter we will assert a fully comprehensive view on how the complex Japanese linguistic system endorses what we regard as the factor of equivocality, in both the interpretation and perception of a subject matter, affecting the ways the subject defines the self. These complex multiplicities tune and encourage the subject to entertain a flexible shift in the perception of the self --- to interpret and represent self in multiple ways.

When we communicate, we are constantly attempting to work out what exactly the speaker wants to tell us, not only by judging the literal meanings of the words spoken, but by observing the multiple factors of body gesture, facial expression, the gaze, speech tones, etc. It is clear that the use of language is ingrained into one's awareness, and this thesis therefore examines language from a pragmatic aspect in order to address how its use is accompanied by the active coordinating of multimodal perceptions, and how one's experience of living with and using language invariably changes its function. Language is mediated, not static.

The impact of the use of technologies is also unavoidable. Looking into how personal communication takes place in a 21st century technologically-mediated environment, it becomes advisable to analyze how one's choice of technological devices affects the nature of communication as well as one's detection of affordances. As we have previously noted, our aim with the application of Gibson's affordance theory is to identify how the use of language and technologies influences the subject's self-representations, and how the subject is encouraged or invited to identify the particular affordance that we term flexibly adaptable circumselves, which may lead to an enactment of kyara-play.

We have additionally noted that the subject's perception of affordances fluctuates according to circumstances, since the outcome of one's action --- potentially *kyara-play* --- is influenced by circumstantial factors. Factors influencing one's perception of the detected affordance of course vary. We can register both positively (*kyara-dachi*) or negatively, in which we are forced to play a *kyara* or indeed reject it; and then there is the shifting, in-between situation determining a fluctuation of one's view according to circumstances. With this last determinant, the paramount impact of *ba* onto the subject's perception and action is referenced by the subject typically and genuinely believing that switching one's *kyara* can only be achieved by changing the space. The awareness behind these kinds of recognition is constantly being challenged, improvised with, or altered via the use of language and the multitude of technologies available, simply because those engagements are involved in circumstantial factors.

To delineate the complexity of these interactions, this chapter juxtaposes some *kyara-play* commentators' points of view with those from individuals who tell us about their real life experiences of playing *kyara*, depicted in vignettes to help portray these complexities in reality.

3.3 Ecological approach to visual perception

Gibson's ecological psychology and his affordance theory especially urge us to recognize the fact that our everyday life interactions involve the medial processes of negotiating with the multiple factors that constitute the environment (Fuller, 2005; Parikka, 2010/2015).³⁵ To fully comprehend Gibson's view on affordance, it is crucial to understand how and why Gibson came to develop his ecological psychology, expressing the egalitarian view that perceptual behavior is partially learnt but that fundamentally everyone's optical perceptual ability is the same (Gibson, 1966/1971/1982/1986).

One could argue that affordance is the apex of his ecological psychology, and provides a conclusive answer for his life-long search to explain how

³⁵ Media ecologists' view on affordance --- we can take Fuller and Jussi Parikka as examples --- in corporate Gibson's theory as a device for examining the complexities of a contemporary engagement with the mediated environment, showing how the general outcome from such an engagement in fact forms the cultural identities we all live with, wherever we are.

perception and physiological elements simultaneously integrate with each other, shaping the ways we perceive and act in relation to the environment (Reed, 1988). Arriving at his concept of ecological psychology, Gibson was able to evade the traditional Cartesian model of a mind-body separation, a structuralism which reduces dynamic human behaviour to a systematic order; and it similarly also enabled him to undermine the essentialist claim on inherent cultural values.

Gibson's biographer, Edward Reed, offers valuable evidence indicating that Gibson had a great interest in social science throughout his academic career (Reed, 1988). Reed tells us that Gibson's main aim was to understand that the human mind should not be conceived of in the reductionist psychological tradition, but that "the mind as a mental reflection of physical causes, experience as atoms of sensation caused by the impingement of physical energies on the nervous system — but the mind as the living creature's search for meaning" (Reed, 1988, p.51).

Being influenced by William James's radical empiricism, Gibson argued against those social psychologists who regarded the problems of social stereotyping as being problems of innate perception. We can trace this view, for example, in his first book, *The Perception of the Visual World* (Gibson, 1950), and in several papers on social psychology (Gibson, 1950/1951/1953), which show his serious concern over the problem of social stereotyping.

Analysing socialized perception (i.e. socially stereotyped pattern-perception), Gibson attempts to find a way of explaining "perceptual learning" — the subject learns to perceive, whilst stimuli that are activated by a sense organ (the optical system) are "not altered by learning" as they are events in the domain of physics (Gibson, 1953, pp.128-131). Gibson fully understood that such a distinction is difficult to make, especially when certain perceptual behavior becomes habitual, generating an automatic response in the guise of an innate reaction. He explains these switches when he states that "the progress of learning in perception is not in the direction of becoming *independent* of stimulation but, on the contrary, in the direction of becoming *more dependent on higher order variables of stimulation* (Gibson, 1953, p.135, emphasis in the original). He is arguing here that repetitive perceptual behaviour would have a certain impact affecting variables of stimulation such as multimodal perception.

Searching for a way of explaining such complex perceptual mechanisms, Gibson developed the idea that the act of seeing is formed via circumstantially coordinated activities of “direct” (i.e. stimulus, sensation) perception, and “indirect” (i.e. learnt perceptual behaviour such as habitual behaviour, memory, intention, etc.) perception (Gibson, 1986). This distinction enables him to argue that reality is formed via sensation, which is unique and singular to each individual, whilst awareness is formed by a certain repetitive perceptual behaviour, both being shared amongst people. Gibson’s profound interest in the shaping of perception by the environment directed him to develop the concept of ecological psychology. In this sense, we can think of affordance as his way of explaining how the subject is constantly in the medial processes of engaging with the environment.

Gibson states that, “perception is (...) a sort of halfway stage between pure sensation and pure imagination. It is partly determined by external causes and partly by internal causes — memories, attitudes, motives, or whatnot” (Gibson, 1953, p.135). This leads us to speculate that the distinction between direct and indirect perception can be blurred in some instances. That is to say, habitual behavior may prompt certain responses, such as perceiving a particular affordance, without having a clear or concise intention to do so. Offering a kind of overview of Gibson’s vision, Knappett points out that the affordance theory raises a question on the limited scope of the existing scholarly work on archaeology, social science, behaviourism and phenomenology, which are somewhat ill-equipped to describe the extent that ecological conditions influence the subject’s perception and action (Knappett, 2005).

3.4.1 Advancing affordance theory in a social context

As Reed (1988) tells us, Gibson’s theory of affordance may have aspects that appear incomplete due to the fact that he died shortly after he proposed the theory. Several ecological psychologists acknowledge the possible implications resulting from this unfortunate fact, and attempt to address any ambivalences that could occur in the course of understanding how the detection of affordance can be made in a social context (Costall, 1995/2012; Knappett, 2005; Norman, 1999; Ingold, 2011; Stoffregen, 2000). Costall (1995), for example, points out that although Gibson specifically developed his affordance

theory with the principle of reciprocity between the animal and the environment in order to override Cartesian dualism, Gibson (1982/1986) nevertheless contradicted himself when he stated that humans depend upon the environment but not the other way around.

Indeed the ecological psychologists, Stavros Valenti and James Good (1991) argue that Gibson's unfortunate time-curtailed ability to embrace the role of culture in the development of social affordances, may indeed encourage the very dualism of culture and nature which Gibson (1970/1986) wanted to avoid. They claim that the concept of culture has a central role to play in the further development of the notion of social affordances, especially in its relation to interaction. The case studies, which involve care provider-infant interactions, urge us to recognize the impact of social interactivities --- the processes of perceiving and assembling social coordination. Referencing language-use, he notes, for example, that when a mother speaks to her baby, she makes certain body gestures or changes the tonality of her voice. These coordinated multimodal perceptions, it should be noted, are also the functions of social interaction in the acquisition of knowledge and behavioural competence (Valenti & Gold, 1991).

Keeping these analyses in mind, and as we will see in the next section, this thesis tentatively suggests that we need to take into account the full impact language-use makes on the subject's perception and action, from which position it will be possible to rectify some of the theoretical quandaries in Gibson's affordance theory, and contribute to its further development.

3.4.2 Affordance detected in language-use: circumselves

From an ecological psychology point of view, two aspects of language-use need to be examined. Language primarily functions as a way of distinguishing subject matter rather than thinking that it is used simply for defining meanings. This understanding is based on the fact that any meaning we might think of in reference to a given word --- by which we mean "indexing" --- is not an innate or inherent value or quality, but is given by mediated information. We should additionally explore the ways language-use incorporates multimodal perceptions like speech tones, body gestures, facial expressions, etc. (Worgan & Moore, 2010). It is important to recognize the fact that we generally try to

make sense with what a speaker actually wants to say not just with the words spoken, but by analyzing ambient information gathered via multimodal perceptions.

Whilst Gibson is known for his work on the biological optical functions of direct perception, it is crucial to note that he was fully aware of the impact language-use has on one's perception, urging us to recognize the fundamental factor that language can indeed alter the ways the individual perceives a subject matter.

Gibson's understanding of perception is centred around two factors: direct perception (i.e. pure sensation) and indirect perception (i.e. learnt habitual behaviour). This distinction helps us to recognise more clearly that the subject's perception can be distorted by certain repetitive perceptual behavior. The value of this understanding lies in the fact that it can open up new possibilities for us to see why and how the preconception of a stereotyped national character, for example, is nothing more than a fabricated presumption.

Reed points out that "(f)or Gibson, perception is not an act of subjective consciousness but a basic skill. The ability to live in a shared environment rests on such perceptual skills as recognizing what someone else is looking at. Perception, like action, is socially patterned (and sometimes distorted, as in the case of the stereotypes), but it is still our basic link with the environment and with other people in the environment" (Reed, 1988, p.63). In other words, the subject develops an awareness that tunes he or she into focusing on a certain subject matter in a particular way that results from the experiences had with various socio-cultural factors. To explain the complexity of this process, Gibson refers to the scientific study done by Jerome Bruner and Cecille Goodman (1947), in which ten-years-olds in need of money perceived coins as approximately 25 percent larger than the equivalent-sized card disks. He points out that the perception of size is also affected by the meaning or value placed on it by the subject (Gibson, 1950, p.209).

This example formulated by Gibson, also supports speculation that a significant reason why some Japanese people aspire to playing kyara is because those individuals are familiar with the idea of flexible changes to self-addressing modes, confirmed in the use of personal pronouns, speech styles, the use of formality words, and so on. We are suggesting that the daily use of the

Japanese language manifests a perception of the self which is attuned to flexibility.

Acknowledging that all meanings and values are mediated via interactions between the subject and its environment, we can absorb Gibson's scientific experimentations as valuable evidence, confirming the validity of a pragmatic approach to identifying the impact of language-use on the subject (Gibson, 1939/1953).

Gibson discovers that giving names to subject matter which are not easily distinguishable one from the other, helps the subject to perceive their differences much more easily (Gibson, 1953, pp.128-129).³⁶ He argues that "social psychologists have evidence to show that the phenomenal world of a language-community is partly determined by its language, i.e., people see what they have words for. (...) Words tend to fix or freeze the objects and qualities which become differentiated out of the stimulus flux; words tend to determine a man's repertory of perceptions" (Gibson, 1953, p.136).

With the forming --- so to say --- of an index, the name or the index functions as a reminder, telling the subject that a particular subject matter is to be seen as different and distinguishable. Indeed, the detected affordance in this language-use is to distinguish a subject matter from the rest, rather than having as its prime concern the defining of "correct" meanings.

We can consider further that indexing one's flexible change of roles by giving a certain name ---"kyara"--- can also function as a reminder, confirming the change of her or his status quo. That is to say, the naming of "kyara" functions as indexing circumselves. This is where we can recognize that kyara-play enacted as a result of the detection of affordance in *ba*, comes from a totally different appraisal and recognition of material in comparison with multiple role-play.

In general, we understand the traditional notion of multiple role-play in terms of the subject stereotypically meeting the demands of various circumstances, a kind of interaction which then directs multiple role-play to form subjectivities. Playing kyara, however, demands the utmost attention to *ba*, an attentiveness that at once necessitates and actually encourages the enactment

³⁶ Gibson offered an analysis of how the Nazis gained control over a group of people by inventing and giving the fictive name, the Aryan, to distinguish the German race's fictional superiority over the other (Gibson, 1939).

of kyara-play. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons why the subject often perceives the self as an “assemblage” of the multiple kyaras one plays (Dentsū Sōken, 2015; FNN Prime, 2018; Ogi, 2015). The corollary to this however is when the very opposite happens, and the inability to find the kyara to play not only diminishes self-esteem, but can actually threaten one’s sense of the self as a recognised entity in existence (Doi, Takayoshi, 2008/2009; Kumazawa, 2017; Tanaka, K. 2010; Washida, 2002). These scenarios indicate that playing kyara embraces the embodiment of context-dependent subjectivities, whereby each played kyara emerges as a result of the subject identifying the self in relation to a spatio-temporal composition.

The idea of language putting this self-awareness into a spatio-temporal composition shifts our focus to the two issues with language-use that ecological psychology referenced. We turn to the anthropologist Bachnik (1986), who closely observed this material, and offers some useful analysis. She explained how the Japanese language affords the subject to map him or herself in this multiple dimensionality, and draws attention to the two functions of language --- “referencing” (naming) and “indexing” --- that define “the self” and the other. With specific reference to the Japanese language, she claims that “the relationship between speaker and addressee (and/or referent) [...] is also spatio-temporal”(Bachnik, 1986, p.58).³⁷

Bachnik was not an ecological psychologist, yet her observations on these indexing practices go some way to explaining how the subject performs an appropriate social role via kyara-play. However, our concern is to identify how the subject comes to actually perceive the resourcefulness within circumstantially flexible adaptabilities --- which Gibson termed “affordance” --- and thereby activates kyara-play.

³⁷ Allan Whitfield and Timothy Wiltshire (1990) think that a name given to a subject matter is merely a code having consequently no psychological impact on the subject. But changing the name, for example, of a space is often considered to be one of the most effective ways of shifting existing perceptions about that space. Lucy Keyhole (2018) gives us a simple example of this when she tells us that, because the local council wanted to change the general public’s negative view of a particular street where an horrendous crime had been carried out, they decided to give the street a new name, and gradually the old negative memory associated with it faded away.

3.4.3 Language and multimodal perceptions

Recognizing the inevitable influence that everyday life activities play as the subject is progressively learning to perceive, we can note that in a scenario of face-to-face communication, the subject invariably tries to make sense not only with what has been said in literal ways, but will also analyze information gathered via multimodal perceptions. We absorb the visual information of, for example, physiognomical features, especially vital for a child's learning processes; and the variations in utterance --- speech styles and tonality --- body gesture or kinetic coordination noted in movement, and so on (Kita, et al. 2017; Kress, 2010; Runeson & Frykholm, 1983; Vigliocco, Perniss, & Vinson, 2014).

The same principle applies to kyara-play: one attempts to mold the coordinated multimodal perceptions of especially appearance and language-use, into a prototype of the kyara one wishes to play (Kondō, T. 2014; Tada, A. 2008; Takeuchi, I. 2008/2014).

Language-use --- the Japanese language --- is one of the primary vehicles in the motivation and understanding of kyara-play, and we can acknowledge that existing research on the ways the subject engages with language-use offers two contradictory tropes. We might agree that language is used simply as a tool, serving certain functions for the subject. On the other hand, we may see language as an integral element whose use influences and is influenced by the subject. This is the aspect we aim to explore further.

The first issue --- language as a tool --- is proposed by Chomskyans, mainstream cognitive scientists, and those essentialists who all claim that the human has an innate ability to control how language functions. The second theme is scrutinized by groups of post-Gibsonians who recognize the impact of ecological conditions on the subject, with whom language --- as a living entity --- has a mutually interdependent relationship. They are committed to portraying a reciprocal relationship between perception and action, and approach language from a pragmatic point of view. Exploring the non-representational aspect of language, what we might consider to be the absolutely truthful objective meaning of a word per se ceases to exist because it changes in relation to context. The aim of these scholars is to identify the kinds of instances when one shifts ones perceptions frequently. Their position is that these shifts are caused by the meaning of a word changing according to which

context it is used in, how it is written or pronounced, who is speaking, and so on.

In keeping with these propositions, this thesis aims to demonstrate that the use of the Japanese language inclines the subject to be prone to flexible percepts, which then activates kyara-play. Providing a broad support for these observations, Reed, argues that

The view that language refers to ideas or mental representations and not to things in the world is an old one within philosophy, and tends to be accompanied by variants of that constructivist metaphor. [...] But we need not accept this restrictive view that language is a vehicle for helping us to build a mentally constructed reality. Instead, language can be understood ecologically, as part of a process whereby *groups of people* regulate their actions and interactions. Ecological information serves to regulate individual action (Reed, 1996, p.155).

Renowned pioneer of infant learning ability studies, Eleanor Gibson, is Gibson's wife and collaborated with Gibson on substantial scientific investigations into perceptual learning (1955/1959/1962). She stresses the importance of recognizing the fact that perceptual behaviour cannot be analyzed separately from utterance, tracing her concept back to the infant who learns to make sense with language by engaging with perceptual cues (i.e. the mother's body gestures, facial expressions, etc.), which are coordinated with auditory cues --- voice tone, words used, etc. A group of post-Gibsonians, that would include Nancy Rader, Leigh Vaughn, Pieter de Bordes, Fred Hasselman and Ralf Cox, explored this understanding and developed it further, confirming that the learning processes of dealing with language aligned with perception become gradually integrated with one's awareness (Rader & Vaughn, 2019; Bordes, Hasselman, & Cox, 2019).

Support for an ecological approach to language-use is also found in Robert Verbrugge's statements that "language is not fundamentally representational" (Verbrugge, 1985, p.183), where he points out that speech, as a type of social event rather than an object of structural description, fulfills its function through perception and coordinated movement. Verbrugge suggests redefining "language with a broadening of the principles of event perception, making it

clear in the process how the two can be viewed as compatible and mutually supportive (... in order) to understand how perception, recollection, and skilled performance are possible under conditions of 'partial information'" (Verbrugge, 1984, p.164). Verbrugge's use of "event perception" is interesting here because it runs parallel to our concept of *ba* as a context for *kyara-play*, whose performativity is perhaps also echoed in his reference to "skilled performance."

The new breed of cognitive scientists, post-Gibsonians, also explore these re-figured concepts of language, analyzing the functions of language which are not limited to texts or discourse but whose impact needs to be looked at by including other bodily communicative activities such as gesture, eye gaze, and posture (Hodges & Fowler, 2010/2015; Evans & Levinson, 2009; Worgan & Moore, 2010).

Li Wei (2018), for example, argues that Merrill Swain's concept of "languaging" --- which concerns the cognitive process of negotiating and producing a meaningful, comprehensive output (Swain, 1985) --- should be looked at because it addresses the issue of face-to-face interaction, involving the coordination of information scanned via multimodal perceptions. Wei's observations lead her to claim that one's experience of using language simultaneously shapes "translanguaging," the term she uses to describe how the nature and functions of language are spontaneously transformed as it is being used.

Considering this point that the functions of language are indeed transformed via its actual use, Gunther Kress and Theo Leeuwen draw our attention to the fact that multimodality is also "shaped both by the intrinsic characteristics and potentialities of the medium and by the requirements, histories and values of societies and their cultures" (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006, p.35). That is to say, language-use nurtures a certain awareness which signposts probable outcomes or sets up conventionality, recalling Reed's insistence that language and ecological information can act as a means of regulating action.

That "conventionality" affects behaviour, giving cause to affordance being detectable via both direct and indirect perception, is a line of thought explored and analyzed by Sabrina Golonka, Mark Bickhard and Mark Bickhard (Golonka, 2015; Wilson & Golonka, 2013; Bickhard, 2007/2015). Examining language-related behaviour, Golonka argues that affordance can be identified via a conventional mode of indirect, learnt perception. She tells us that this

comes from the subject constantly engaging with the ecological conditions that alter indirect perception, causing it to be indistinguishable from direct, innate perception. This helps us understand that certain habitual, learnt behaviour alters the way the subject perceives, so that flexible shifts of perception can be automatically activated, opening the way to kyara-play.

The correlation between language and perception that these arguments propose helps direct our examination of how the subject is able to attune with the ambience of the space being engaged with. A member of the Distributed Language Group, Bert Hodges, suggests that language functions as “a perceptual mode,” enabling the subject to attune with the specificities of a circumstance. Appropriating Gibson’s idea that the subject perceives a subject matter by scanning its invariants in relation to its background, Hodges asks us to think of language as a perceptual mode, enabling us to scan linguistic invariants --- what he called the “dialogical array.” Hodges writes that, “dialogical arrays can only be explored by being enacted through dialogical fields (i.e. fields of caring conversation). The creation and development of dialogical fields, as people move in and through dialogical arrays, requires that language functions as an action system” (Hodges, 2009, p.637).

In this sense, Hodges’ metaphorical concept, “dialogical array,” can be equated with the subject “reading air,” as if the air sparks arrays of information. It clearly resonates in a similar way. Indeed, how the Japanese language invites the subject to enact kyara-play by reading the air in relation to circumstances, can be understood as a fruitful example demonstrating the function of language as an action system, affording the subject the ability to perceive dialogical fields through dialogical arrays.

In addition, Hodges points out that language is distributed through the integrity of collective action, and so we should examine how language involves its various components --- its invariants --- via their interdependent relationships. Referring to Paul Thibault (2005), who sees language as a multimodal contextualising activity which integrates space-time scales in diverse ways, Hodges claims that “language may have a special role to play in the integration of scales of action and perception for humans, but it also means that if language is to work pragmatically, linguistic activity itself will be scaled at multiple levels” (Hodges, 2009, p.638).

We can question then, just how does the subject --- being under the influence of the *mitate*-awareness, which historically sanctions the idea of flexibly adaptable multiple selves --- come to detect affordance in the use of language and technologies, and then play *kyara*? Is one indeed able to pick and choose whichever *kyara* one likes? Furthermore, what kinds of factors dictate the success or failure of one's act? Is it all up to whether one anticipates playing *kyara* or does everything change spontaneously according to circumstances? We can now look into how the subject's perception of affordance fluctuates according to circumstances and why.

3.5.1 Kyara-play: Half-scripted and half-improvised

Michael Haldrup and Jonas Larsen claim that an act of performance --- we can see nowadays with Instagram for example --- needs to be understood as an activity that is half-scripted as a coded form of behaviour, and half-improvised by adapting to circumstance (Haldrup & Larsen, 2008). The individual, after all, is constantly negotiating with the mediated environment. *Kyara*-play can also be understood similarly, as it is a coordinated performance which is half-scripted by one's need for the *kyara* to be recognized by others; and half-improvised as one needs to adapt circumstances.

To examine whether one's intentions dictate and govern the outcome of one's *kyara*-play, we can note that *kyara*-play is not performed in isolation as it needs an audience to see and recognize the *kyara* itself (Hada, 2018; Kodō, T. 2014; Shiraiwa, 2008). The choice of *kyara* one plays is directed by a set of circumstantial factors like reading the air of *ba*, one's need to gauge one's colleagues' expectations, friends' opinions, and so on. Observing that such mediatory interactions are generally carried out amongst individuals as a preview of any actual *kyara* enactment, *kyara* commentators such as Saitō Tamaki (2011/2013), Doi Takayoshi (2008/2009) and Takao Ryūichi (2015) point out that, broadly speaking, there are two types of *kyara*-play scenarios. In the first, one makes one's own decision about which *kyara* to play; and in the second, he or she has which *kyara* to play appointed or suggested by a peer group.

We can recap those two scenarios in relation to one's detection of affordance activating *kyara*-play. The first case is that the subject perceives a

positive affordance in the act of kyara-play, deciding to play a kyara which carries a personal meaning or value in the action. In the second case, the subject is expected or coerced into playing a kyara recommended by others. In this instance we can clearly assume that the subject's perception-reception of the kyara-play decided upon can be either positive or negative, depending on the circumstances. The central issue here is to examine whether the subject's intention always rules its outcome. In other words whether the purpose in playing a particular kyara can be considered either positively or negatively no matter how the circumstantial factors change; and whether one's corresponding perception about affordance fluctuates over the period of time of one's experience of playing kyara.

3.5.2 Kyara-play as "personality visualization"

Fundamentally, each individual's perception about kyara-play changes according to TPO, and these changes inevitably influence one's perception of affordance. We can trace these diversified and fluctuating views on kyara-play because affordance is essentially a circumstantially improvised reaction, inevitably reflecting a mixed view on kyara-play. It can be viewed positively for allowing the subject to "secure a relatively transparent communication similar to participating in "a role-playing-game" (Enomoto, 2014, p.64). It can be assessed as a liberating social skill, which allows the individual to deal with various situations that require certain ways of representing the self (Tanaka, I. 2010; Hada, 2018; Kondō, T. 2014). And, moreover, kyara-play can of course be viewed negatively, not simply because of a pluralistic vision of the self (Asano, 2013), but because the subject is "hesitant to perform a non-real-self" (City Living Web, 2015; Nakoshi, 2015a/2015b; Takao, 2015), and, expressing a doleful skepticism more akin to social suffocation (Livedoor News, 2011), has no choice but to play a kyara one does not like (Harumaki, 2017; Doi, Takayoshi, 2009). Recognizing such a barrage of scepticism on kyara-play, the psychiatrist, Nakoshi Yasufumi (2015b), proclaims that playing kyara may put pressure on the individual to play a role expected by others, in a one-dimensionally limited way. Inoue Yoshitaka (2017) also warns us to recognize the fact that kyara-play may stabilise personal relationships, but may also create stress because one has to keep on maintaining one's kyara's status quo.

Helping to trace the ways the individual negotiates with circumstances, we will look into specific cases of kyara-play activated in normative spaces like a work place, in formal occasions, or in a school, situations where the individual is generally expected to behave appropriately by following so-called social protocols or ethics.

We can then look into how the idea of kyara-play is explored in relation to the use of technological communication devices and their interactions with the environment. This closely examines how the increasingly noticeable multiple digital personhood (Kerrigan & Hart, 2016) is explored in social media, and activated by the change of ecological conditions especially with the rapidly-advancing technologies, which increasingly become affordable to the individual and open-up possibilities and explorations within the idea of circumselves.

This examination allows us to see more clearly that it is the mediated environment that crucially influences what kind of affordance one identifies. That is to say, the subject explores the idea of circumselves because of what the advancing technologies afford, rather than thinking that an inherent national trait dictates all, as would be found in --- for example --- portrayals of a “unique” Japanese techno-nation, loving robots as if human, etc. (Knight, 2014; Satō, C. 2019; Schodt, 1988).

It is similarly also crucial to recognize the fact that in our Japanese case, there are several additional factors which elevate the idea of the flexibly-adaptable circumselves. The nation’s history, we will recognize, is permeated with the idea that the flexible self is a socially appropriate regime to adhere to, whilst the equivocal functions of the Japanese language itself, accentuated via the use of the new technologies, provide a fully comprehensive incentive for the subject to explore kyara-play.

These interactions between the subject and the mediated environment are necessarily complex, but we are able to access comments on kyara taken from observers who are academics or have specialist disciplines, and cross-examine them with individuals who actually play kyara in their everyday life. This allows us to gauge the reality of kyara-play, rather than having it reduced to a range of theoretical possibilities.

3.6 The intention to play kyara: Positive affordance

We can say that the act of kyara-play is to be understood as one of the effective trans-media, enacted from the detection of affordance in Japanese ecological conditions. Each kyara is generally known for its specific, pre-packaged personal traits, so individuals can predict how the kyara behaves, what one can expect from the kyara, and so on. Naming oneself with a kyara-name as a consequence, confirms one's status quo to both the self and as a signal to others, eliminating uncertainty or any hazard which may occur in scenarios of communication.

The identified affordance in the use of language is a way of distinguishing the self from the kyara one plays in adapting to a certain situation temporarily. This defining and giving of kyara-names substantiates Gibson's view on language functioning as an indexing means, reminding the subject that when one plays a kyara, he or she is supposed to be distinguishable from others. This is one of the main reasons why kyara-commentators observe that played kyara is meant to be explicitly demonstrative of codified behavioural modes, and expected to be announced both verbally through speech styles, voice tones, etc., and through visual statements --- dress codes, physiognomical expressions, body gestures, and so on (Betchaku, 2017; Naitō, Y. 2013; Sugimura, 2006). Being surrounded by such extensive information about kyara-play, it is not difficult to imagine that the subject is led to believe in it as a life skill. Of course, not everyone plays kyara, but the tantalizing idea that many people do is also implied by the ubiquitous belief in *seken's* existence, with its own enticing advocacy of flexibly adaptable, situationally-indexed multiple-selves.

Identifying a suitable kyara to play is probably one of the most discussed and popular subject matters in contemporary Japan. Naitō (2004), for example, asserts that it is vital to identify what the most suitable role one must play is in relation to *ba*, and careful analysis of other people's comments and related signals via body gestures and speech tones, etc. is vital.

Interestingly, the idea of flexibly-adaptable, multiple selves is even recognized by Japanese politicians as an essential skill to have (Fukui, Katō, & Inoue, 2009; Shūkan Asahi, 2014). We turn for an example to the political journalist, Uno Shigeki (2005), who points out that since Koizumi Junichiro was appointed prime minister, Japanese politicians have increasingly focused on the kyara they will present as their public front face. His view is that despite

being politicians --- with the implication that one should maintain one's disciplines and beliefs, and not play to the gallery --- Japanese politicians tend to assess their popularity not because of their political skills or their ideologies, but for having a *kyara* appreciated by their supporters. Ex-prime minister, Aso Shinzō, for example, described his *kyara* as too domineering; while another ex-prime minister, Fukuda Yasuo, was criticized for not having any *kyara* at all. Uno expresses a certain irony when he comments that "In Japan, an individual who changes his personality according to TPO is considered as a proper adult, rather than a person who has a strong, fixed identity and makes no contradictory comment or behaviour in relation to his principles" (Uno, 2005).³⁸ Significantly, such a view is also confirmed by some reports on the final settlement of the House of Representatives, which analyses the success or failure of political candidates according to the suitability of their *kyara* (Tokoi, Ōshige, & Ōnami, 2010; Shūkan Asahi, 2014).

Some *kyara* commentators like Morimoto Mayumi (2005) or Kamijyō Miyuki (2005), offer a set of questionnaires to help the individual identify a *kyara* suitable to his or her personality and social needs. Additionally, online recruitment sites and online community sites like *Mirrorz* --- which is viewed by more than 250,000 online users --- claim that *kyara*-play is an effective coping mechanism for socializing, and offer complementary psychoanalysis online for one's need to play or change *kyara* (Evamag, 2019; Mirrorz, 2018).³⁹ For business people, handling job matters necessitates conforming to certain requirements, and in this regard they also see some benefit in *kyara*-play simply because it can function practically allowing the individual to tailor his or herself to suit certain situations. Examples of this would be in how to represent oneself as a professional sales person to clients who have various personal backgrounds and different needs, or how-to read air and sense each client's needs (Kimura, K. 2006; Kondō, T. 2014; Matano, 2012; Morimoto, M. 2005).

To meet such work-related demands and high expectations, the clinical psychologist, Yahata Yō (2006), thinks that the concept of "*kyara-dachi*," which means to have a *kyara* clearly distinguishable from others, helps the individual to survive in a competitive business environment. "*Kyara-dachi*" is regarded as

³⁸ See for further discussion his "Japanese politics also become *kyara*-ling: the Civil Social Democracy," published on 8th September 2008.

³⁹ See <http://www.support-i.net/test/> and <http://mirrorz.jp/article/jibun-sagashi>.

a positive communication mediator, and a vital contemporary skill to learn and maintain, to be elaborated and discussed throughout the media. There is evidence from an analysis of those who have succeeded in achieving *kyara-dachi* that it is indeed widespread (Kimura, K. 2006; Igarashi, 2007; Morimoto, M. 2005; Shimada & Aida, 2008). As further evidence of its ubiquity, Doi Eiji and Saitō Makiko point out that the concept of *kyara-dachi* enables the subject to as-it-were *produce* or *promote* oneself effectively in public domains like the work place (Doi & Saitō, 2010).

The aspiration of *producing* or *directing* one's *kyara* is pivotal. Confirming this issue, Sugimura Takayo, the author of *Kyara-dachi no gijutsu* [The techniques of *kyara-dachi*] (2006), tells us that the concept of *kyara-dachi* can be best expressed and negotiated by establishing one's own brand, thereby utilising one's *kyara* as a trademark guaranteeing a consistent delivery of the features of that particular *kyara*. In order to achieve this, she offers a set of criteria on how to create one's *kyara* and represent "the self," with meticulously detailed factors --- dress codes, behavioural modes, facial expressions --- and "personality" features --- speech tones, interests, ways of thinking and so on (Sugimura, 2006).

We can confirm that in Japan this kind of information can be readily found, and as a further example of the extremes to which one can go to develop *kyara-dachi*, the strictures of *kyara-play* offered by Kamijyō Miyuki are absorbing. Being the president of the M2 Company, which offers professional training for customer-care service and sales-promotion techniques, Kamijyō (2005) provides a somewhat far-fetched manual on how-to-succeed in *kyara-dachi* to readers of the well-established business magazine *Shyōgyōkai*. She firstly introduces a set of questionnaires that helps individuals to diagnose their residual or potential *kyara-type*. Then, she suggests that an individual should make a choice of his or her desirable *kyara* from ten different types offered. Each *kyara-type* is defined by multiple factors ranging from a suitable occupation; the type of people attracted to the *kyara*; appropriate facial expressions, speech tones, behavioural and dress codes. Finally she offers some pros and cons overviews of each *kyara* on offer.

If we take one of those sets of instructions, we see that Kamijyō defines, for example, "*anego kyara*," an older sister's character, as having a positive personality, looking after her friends and juniors, just as an older sister is often

imagined to be like. She then tells us that people expect this kyara-type person to be good at handling problems at work and putting people together, so she feels it would fit the role of a shop owner or a manager perfectly. Kamijyō goes further, advising the reader that being *anego* kyara, she needs to keep a bright smiley face, speak clearly and logically, always be active and wear smart dresses. To give a final touch, she advises that *anego* kyara needs to show her teeth when she smiles in order to soften her impression --- not to be seen as too businesslike. Such step-by-step instructions parallel self-promoting and job-hunting techniques, yet the concept of *kyara-dachi* is primarily focused on getting the individual to fit into the ideal prototype of kyara-personality in order to facilitate communication (and do a good professional job) (Hada, 2018; Kimura, K. 2006; Igarashi, 2007; Sugimura, 2006). We might consider, for example, a successful female entrepreneur claiming that “skillful kyara-play is the absolutely crucial key for one’s business success” (Noguchi, 2005).

The playwright, Betchaku Shinji, has produced a business book *Hataraku jyoshi no jyoūryoku* [The working women’s power of being an actress] (2017), which specifically targets female workers, encouraging them to see their work environment as a theatre stage where they perform as actresses. We can get a sense in this of him embracing the *mitate*-awareness, encouraging the reader to think of their work colleagues as characters appearing in a play. Betchaku advises the reader to make use of various types of sometimes surprising props --- make-up, power poses, clothing, speech styles, etc. --- in order to support the performance of her chosen role.

Evolutional psychologist, Ishikawa Masato, also holds a similar view, claiming that both the making of “kyaracters” and self-dramatization are methods necessary for adapting to the various circumstances of one’s business position, title, and work situation (Ōtsuka, T., 2011).

The real-life-story of Sugiyama Yutaka, the marketing producer working for Hakuōdō, tells us that he performs “*hade kyara*” (i.e. a person who wears overly fashionable clothes) in order to succeed with his business negotiations. He makes specific efforts to wear outrageously distinctive clothes which match his client’s corporate colour --- a bright red, for example, for Coca Cola, yellow for Colman’s Mustard, etc. --- and he says that this usually gets him his clients’ favourable responses (Kimura, K. 2006).

Online questionnaire columns are also readily available. Individuals are able to seek advice from business counselors touting themselves as so-called kyara-play analysts (Ōuchi, 2018; Uhira & Harada, 2011), but who know about the business environment, or from psychologists who specialize in applying a psychology to personal communications. Indeed, the psychologist, Mizushima Hiroko, is one of those specialists who gives such advice. Responding to a female corporate worker who wants to know how to avoid being dragged into unwanted gossip at work, Mizushima suggested that playing “*tennen kyara*” --- a person who is always absentminded or a person who is prone to making silly mistakes --- can be a useful ploy for evading unwanted gossip or the criticism of seeming to be an outsider. That kyara is clearly protective, allowing one to pretend to having no awareness of any social stigma around the issue of being unable to handle rumours or criticism circulated in a social group (Miura, K. 2018).

The “real-life” experience of Kawada Yasuji (a fake name, incidentally), is also another interesting example demonstrating that if one plays kyara efficiently, he or she can be promoted in the work place even without achieving any significant work-goals. Kawada admits that he is a so-called “*shakai NEET*,” a salary-man who is employed by a company, but has been given no specific duties to engage with. However, because he is good at playing “*rababuru kyara*” --- the friendly, likeable-personality kyara --- and constantly shows-off his communication abilities, he was recently promoted to a manager’s position. Despite the fact that he is essentially doing nothing, the secret of his success, he tells us, is “impression control” --- the skill of pretending to be on some important project. Consequently he will, for example, generally stay at work until 21:00 (and sometimes even until midnight), making sure that even late into the evening he is constantly having friendly chats with his juniors as well as seniors, and keeping the work-place atmosphere harmonious (Asai, M. 2012).

The seemingly unusual one-man-performance of “*charitī kyara*,” in which an individual played the manga character of *Tiger Mask* (1968-1971)⁴⁰ to attract donations, also indicates that under the influence of the mitate-awareness, the subject comes to perceive a particular affordance --- to play a kyara on the spot --- in what may be considered an essentially functional way. This is in a sense

⁴⁰ Written by Itō Naoto, *Tiger Mask* is a series of manga stories about pro-wrestlers. Its anime version was created in 1969 and 140 stories were broadcast during the period 1969 to 1982.

actually demonstrating how far one can explore one's imagination to improvise with a mediated environment that affords "the self" to be temporarily a two-dimensional iconic image. Chapter five will look into these kinds of inspirations and aspirations, exploring the visual cultural productions that are consequently developed from them.

3.7 Playing kyara can turn a positive affordance into negative

The case studies we have just been looking at indicate a positive affordance detected in the act of playing kyara. However, there are other examples showing that the subject's perception about kyara-play can in fact fluctuate in relation to changes in circumstantial factors. There is a contrasting speculation proposed by the Gestalt psychologists, Kurt Koffka and Kurt Lewin, who claim that certain objects have a "demand character,"⁴¹ which, because of its very nature, is guaranteed to solicit a particular reaction --- a detection of affordance --- from the animal or human considering it (Lewin 1926 cited in Koffka, 1935). A phenomenological view on the relationships between the subject and the environment such as this, would however invite the erroneous speculation that one's living environment is the sole controlling agent, drawing pre-ordained responses from the subject. And, by extension, would-summon, as a default consequence, the action of kyara-play. The subject/mediated environment integration proposed by Gibson and this thesis would be duly cancelled out.

Real life stories of course abound about those who originally anticipated playing kyara, but because of one experience or another, found themselves "too exhausted to play kyara" (Asano, 2013; Gendai yōgo no kiso chishiki, 2013; Tanaka, K. 2010). Although individuals may share similar views on the personal traits of kyara types --- which kyara works well for which kind of situation, and what kinds of stigma may be associated with it --- in reality, the outcome of one's kyara-play really comes down to case-by-case details (Kojima, 2016). There are split views for instance on whether playing "*ijirare kyara*" (a

⁴¹ Koffka and Lewin argue that this "demand character" is a part of the phenomenological world in which an "object becomes endowed with a demand character" (Lewin 1926 cited in Koffka, 1935, p.345). They want us to understand, for example, that the structure of a post-box invites the subject to insert a letter; a chair asks the subject to sit on it; a door handle may demand to be gripped, and so on.

person who is made fun of and harassed (Gendai yōgo no kiso chishiki, 2006), or “*ijiri kyara*” (a person who harasses *ijiri kyara*) is good for business success (Ōtsuka, T. 2011; Yoshida, N. 2016).

The status quo of female workers is of course a demanding factor in the changing national demographic as their working environments develop. Women are encouraged to detect affordance in a flexible adaptability, and play a certain *kyara* type. We have examples here, taken from real life experiences and showing how one’s perception of affordance can change through one’s experience of playing *kyara*.

Stories abound. Following the introduction of equal opportunities for employment for both women and men issued by the government in 2013, female workers began to show their qualities in the workplace. It has been duly noted consequently, that a quite few male workers --- especially those who hold senior positions --- have expressed a certain anxiety around their lack of experience working with skilled female workers (Nakano, M. 2017b/2017c/2017d).

The 30 years old female office worker, Nana (fake name), tells us that she originally anticipated playing the *ijirare kyara* of someone using herself as bait for others to make fun of. However, things became difficult when she gradually started to feel depressed from endlessly playing the *kyara*, and constantly putting herself down in front of others. In the beginning of her *kyara*-play game, she purposefully presented herself as a brazen-faced, but easy-going person. This *kyara* made her the butt of male colleagues’ jokes --- “you’re too crude to get married” or “you’re not feminine at all, so your home must be a mess,” and so on. Because she joked back with them, things escalated and the nasty comments or jokes got worse. By the time she realized that it was all becoming far too painful to deal with, she nevertheless found herself having no choice but to force herself to keep on playing the *kyara* (Nakano, M. 2018a).

We learn then that the stigma of playing *kyara* can reach extreme measures. Nakano Madoka (2018a/2018b) interviewed a number of female workers who had been traumatized by playing *ijirare kyara* at work, and it seems that this *kyara* has become an issue, especially for female workers who feel obliged to diminish themselves as a means of surviving alongside their male counterparts. Nakano finds out that female workers have even attempted to commit suicide because they find it is too painful to play *that kyara*. As a prime example of

these extreme reactions, Nakano tells us about the advertisement organizer, Takahashi Matsuri, who was gifted with both intelligence and beauty, and who committed suicide in 2015, largely because her colleagues forced her relentlessly to play *ijirare kyara* (Nakano, M. 2018a).

Yet we can note that although there is a strict sense of what one can and cannot do, there are several kyara commentators who claim that no individual can autonomously decide which kyara one should play. As we would find in a school classroom, one's kyara has to be agreed by other people who belong to a specific space (Enomoto, 2014; Kanno, H. 2008; Ogiue, 2008; Saitō & Doi, 2012). The clinical psychologist, Honma Tomomi (2009), expresses his skepticism about the individual who enjoys playing a kyara from the bottom of his or her heart, since one's kyara tends to be decided by the members of one's peer group, and --- as in the extreme situations we have just witnessed --- one may end up being forced to play an unwanted kyara.

Nevertheless, as Inoue Yoshitaka (2017) and Honma have pointed out, individuals tend to prefer to play kyara because there is a believed stigma to having no kyara to play: it means one's existence is not recognized in relation to the specific space, and this is clearly an almost existentially negative message. One cannot freely choose which kyara one plays nor can a played kyara be changed by one's will. Kyara-play, in other words, can be understood as a game offering the choice, only, of playing it or not.

At this point we can question whether the subject, who has no intention of actually playing kyara but is coerced into some kind of engagement with it, would always perceive a negative affordance in the situation? We should bear in mind of course, that Gibson's non-representational ecological theories consider perception to be an activity whereby affordance can signify meaning or value, as identified via mutually interdependent relationships between the human and its environment. Gibson states that one's perception of affordance changes according to circumstances, so that one's positive or negative perception of affordance never remains static.

The following recent case study shows that one's perception of an affordance can change according to how one recognizes what is actually resourceful. The freelance TV announcer, Takahashi Māsa, confessed that she was hesitant to announce her recent marriage, fearing that she might lose her job. It was through playing the "*dokushin kyara*" (a woman who is not yet

married) that she was able to get most of her work (Ūkan Fuji, 2019). Case studies like this serve to illustrate the issue of flexibility within perception and affordance, making clear the impact of the mediated environment --- the situation --- on the ways her kyara is perceived by her.

Phenomenologists' view the effect of affordance on our understanding of kyara-play as a self-contained act, not as an action-possibility identified through the processes of engaging with the mediated environment. Both Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Gibson acknowledge the important role that the subject's perception plays in the processes of understanding and engaging with the world (Reed, 1988/1996). However, Gibson's non-representational ecological theories --- as we have consistently noted --- consider perception to be an activity undertaken as a mutual relationship.

Though, as-it-were, meeting Gibson part way, Merleau-Ponty's concept of "schema corporeal" --- body schemes --- stands in direct contrast, acting more as a representationalist's proposition. It aims to address the ways the subject "correlatively" acts upon the world, underscoring the idea that humans maintain supremacy over the environment. Phenomenologists --- Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Kelly, or Erik Rietveld --- conclude that affordance arrives when the individual feels obligated by the environment to make a particular response to it (Dreyfus & Kelly, 2007; Rietveld, 2008). In other words, if we take the phenomenological view on affordance on board, we would imagine that the subject is always able to control the outcome of one's performance, stamping authority onto the situational environment. What we have confirmed so far would not however, fall into line with this position. The following case studies will serve to show that what one's kyara-action entails critically changes in relation to *ba*.

3.8 Negative affordance detected in kyara-play

As Gibson has pointed out, one may perceive affordance "positively or negatively or even neutral" (Gibson, 1986). The prevalence of these case-study explorations of context-dependent circumselves, indicate an either positive or negative affordance. They can also reveal instances of actually switching between the two according to circumstantial factors --- what is the intention

behind playing the kyara, who is it being played for, and how do others responds to it?

There are doubtlessly individuals who are reluctant to play kyara, but feel obliged to compromise in particular situations. They typically express unease with the predicament and what they consider to be a negative ethical position, as we find in this situation, where a Japanese woman working in an office explains that, "I feel distraught being obliged to play kyara, because I feel guilty deceiving others by pretending to be a fake" (Uhira & Hadrada, 2011). Nevertheless, played kyara can be metaphorically depicted as "wearing a costume" (Akiyama & Iwanami, 2011) or "being a connector" (Iwamiya, 2016), that allows one to form a relationship with others, as we saw in the instance above with the unmarried woman.

Such ambivalence toward kyara-play is also confirmed by a large number of Japanese readers of Hirano Keiichirō's *Watashi towa nanika* [What is "individual"?] (2012), which one can consider as a "kyara-therapy" book (Yuriika, 2012; Hashimoto, Shūhei, 2014; Tsuji, I. 2013). There are in fact a large number of people who acknowledge the necessity of playing kyara, and perform it in their everyday life (Ikeda, Kamei, 2014; Hikita, 2015). Ishinabe Hitomi (2005) tells us that "the number of kyara one can play defines who you are, rather than which kyara one plays." Indeed, it is also easy to find that individuals exchange their kyara-play choices and --- as we have noted previously --- also actively seek advice online (Yahoo! Japan, 2014/2016/2017; Yomiuri Shinbun, 2015).

In the midst of this great melee of kyara activity, it is not surprising therefore to find that the psychologist, Enomoto, surveyed 200 twenty year-olds. He found out that more than half of them felt uncomfortable about playing kyara, and also wanted to change the kyara they currently play (Enomoto, 2014). His survey offered up a dozen mixed views expressing the pros and cons of kyara-play, that run from person A, who sees it as a positive affordance --- "fixing my own kyara creates a comfortable situation because it's predictable" --- to person B, who detests that "kyara is too simplistic and fixes an individual's identity." Enomoto draws out from these contradictory views the conclusion that kyara-play can offer the subject "comfort" by masking or protecting the self from theoretically uncomfortable social situations, or can cause "frustration" because the played kyara limits the self to a kind of inflexibility.

But there are yet other approaches to the phenomenon of kyara-play. The idea of changing one's kyara in order to attune with *ba*, or of being just too tired to play an unwanted kyara, are also widely discussed amongst individuals online and by commentators (Aera, 2013; Hikita, 2015).

Problematic responses to switching kyara help us recognize the fact that each played "kyara" is a context-dependent circumself. That is to say, being reflective of *ba*, one's kyara only exists in a particular context. This helps us to understand why individuals tend to believe that any attempt at changing one's kyara has to be done by changing *ba* or the place one associates it with (Nakoshi, 2015a/2015b; Doi & Saitō, 2010). Harumaki, for example, happily informs us that he was finally able to switch his kyara by changing his job and where he lives (Harumaki, 2017). Similarly, the previously looked at Kawada Yasuji, who achieved career success by playing "rababuru kyara" --- the likeable face of "impression control" --- also thinks that it is too risky for him to change his kyara abruptly, and so changing his job would be the best timing for switching his kyara (Asai, M. 2012). On the other hand, the psychologist, Itō Akira (2013), argues that one of the best timings for changing one's kyara is when one becomes a university student. The validity of his point of view is supported by the online magazine, Evamag (2019), which informs the public of active university students' comments, confirming the fact that one has to maintain consistency in one's kyara's status quo.⁴²

3.9.1 Being desperate or having a fun? Youth playing kyara

Recognizing the impact of *ba* onto the ways the subject perceives the self, opens up discussions about why kyara-play is portrayed as enhancing communication, yet is also understood quite differently by both adults and youth. Saitō Tamaki and Doi Takayoshi claim that although kyara-play can have "commuryoku" (communication ability), people can understand it differently simply because they engage with different types of spaces (Saitō & Doi, 2012). Subject-environment integration being fundamental to our understanding of affordance, this becomes an immediately attractive proposition. They point out that dealing with increasingly diversified social platforms encouraged by

⁴² See Shiraiwa Gen's *Nobuta, o prodūsu* [Producing a person whose kyara name is nobuta (a wild pig)] (2004).

globalization and the changes in industrial structures, adults tend to regard that *commuryoku* initiates positive engagements with those who may have different perspectives and opinions about various subject matter. As we have seen, adults can often regard the concept of kyara-play as a technically useful communication tool.

Youth, on the other hand, often express pressure in regard to approaching kyara-play by reading air, perhaps because they mainly associate it with a close-circuit space like a school, or even being stuck in a local community (Hirata, 2009/2012; Iwamiya, 2016; Sakato, 2007). Youth are observed as naturals for wanting effortless, smooth communication. Doi Takayoshi, observing the ways elementary and junior high school students play kyara, thinks that the played kyara enable them to secure "a premeditated, harmonious communication" (Doi, Takayoshi, 2008/2009). This view is also confirmed by Senuma Fumiaki (2006/2007), who thinks that kyara-play envisages "a transparent communication," because each kyara is known for a certain personality trait, and individuals know how the kyara responds and what one can expect from it.

The kayara-play matrix also picks up on information given from an entirely different cultural genre. TV shows and publications from popular culture abound, offering endless permutations of would-be heroes that the young can in some way aspire to. Indeed one of the most elaborate versions of kyara-play is practised by a growing number of Japanese youth inspired by fictional characters from manga, anime and television dramas. For many of those playing fictional kyara, for example, at school, the action may be seen as fun-play, a game (Ishinabe, 2005) replicating images and sequences that have been seen and memorised. Certain ecological changes have no doubt played a part also in the ways youth communicate. In present-day Japan, youth tend to have fewer siblings, and living in nuclear families with both parents working. They consequently have significantly less opportunity to communicate with others (Iwamiya, 2016; Hirata, 2012), and inevitably, communication skills are learnt by watching television (Enomoto, 2014; Doi, Takayoshi, 2011).

The clinical psychologist, Iwamiya Keiko, offers counselling to some junior high school students struggling to maintain their kyara-play. She finds they generally watch variety programmes, which are televised more or less daily from early evening onwards, and learn their how-to-communicate skills from the ways

that television personalities perform their kyara (Kamiyō, H. 2007). It is also easy to find websites that offer tips on how to play fictional kyara in everyday life sequences, and what kinds of benefit or effect one might gain from doing this. Furthermore, there are also discussion forums where individuals exchange information about which fictional kyara suits which kind of circumstances (Mirrorz, n.d.; WikiHow, n.d.).⁴³

Certain academics --- Ogiue Chiki (2008) and Shirata Hideaki (2005) for example --- speculate that the playing of fictional kyara may indeed indicate something particular about Japanese cultural identities. Yet the motivation behind Japanese youth playing a fictional kyara that apparently has no real social context, eludes them. It is considered ok to mimic a policeman or a nurse, but a character from manga has no social reference. At this point we must acknowledge that the difference from a Western youth or child who may put on a batman cape occasionally and stand in front of the mirror, is that the young Japanese who enter into this projection perhaps do so in a more or less total way.

But if we carefully examine the stratagems either social role-play or fictional kyara obey, we can recognize that the two acts both share the essential observation that the individual identifies "the self" circumstantially, and performs "the self" to reflect upon *ba*, the particular nature of the space. In other words, when an individual associates with a space that only exists temporarily --- for a clear example, let's use as a pupil at school would do --- he or she may aspire to present an image of "the self," less bound to reality precisely because it has no social substance and remains as a surface representation, just as the space itself --- the classroom he or she belongs to --- disappears for the pupil when he or she leaves. Shirata gives support to this view, pointing out that the concept of *ba* is the overriding influence that directs an individual to play a certain type of kyara. In concurrence with our ecologically-based position, he tells us that many Japanese acknowledge the fact that they tend to perceive a space (*ba*) as having a specific context which influences the ways individuals define "the self" circumstantially (Shirata,

⁴³ See <http://mirrorz.jp/article/if-anime/>; <https://www.wikihow.jp/アニメ・漫画のキャラになりきる>.

2005).⁴⁴ He thinks that this is the reason why the concept of fictional kyara-play is promoted by, and primarily occurs, in relatively small and closed spaces --- like school classrooms --- and is destined to be a site-specific performance that exists temporarily, as we would find for example during a student year or semester.

One can also argue that the reason why youth tend to express their concern over communication via kyara-play, and often seem eager to take part in its game-play (Naitō, 2013; Senuma, 2006/2007; Tanaka, I. 2010) is because they cannot easily change their associated space --- the school, for example --- unlike the adult who has perhaps a more flexible choice both socially and with the work-place.

3.9.2 Mitate and kyara-play

In principle, kyara-play is not an obligatory act with which one is duty-bound to engage, and Japanese youth of course harbour mixed views on the subject. We should not actually forget that as with affordance, there are individuals who express mixed views on kyara-play. Ambivalence, of course, clearly rears its head here too, as confirmed by the newspaper, *Asahi Shinbun*, when its readers were invited to talk about how they perceive and understand the act of kyara-play (Akiyama & Iwanami, 2011). Interestingly, their views on what kyara-play does stand as a clear indication of the influence of the mitate-awareness. Many (mainly youth) claimed that kyara-play functioned as “an armour” or “a bulletproof jacket” that protects individuals in difficult circumstances, and this idea of it offsetting “reality,” countering the weight of social obligation, has clear traction. We can appreciate that the widespread phenomenon of “cuteness,” which might seem deliberately provocative, could be motivated by other concerns.

To pursue the intricate world of students and youth further, we come across the existence of the student popularity ranking system known as “school caste,” which helps us gauge the level of youth desperation for mastering

⁴⁴ This view is also supported by Kaneko Mitsuru (2009), who carried out an experimental study on how children “read the air of ba.” Newspapers also report that Japanese children are desperate to read air in order to identify a suitable kyara to play at school, offsetting the risk of being socially ostracised (Hamada, 2006; Akiyama & Iwanami, 2011).

communication abilities. It is noteworthy that a substantial number of academics, educational bodies, and the public in general express serious concern over how the “school caste” tightly links with kyara-playing games, delegating the nature of relationships at school, and often triggering negative responses, like fellow-student harassment (House of Representatives, 2006; Suzuki, S. 2012a/2012b; Doi, Takayoshi, 2011; Wada, Hideki, 2010).

We can see, for example, the level of desperation certain young people may suffer from an article published by the Asahi Shinbun on 20th November 2010, entitled “I am too exhausted to play kyara” (Tanakaka, K. 2010). The report tells us about a boy sinking into depression because his classmates pressured him to play an unwanted kyara. Indeed, further confirmation of such negative and even tragic predicaments, exist in literature, newspaper articles, and even television drama and manga, with some references revealing true-life and fully-stressful experiences of dealing with those extreme kyara-play scenarios.

The novel, *Rihame yori 100 bai osoroshii* [‘Rihame’ --- non-overt harassment --- is 100 times scarier] (Kodō, 2006), and the film, *Ashita no watashi no tsukuri kata* [How I create a future self] (2007),⁴⁵ for example, both vividly depict the existential desperation triggered by extreme harassment that can be activated by kyara-play.

3.10.1 Social media affords the exploration of circumselves

We will focus on the following two aspects of detected affordance activating kyara-play through the use of technologies. First, technologically-infused mass media such as television, films or Internet information encourages the subject to detect affordance often by actually portraying a possible role one can play. In particular, the newly-converted social roles such as the career-focused female, the full-time household husband etc., are more prominent for reflecting the changes of socio-cultural, ecological conditions. We will then examine the mass media, especially television programmes and variety shows, which offer vignettes, showcasing how to play kyara in a short and precise context.

⁴⁵ Ishikawa, Jun. (2007). *Ashita no watashi no tsukuri kata*. Tokyo: Nikkatsu.

Secondly, the subject identifies affordance in the use of various technological devices --- the mobile phone, the computer, cameras, etc. --- for capturing, editing or fabricating images that represent the self. Those devices empower the increasing number of technologically-mediated communication platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Our aim is to examine the contention that the subject detects affordance in the use of technologies to “curate or edit” circumselves, and realise it materialistically.

It is important to note that over the past two decades, *kyara-play* began to be taken as an effective way of demonstrating one’s *commuryoku*, functioning as the social filler of generation gaps. Dealing with the collateral differences from economic conditions over the years, those who hold senior positions in employment industries, and the younger generations like the so-called “lost generation,” who might feel they have less security in life, often do not share similar work experiences nor life goal expectations. These differences in socio-cultural background also explain why more than 84% of Japanese corporations think that the prime criterion for recruiting new employees is that of communication ability (Nihon Keizai Dantai Rengōkai, 2018; Kawashima, 2018; Saitō, T. 2018). Additionally, a long stagnation to Japanese economic growth has restricted both the companies’ time and money, and caused a re-scaling in the nature of employment. Acknowledging such a recruitment trend, we can agree with Nakamura Takayasu (2018a), who claims that *kyara-play* is increasingly appreciated as a performative solution. Inevitably and perhaps understandably enough, those who are able to perform a job role with a smooth running, clear and engaging precision would be most appreciated.

From this we can see why some commentators such as Hada Tōru (2018), claim that the best way to learn how to present one’s skills and ability by playing *kyara*, is to steal promotional techniques from “15 second television commercials,” television variety programmes (Tanaka, I. 2010, Tanaka, D. 2008), or television commercial films (Iota, 2014; Hayashi, Y. 2014).

Views like these encourage us to consider that being under the influence of the *mitate-awareness*, one can take the work environment as a theatrical playground, helping the subject to be detached and handle situations in a practical manner. The subject is inspired to perceive the self as a kind of business commodity, to promote one’s sale-ability in the job-market --- what the person is good at, and what can be expected from him or her, and so on.

The fact that current recruiters often want to know what a candidate's "catchphrase" is, as an indicator of potential work achievement, indicates the extraordinary influence of comedians' own sales talk, and how the individual is increasingly being encouraged to represent oneself as an attractive business "asset" (Internship Guide, 2019; Suzuki, E. 2019; Yoshikawa, T. 2018). Significantly, there are a number of recruitment-related business websites which offer check-lists for individuals to create their own catchphrase, and make sure one's kyara is in order to succeed in job-hunting activities (Aipuresu, 2015; Nakata, 2017).

The prospect of television acting directly as a mentor for daily life behaviour is also addressed by the novelist, Fujiwara Tomomi. She makes the explicit statement that, "modern Japanese people learn how to play kyara in everyday life, and make their choices of which kyara to play by observing television characters" (Ehime Shinbun, 2009). Enomoto opens up this observation further, proclaiming that "the ways people communicate with each other strikingly resemble television shows. It makes you wonder whether people have now been turned into the television show themselves" (Enomoto, 2014).

3.10.2 Possibilities for new kyara

Mass media --- especially television dramas and variety programmes --- are often thought of as treasure houses for promoting various kyara (Tanaka, I. 2010; Tanaka, D. 2008). Television programmes are watched more intensely for the portrayal of a possibly new role that one can play, because of the changes to demographic conditions. Influencing how many --- especially young --- people may position themselves in society, these programmes can potentially act as catalysts for shifting pre-existing, gender-specified role-play (Collins, 2010; Dales, 2015; Freedman & Weickgenannt, 2011).

It is true that individuals may not necessarily be convinced by "kyaracters" appearing in the recently broadcast popular television dramas. Programmes like *Watashi, teiji de kaeri masu* [I leave work at the appointed hour] (2019)⁴⁶ or *Athome Dad* [Dad at home means a full-time house-husband] (2004)⁴⁷ humorously portray those aspects of contemporary urban society that reflect

⁴⁶ Okuda, Satoko (2019) *Watashi, teiji de kaerimasu*. Tokyo: TBS.

⁴⁷ Kudō, Kankurō. (2004). *At Home Dad*. Tokyo: Fuji TV.

new attitudes to old roles. Japanese working environments and the elimination of gender-biased employment still require much-needed improvements.⁴⁸ Lightweight or not, these TV dramas nevertheless clearly carry a preconception of content designed to reflect the new dynamics within the milieu, setting up new roles for kyara-play that correspond to the demographic changes. The significance of the media in shaping a culturally shared view of social order can be found elsewhere (Roseneil, 2007), not only, of course, in Japan.

It is worth noting, however, that Japanese television programmes, and especially variety shows which often appoint comedians as MC's, offer vignettes on how-to-play kyara (Tanaka, D. 2008; Tanaka, I. 2010; Senuma, 2006/2007; Enomoto, 2014). These programmes can feature directly instructive material as well as played-out scenarios, and typically demonstrate how-to find one's position by reading the air of *ba*, and how best to conduct smooth communication by --- for example --- making funny jokes, and so on.

One may question just how such television variety shows can indeed be influential promoters of the concept of kyara-play. Aren't they simply there for entertainment? There are many kyara-play commentators, however, who consider that variety television programmes and the comedians usually featured on them, offer essential information about kyara-play tactics, and in fact keep reminding the viewer that kyara-play is one of the ultimate communication enhancers.

The fact that those comedians typically emphasize that kyara-play is just a game of pretense in which one need not be particularly empathetic, sends us the message that playing kyara can mean, for example, faking being a fool simply for the sake of showmanship. Offering-up kyara-play as a light form of sociability, helping communication flow, it is indeed possible that variety television shows and comedians have become one of the most vital resource providers of the kyara-play phenomenon. Senuma, the ex-comedian and author of *Kyararon* [Theory of kyara] (2007), is one of those claiming that kyara-play is a vital communication enhancer, enabling the subject to engage in "personality visualization." It is as though kyara-play comes in kit form. One can read the instructions as it were by watching the kyara in action on the television, and imagine how it would work for oneself. The practicality of engaging in

⁴⁸ The global gender gap report of 2018 indicates that Japan ranks 110 out of 149 countries, which is the lowest position amongst the G7 (World Economic Forum, 2018).

kyara-play adds to the consideration of it as a vital skill which is “quite similar to the ways comedians play double acts, like old vaudeville duos, just for the purpose of making someone laugh or feel easy” (Saitō, Nobuta, & Morikawa, 2017, p.117).

Additionally, the broadcast writer, Tanaka Idea (2010), even urges the viewer to apply *mitate*, and look at variety television programmes as a miniaturized society. He claims that one can actually learn how-to build useful business relationships by observing the ways comedians play their kyara by reading the air of *ba*. Doi Takayoshi even draws attention to the recent trend of some young people calling their friends “*aikata*” (a typical way of calling an entertainment or performance partner). He makes a parallel with the form of a friendship being announced by mimicking comedians’ interactions. (Doi, Takayoshi, 2009).

Alternatively, the concept of playing kyara can be thought of very much like the situation an actor might find himself in searching for a job --- or a character --- to play in a theatre. Senuma (2007), for example, points out that many Japanese tend to look for a type of kyara which is not played by others, and so avoid “overlapping,” just as in the theatre no production needs two identical characters.

Having ownership of one’s personal kyara is a factor that Doi Takayoshi (2011) also acknowledges in enclosed or specific space situations. He describes how the young in Japan can be desperate to find a kyara that helps them be recognized as different from other members in a peer group, and so secure their positions in school. Perceiving a space --- perhaps a classroom --- as a theatre-stage, they search for a kyara that does not coincide with that of the other pupils, not wanting any two characters to play the same role (Enomoto, 2014; Takeuchi, I. 2014). Extending the theatre and drama analogy further, the philosopher, Washida Seiichi (2002), visualises the skepticism towards allowing this situation of two people playing the same kyara as akin to a television director analysing whether one’s kyara will keep a good balance amongst the cast, fitting in with other people’s kyara.

3.11.1 Kyara-play and technological gadgets

It is very apparent to us these days that information on how-to play kyara is widely circulated via the mass media. The corollary to this is that we should examine how the subject in the contemporary internet-active society comes to identify affordance in the use of various technological communication devices --- the mobile, the computer, etc. --- all able capture, edit and even fabricate images of the self.

We can take studies made by Knappett and Donald Norman as approaches towards an understanding of the complex nature of affordance detection in the use of technological gadgets. Both Knappett and Norman allow the subject-environment interaction axis that we have made central to this thesis. Knappett argues that it is vital to acknowledge the impact of material culture in terms our understanding of the ways humans think and act. He draws our attention to the fact that a certain awareness gained from engagements between humans and material artifacts sharply influences how the subject perceives meanings and values (i.e. affordance) and then activates a certain action (Knappett, 2005). He is, in essence, talking about affordance in the direction of kyara-play, though it is not being spelt out in those exact terms.

Norman (2013),⁴⁹ on the other hand, defines the disciplines of affordance detection into four broad categories: physical, semantic, cultural and logical. He applies Gibson's affordance theory as a way of explaining the complexity and intricacies the subject is engaged with in the constant negotiation processes of daily life. That is to say, the subject simultaneously gathers and coordinates information via cognition, perception and action, and digests this feedback for future interactions with the mediated environment. Whilst also drawing upon Gibson's ecological psychology, Norman registers the subject as constantly learning from interaction with the environment, granting these enriching experiences the potential to detect a new affordance. Through Norman's instruction we come to recognize the surprising validity of Hysse Forchhammer's example of a walking stick being used as a telephone (Forchhammer, 2016).⁵⁰ Of course we generally perceive a mobile phone as a

⁴⁹ Knappett refers to Norman's book published in 1998. The thesis uses its revised edition published in 2013 as it takes into account of the impact of the advanced technologies.

⁵⁰ Forchhammer describes how a disabled woman was able to detect affordance in the use of her walking stick as a way of making a telephone call to let her neighbours know that she needed their help.

useful communication device, but when its reception is down or interfered with, our perception quickly shifts from seeing it as a user-friendly device --- a positive reception of affordance --- to it being a nuisance --- a mechanical gadget as a negative view of affordance.⁵¹

This argument can be extended further when we note that whatever medium the subject uses for interacting with others --- whether it be face-to-face communication with someone, or using a digital device like a mobile phone or computer --- the input energy of sending a text or an image, or expressing oneself via body gestures, would never transmit exactly what the subject matter was. Each medium, we can argue, has its own configuration system restricted by its own materiality --- its capacity and compatibility etc. (B. Hogan, 2010; Marwick & boyd, 2010; Turkle, 2011).⁵² In other words, whatever medium the subject chooses, it functions as a trans-medium which configures the input into a certain form. Additionally, the end result of such a transmission may not necessarily be consistent with or controllable by the subject's will, the subject, we must remember, acting upon the environment and negotiating with various ecological conditions.

Fluctuating views on detected affordance in these technological instances --- its pros and cons --- are triggered by the technical limitations of social network systems (SNS), whose functions one cannot control. Putting the impact the environment has on us in perspective, so-called "connectedness" is increasingly dictated by proximity to technology, not to the individual (Gottschalk & Whitmer, 2013; Ling, 2010; Turkle, 2011), since "technology may function 'on demand' but people usually do not" (Bugeja, 2005, p.24).

3.11.2 Improvising with technological communication devices

⁵¹ Fuller offers an extensive analysis of how our lives integrate with multiple-media systems --- surveillance, and cyber communication and interaction for example. They afford the creation of multi-layered cybernetic spaces that, with the fluidly shifting materiality of media systems, often remain outside our awareness. His focus is to show how hit and miss the nature of affordance of course is in this: radio transmission may be destroyed by bad weather, wearing a pair of gloves may obstruct typing words on a mobile, etc. (Fuller, 2005).

⁵² Adrian Mackenzie describes how "wirelessness as a state of effervescence develops in assemblages of conjunctive relations" and terminates in a movement rather than a place (Mackenzie, 2010, p.69).

The direct action of playing *kyara* is also explored via the use of technological communication. Exploiting the material limitations of each device and hence improvising with that materiality, the individual can invent a new usage for their functions.

In comparison with face-to-face communication, some commentators confirm that exchanging emails can often be perceived as impersonal or even challenging (Kurzberg, et al., 2005; Naquin, et al., 2010; Wallace, 2016). To compensate for such a “reduction in concern for self-presentation and the judgment of others” (Joinson, 2007, p.75), the use of emoji in a mobile text or email is often considered to be one of the most effective tools for controlling the impression given (Hirose, Ushijima & Mori, 2014; Ōyama, 2015; Miyake, K. 2012). Honda Tetsuya (2016) offers the interesting proposition that the user’s nationality influences how and what kinds of emoji one uses. This may bear relevance with the Japanese, but it remains unclear whether we could apply his theory to distinguish emoji used by the French as opposed to Italians. However, more relevant here is his reference to the Japanese using emoji as a means to reading air. This is a theory also shared by certain scholars who ascertain that the use of emoji directly helps the individual to read the air of a mobile text or email, enabling one to express friendliness, feelings, and even an atmosphere (Kobayashi, Yamamoto & Mizuno, 2003; Sano, 2010; Miyake, K. 2012). We witness here how the all notions of environment as being tied to place and time is being subverted --- or, rather, expanded --- to include forms that take on an aspect of cyber abstraction. The mediated environment not so much in miniature, but as universal, speed not only nailing the precision of time and place, but simultaneously disregarding it.

Recognizing the current ubiquity of emoji, its inventor, Kurita Shigetaka (2017), notes that although emoji was originally invented by appropriating *manpu* (the visual codes used in manga) and *kanji*, the phenomenon has proven to be a vital communication tool in the use of digital communication devices worldwide.

What concerns us here is the fact that historically, the use of the Japanese language was constrained by technological limitations --- the memory, software, and processing powers of early computers that were not capable of storing and utilizing the Japanese linguistic system. We will look closely into the complexity of the Japanese linguistic system in the next chapter, but in this instance, one

should realise that the Japanese language requires a fairly advanced computer system to cope with its complex, equivocal functions. Although much improvement has been made since the turn of this century, there are still technical blind spots that need to be sorted out for simple operations. Exchanging text messages via mobiles or computers is not so straightforward (Mizumoto & Komachi, 2012; Komachi & Kida, n.d.). Emails containing emoji or a text written by a certain font type, may not necessarily be displayed on a screen in the same way if the sender and receiver use different mobile carriers or different internet servers, or use different computer software (Satō, Kenji, 2012).

(Figure 1. Simeji, n.d.)

| | | | | | |
|---------|-----------|---------|-----------|------------|---------------|
| (^0^) | (; _ ;) | \(^o^)/ | (? _ ?) | (^ _ ^)v | (* ^ 。 ^ *) |
| smile | sadness | hurray | what!? | peace | grateful |

Analyzing a similar subject matter, we come across the emergence of a very clear affordance. Miyake Kazuko (2012) offers some useful observations on how Japanese mobile users invented new notations specifically created for exchanging mobile messages. She points out that the invention of “*kaomoji*” (Figure 1.) --- depicting an image by using the basic characters available in the majority of computers and mobiles --- can overtly circumvent the correct orthography. This however has given a creative license to those individuals who mix-and-match upper and lower-case letters, double consonants, bracket characters etc. Furthermore, we can assume that those people wanting to avoid any miscommunication caused by existing technical incompatibilities (Yasuoka, 2012) have identified an affordance in the new use of characters and letters, by negotiating with what these technological devices actually afford. This affordance in turn offers the user the freedom to adopt a signature methodology in the use of the device at hand, and, as-it-were, develop an online *kyara*. The availability of *kaomoji* consequently makes the individual aware that using it or not induces the playing of certain *kyara* according to the situation.

3.12.1 Technologically-empowered communication platforms in the West

Due to the increasing number of technologically-configured or empowered, social media-related communication platforms --- Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc. --- it can be argued that we are perhaps more able to see clearly how complex interactions with the mediated-environment embody subjectivities. That is to say, in relation to this progressively advancing, technologically-mediated environment, the subject identifies affordance in exploring flexibly adaptable circumselves. Such phenomena can be found elsewhere when the individual takes part in computer-generated communication.

The fact that the subject now engages extensively with multi-dimensional communication platforms, has caused a pronounced shift in ecological conditions. We can ask whether these developments in technologically-advanced communication devices enable us to see clearly that the subject has always been --- so to speak --- an unrealized, subconscious, and unfulfilled vehicle for circumselves? "Unrealised," because there was no previous technology that could afford the subject an equivalent provision to explore and express the idea of multiple-selves. Those issues demand a look into how the increasing agility of modern technologies influences the subject's ability to detect affordance in the use of such communication devices.

Via the use of advanced technologies, self-representation is no longer constrained to one's physical presence (Turkle, 2011/2012; Hansen, M. 2006). As with Turkle, David Parisi (2008) is also referencing the West. He claims that the new communication media do not merely extend our powers, but reconfigure our very existence. Indeed, "multiplying technologies of computer-mediated communication not only colonize all areas of social life faster than we think, they are changing how we think" and "how we interact" (Gottschalk & Whitmer, 2013; Parikka, 2015). One can even create a distinctive flow of moving-self-imaging by using technologically operated multi-gadgets, which afford us to curate or fabricate a self-image from three-dimensions to two, converting an image from the animate to the inanimate.

These action possibilities --- i.e. affordances --- shift the notions of time and space to exist ubiquitously outside of specified dimensionality, being less constrained by any physical reality. Such is the hugely dynamic capacity of cyberspace. To shed a light on how such ecological changes influences personal communications, especially the ways the subject might play multiple

roles, the socio-psychologist, Sherry Turkle's influential book *Life on the Screen* (1995), and her talks given in 2012, offer insightful explanations. In 1995, Turkle described how the change of ecological conditions invited individuals to "retribalize" (as Marshall McLuhan said) (Turkle, 1995, p.178). The computer window endorsed the identity of the "decentralized self," embodying fractured but multiple identities. She wrote that, "Windows provide a way for a computer to place you in several contexts at the same time (...) you are a presence in all of them at all times. (...) your identity on the computer is the sum of your *distributed presence*" (Turkle, 1995, p.13. emphasis is mine). Observing those individuals who are "addicted to flux" and play a number of roles online, Turkle recognized that certain individuals gain a benefit, or detect a positive affordance, from playing online role-games, because they function as a psycho-therapeutic communication platform, where one can pretend to be powerful --- or whatever one wants. Does this then mean that the "decentralized self" has therefore changed in relation to the increasing number of multiple communication platforms available in the past decade?

In the present time, advanced technologies enable the subject to explore the idea of circumselves with much less constraint from one's physical reality, previously tied down to a spatio-temporal composition. And this is no doubt where some individuals detect affordance, in exploring the idea of the self existing ubiquitously. One can do, for instance, pre-scheduling when one's blog appears online, or send a video text message to a friend from the other side of the planet in real time, etc. Dealing with these notional irregularities and flexibilities empowered by the use of technologies, the traditional concepts of space and time are inarguably challenged.

Interestingly, when Turkle gave a speech at TED Talk in 2012 --- thirteen years after her book was published --- she pointed out that there were paramount changes in people's attitude to personal communication, drawing attention specifically to the observation that individuals were becoming especially obsessive about how to edit or design self-representation. Her position was that individuals were weary about face-to-face communication: they were incapable of controlling what they were going to say because it takes real time. She pointed out that "Texting, email, posting, all of these things let us present the self as we want to be. We get to edit, and that means we get to delete, and that means we get to retouch, the face, the voice, the flesh, the

body --- not too little, not too much, just right" (Turkle, 2012).⁵³ As a prime example, Turkle told us the story about an 18-year-old boy who used texting for almost everything, and said to her, "Someday, someday, but certainly not now, I'd like to learn how to have a conversation" (Turkle, 2012).

The boy's plaintive statement might be a bit overwrought, but nevertheless, it is very apparent he is expressing a disconnectedness, a lack of empathy (Konrath, O'Brien., & Hsing, 2011; Turkle, 2011). Or perhaps we can say that the individual has become more absorbed in *editing* or *curating* a digitally represented circumself.

What then about our case of kyara-play taking on board the use of multiple devices and multiple accounts on the social media?

3.12.2 In Japan: Kyara-play and social media

According to Dentsū Sōken's survey --- answered by two thousand people of both genders, aged between 15 and 29 years old --- the average number of kyara played by high school students is 5.7; university students is 5, and the twenties as members of society, average 4. Significantly, 62.7 percent of high school students and 50.4 percent of university students have multiple twitter accounts, and fully confirm that they switch kyara accordingly (Dentsū Sōken, 2015). Indicating that youth carefully choose who they want to communicate with, and furthermore take care over which device they use to connect with others, the journalists, Kumazawa Shiho (2017) and Kimoto Harumi (2017), have also notice such trends. From another survey done by SIRABEE, 1342 men and women throughout the whole country, aged between 20 and 60, were questioned. We can also learn from this that the people switch kyara according to the type of social media (Tatsuki, 2017), and this use of multiple devices, according to Asano (2017), embodies the "pluralistic self."

To the question of how one changes one's kyara via the use of social media, twenty males replied, "I use social media for three different purposes: for work, friends, and otaku activities, and I represent myself very differently. For example, on the work-associated account, I consciously try to make politically intensive opinions, but for the account connected with friends, I tend to gossip.

⁵³ See https://www.ted.com/talks/sherry_turkle_alone_together/transcript.

Comments I make on the account associated with otaku activities, I would not dare to share with any of my friends or work colleagues" (Tatsuki, 2017). This of course is not a Japan-only occurrence. Such an attitude can also be found amongst social media users from different countries (Shane-Simpson, et. al, 2017). Several Western participants who contribute to the work done by Finola Kerrigan and Andrew Hart (2018), also confirm that their online identities are carefully curated by the specific intention of appealing to specific audiences.

The availability of multiple communication channels allows those individuals, who detect positive affordance in the use of social media, to explore the multi-complex aspects of "the self." There are, on the other hand, individuals who find it uncomfortable to deal with social media because they are unable to control "social media leakage" (Kerrigan & Hart, 2018) --- unwanted information being accidentally exposed to the public.

These mixed views are in a sense provoked by whatever medium the subject chooses to use. Perceiving a positive or negative affordance in the technologically-mediated environment, the availability of social media affording the subject the possibility of exploring the idea of circumselves will nevertheless be governed by the device itself, which configures input into a certain form (Gottschalk & Whitmer, 2013; Turkle, 2011). In addition, it can be observed that the end result of these transmissions also cannot be controlled by the subject's intentions, because the subject also has to constantly negotiate with various ecological conditions (Fuller, 2005; Parikka, 2010).

Examining whether computer-mediated encounters sufficiently support the subject's intention to represent the self on social media, Simon Gottschalk and Jennifer Whitmer argue that digitally-mediated devices have their own agenda and limitations. They point out the fact that "digitally-mediated encounters (destabilize) those practices, challenges their underlying assumptions, and frustrates the satisfaction of those needs" (Gottschalk & Whitmer, 2013, p.311). In a similar vein, Alice Marwick and Dannah boyd (2010)⁵⁴ observe how the individual has to negotiate with a particular format of social media, like Twitter, since it "collapses" or flattens multiple audiences into single contexts. Unlike with face-to-face, one can no longer orchestrate and control one's projection of oneself according to who one is communicating with, or indeed where and

⁵⁴ I follow the author's choice of using a small letter for her surname.

when one is. The “air of *ba*” no longer has relevance. Being connected with an unknown number of online users --- “one-to-many and many-to-many communication via text, photographs, instant messenger, direct messages and videos” (Duffy & Chan, 2019) --- or in fact with technologies, restrains ones actions or re-configures ones input in uncontrollable ways. In these ways we begin to see more clearly how the complexities of the environment influence ones perceptions and actions.

Turkle’s understanding, however, is that “online life is about premeditation” (Turkle, 2011, p.273), because when one represents oneself on Facebook, for example, it necessitates one to edit or tailor “what you do put up (on Facebook) and how you portray yourself” (Turkle, 2011, p.184). This aspect connects with the idea of establishing “the self as brand” (Gottschalk & Whitmer, 2013; Hearn, 2010; Marwick & boyd, 2010)⁵⁵ or “self-promotion” (Mehdizadeh, 2010; Zhao, 2014; Lowe-Calverley & Grieve, 2018) in order to engage with an imagined audience --- which then of course reminds us about performing *kyara*.

Kerrigan and Hart’s work offers some insightful views on how the individual who aspires to represent the self via social media, constantly struggles to aggregate or consolidate what they call “the bounded digital personality” --- the digital personhood. Their case studies reveal how it is difficult for individuals to control their self-representation via the use of social media. In a case of leakage-paranoia, one participant, for example, expressed her serious concern about uploading information to the wrong account accidentally, which would no doubt cause confusion and embarrassment. Another participant, on the other hand, was eager to edit his past by deleting some uploaded photos and blocking unwanted access to his account (Kerrigan & Hart, 2016). In many ways, the very existence of the digital personality exceeds pre-existent notions of space and time as the new technologies embrace and afford new creative activities in cyberspace. And perhaps this is the reason why commentators tend to see that multiple, digital identities only exist temporarily. Instead, one has “a past, present and future digital self” (Kerrigan & Hart, 2018, p.1712). That is to say, that in relation to the 21st century, technologically-mediated environment, self-editing procedures can be understood as ongoing projects.

⁵⁵ They point out that the individual tends to establish a “personal branding” by imagining the audiences evoked through their tweets (Marwick & boyd, 2010).

These medial processes of curating self-representation remind us of the fact that the enactment of kyara-play also requires that the subject maintains a consistent presentation.

One may question whether multiple digital selves or “the bounded digital personality” can be understood in ways that parallel the individual playing kyara. However, there are two critical factors which sanction kyara-play as a more eminent way for the subject to negotiate the medial processes, because of its specific focus on being reflective of *ba*. We acknowledge, for example, that the subject has a clear precision in performing a particular kyara in relation to a specific social context inclusive of to whom one plays it for, when and how. Also, since kyara is played both online as well as in “the real world,” its existence is more prevalent than those multiple digital selves which are primarily performed online.

One’s perception of detected affordances is more likely to fluctuate because multiple digital selves are embodied through online interactions with an imagined audience. The social network system is after all, a way of connecting with unspecific numbers of known and unknown others (Sheldon, 2012; Special & Li-Barber, 2012). We can see that the very nature of space consequently can cause drawbacks to one’s efforts to use social media, because it requires the subject to meet the expectations of multiple audiences simultaneously (Lang & Barton, 2015; Marwick & boyd, 2011). Yet both kyara-play and multiple digital selves may amplify the idea of promoting self-presentation strategies which are often motivated by the need for other people’s validation or approval (Toma & Hancock, 2013; Saitō, T. 2013). However, a prerequisite of kyara is that it is specifically played as being reflective of *ba*, and self-representation via social media is not an unfolding social performance in front of the reacting others (B. Hogan, 2010). It is instead “a virtual *mise-en-scene*, a premeditated display of artifacts connoting social and symbolic capital” (Gottschalk & Whitmer, 2013), and instead stands as a purposefully-curated, self-presentation (Hogan, 2010; Marwick & boyd, 2011).

This point of view also explains why the idea of switching kyara according to *ba* became more noticeable to the public, coinciding with the invention of the computer, which was to hugely influence how we communicate with each other (Excite News, 2015; FNN Prime, 2018). We can therefore make a link with Asano’s observation that, after the 1990 introduction of the personal computer,

one of the significant changes that happened to young people's communication style was that their friendships tended to become more circumstantially defined (Asano, 2013).

The difference between *kyara-play* and multiple digital selves can also be noted in the negative performance some individuals perceive in the "temporal existence of digital selves" (Kerrigan & Hart, 2018). The concept of *kyara-play*, on the contrary, embraces its temporal status quo because, being reflective of *ba*, it is simultaneously changing with the ecological conditions. In this sense, *kyara-play* helps us to see more clearly that the subject, being a fluid self, is constantly in the process of becoming.

It is thereby crucial to recognize the fact that no single "shot" can define the self. The subject is involved in mediatory processes continuously, and these are continuously changing throughout everyday life. This point of view echoes with Gibson's understanding that neither stimulus nor the perceptual behaviour of the subject actually exist in reality. Subject-in-reality cannot be replicated by an artificially framed "inanimate" image of the self. Gibson argued that reality consists of a flow of movement, and is comprised of animated visions and stimuli. No fixed or static image therefore, could replicate the reality we perceive or experience (Gibson, 1960/1986). Confirming that the subject and the environment are simultaneously integrated, Gibson firmly believed that any inanimate, static vision of the subject is merely a conventional artifact, incapable of replicating the same awareness of being in a space --- of being "in reality." This vision can also apply to *kyara-play*, as it embraces the idea that the subject is constantly in the processes of becoming, rather than being a fixed self. This concept of fluidly-changing, multiple-selves can be traced in the ways the subject constantly has to negotiate with the technologically-mediated environment, since there are certain obstacles --- how social media is constructed and how technological devices constrain its use, for example --- which make us see more clearly that the subject is constantly negotiating with its environment.

Finally, we must come to engage with a certain quandary: whether the act of role-play is intended to unify the self or reveal multiplicities. There are dozens of commentaries touching upon this issue, and analyses from various schools of thought on the impact of those vastly popular, digitalized social network systems. We can note approaches from a psychology perspective (Schwalbe,

2013), from sociology (G. Smith, 2006; Vaast, 2007), and from cultural studies (Waskul & Vannin, 2013). In essays that bear common territory with this thesis, Emmanuelle Vaast (2007), for example, points out that some individuals clearly seem to explore flexibly-adaptable, multiple-selves. Whilst the majority of work can be acknowledged as applying discourse analysis, Philip Vannin (2009) applies a non-representational theory, recognizing a performance as a non goal-seeking action, in other words, an action simply to do with doing. However, his view on the individual as always acting on-the-spot without intention or discriminatory preferences is difficult to endorse, because it fails to take into account the impact of one's living environment on the subject, that is to say, what the environment in fact affords. Furthermore, we often, and in some situations, inevitably notice ourselves having certain tendencies or preferences that we turn to that help us facilitate engaging with circumstances. It is important to take into account the impact these awarenesses carry in shaping both perception and action --- what Gibson calls "subjective determinant tendencies." This line of thinking directs us towards Haldrup and Hart's understanding of the simultaneous and mutually interactive influence between the subject and the mediated environment.

3.13 Creating one's own theatrical place

Haldrup and Larsen claim that an act of performance needs to be understood as a half-scripted (a coded form of behaviour) and a half-improvised (adapting to circumstance) activity (Haldrup & Larsen, 2008), constantly negotiating with the mediated environment. As an activity that carries so much formatted advice, it is easy to think of kyara-play as a scripted performance, learnt, practiced and perfected in the confines of one's private space before being brought out to meet the world. Looking at their argument from a pragmatic point of view, we register that Haldrup and Larsen, using the analogy of a holiday scenario, observe how the subject comes to detect affordance in the use of photography, perhaps carefully posing to authenticate one's theatrical performance abroad. They point out that performative actions like this need to be understood as half-scripted and half-improvised, because the individual inevitably needs to take into account aspects of circumstance that cannot be entirely controlled (Haldrup & Larsen, 2008). Their understanding resonates with the responses

kyara players themselves give to the question of whether kyara is totally fabricated or not. A number of online kyara users confessed that kyara-play can indeed be a manipulation of both (Takahashi, I. 2019).

We can extend this declaration⁵⁶ when surveying individuals' attraction to Instagram, which can involve editing, converting, and fabricating photographs they have taken (Jackson & Luchner, 2017). In particular, camera-phone photography radically changes the notion of space and time: we are able to take photos and instantly upload them almost anywhere and at anytime (House, 2011; S. Smith, 2018; Schwartz & Halegoua, 2015; Shanks & Svabo, 2019). Since uploading an eye-catching, attractive picture is generally held to be perhaps one's prime interest with Instagram, photography may no longer be understood as capturing images of reality, but may be conceived as a raw material affording the individual the opportunity to improvise with it, to edit and even fabricate it into a new image (Haldrup & Larsen, 2008; Lamp, et al. 2019). Instagram is a social media platform which allows and, to some extent, encourages these forms of alterations, and the phenomenon itself can consequently readily influence how one perceives the self. It becomes apparent that "flexibly editable selves" as a concept, is simply a mirror configuration of the modified performance reflected in the photograph.

Taking a photo of oneself means to capture an image of a momentary status quo, but in certain circumstances, the subject's initial intention to show it to the public via Facebook or perhaps through blogs, may change over time. In this context, one's perception of affordance in the action of photographing fluctuates from positive or negative, due to certain circumstantial changes. Kerrigan and Hart studies indicate that such changes in one's perception are possibly caused by "a message from a former self to a future self that is intended to recreate the emotion of the original experience, but this might lead to both positive and negative experiences" (Kerrigan & Hart, 2018, p.1712). Indeed, technologies perhaps also serve to make us realize such changes to our perception more explicitly. Nevertheless, inversely, we can see that technologies can also afford "retrospective editing," allowing the subject to reverse the past to the present time (Haldrup & Larsen, 2008; Takahashi, A. 2015).

⁵⁶ Instagram was invented by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, and was launched in October 2010. When Haldrup and Larsen wrote their book, Instagram did not exist.

One may argue that this kind of detection of affordance in a sense premeditates the aspiration for certain devices to indeed render a shift in one's perception. Camera-phone photography, computer graphics, and so on, can be seen as offering a very positive affordance when considered as means of simply opening perception (Haldrup & Larsen, 2008; Massumi, 1995; S. Smith, 2018). In this respect, we need to allow a non-representational aspect to performance because it will primarily concern a shift in perception of the self, whether the performance was carried out well or not becoming a strictly secondary matter.

3.14 Conclusion

As a means of approaching life in contemporary Japan, we have examined the nature of fluid identity in the ways the subject defines multiple-selves via the enactment of *kyara-play*, offering a rich example that demonstrates the constant negotiations between the subject and the mediated environment. Gibson's theory of affordance and his ecological psychology allowed us to spell out the complex interactivities carried out in daily life.

We focus on the impact demographic changes made on the subject. This brings attention to the environment's influence on the subject's definition of the self, and our realisation that perceptions of affordance fluctuate, and can change with the source of mediation. Interaction with the specificities of Japanese ecological conditions guides the formation of the *mitate-awareness*, a key sensor within the milieu.

It is this awareness that triggers the use of *kyara-play* as a means of circumstantial adaptation, allowing us to note how dealing with the circumstantially-offered, multiple-meanings implicit within the Japanese linguistic system, also encourage the subject to flexibly change perception. These changes are both opened up and reinforced by the use of technologies.

Examination of the ways the individual responds to the multiple digitalized-communication platforms in Japan as well as in the West, confirms that new technologies have opened up the scope for multiple identities to be enacted through what in Japan is termed *kyara-play*.

Chapter 4 Verbal thinking and visual thinking

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter we will focus on how language-use shapes the ways the subject thinks and perceives, and the bearing it has in Japan on the ways the subject references “the self” equivocally. Using the concept of *kyara-play*, it examines the mechanics through which the subject learns to perceive a certain meaning and value --- an affordance --- in the dynamics of the environment through dealing with a linguistic system whose exacting demands foster the *mitate-awareness*, creating a milieu which forms an integral and influential part of Japanese cultural identities.

Examining the nuts and bolts of the language itself allows us a glimpse into the fabric of the equivocal, which mediates the constant flow of performance between the subject and the technologically-mediated environment that Gibson’s ecological psychology and his affordance theory helped us to understand in the previous chapter. We have analyzed how the subject is influenced by the *mitate-awareness* in the medial processes of dealing with the intermediaries constituting the Japanese ecological condition, and how this particular awareness activates the possibility of the subject performatively defining what we call “circumselves,” via an enactment of *kyara-play* in order to attune with *seken*.

We also looked at the developments of Gibson’s theory of affordance by post-Gibsonians such as Hodges, Golonka and Reed. Their work helped us to see that the use of language constantly influences the subject’s detection of affordance, and integrates with multimodal perceptions. Recognizing the impact of language-use on the subject’s perceptions and actions, the act of *kyara-play* becomes a useful example to monitor the subject’s detection of affordance in the mediated environment, flexibly engaging with changes to circumstance by reading air. Tracing how the impact of technologies --- the use of multiple communication devices in multi-dimensional communication platforms --- opened up possibilities for the subject to explore the idea of circumselves, we also noted similar affirmations from individuals in the West. These observations have led us to confirm Gibson’s point of view that we all

have the same ability to perceive and act, yet find some differences between each other because our interactions with the intermediaries that constitute the particular spaces we live in, form our cultural identities and milieu throughout time. The detection of affordance, in this sense, is very much affected by circumstantial factors, and so we further noted that the outcome of the subject's perception of affordance fluctuates between the positive and the negative.

To deepen our understanding of the fact that *kyara-play* is perceived as a versatile communication mode affording the subject the ability to manoeuvre within *seken*, this chapter aims to demonstrate that the subject gains the *mitate-awareness* through dealing with the Japanese linguistic system. The Japanese language, we can say, functions as a trans-medium that activates equivocal meanings and multiple perspectives, configuring a space and possibly shifting the boundaries between us and others. It allows the subject to map him or herself, declaring one's stand position within social norms. It can also function as an instigator of "cosplay" (Tanaka, Y. 2011/2012; Lima, 2013; Ōta, M. 2009), enabling language to be a costume one can put on, transforming oneself temporarily into a chosen *kyara*. We will see how this versatility of linguistic performance ultimately invites the subject to think of "the self" as an equivocal and fluid entity. This living process of learning and managing an entire complex language system, with the notorious primacy it grants to the equivocal both in terms of the way the language actually works and to the situational interpretations that underpin its use, educates and motivates the Japanese subject to perceive in the milieu such a clear link to affordance and performativity, that *kyara-play* becomes almost inevitable.

To emphasize these connectivities, this chapter will examine how Gibson's ecological psychology and affordance theory can help us to understand that visual thinking influences --- and is influenced by --- verbal thinking. These are integral to the formation of a linguistic system, the vehicle for the *mitate-awareness* which underpins and helps to create a milieu. The impact of language-use, in terms of its multi-functional performative qualities, needs to be looked at, not from a perspective constricting language to simply functioning as a method of defining meanings or values, but to identifying what kinds of awareness language-use requires of the subject.

Advocating an ecological psychology necessitates analyzing linguistic

functions from a pragmatic point of view, as its aim is to trace the non-representational aspect of linguistic functions (Golonka, 2015; Hodges, 2007/2009; Hodges & Fowler, 2010). That is to say, we are attempting to examine how the use of language ignites a shift or alters one's perception of a subject matter, rather than how the meanings of words change, simply inviting interpretational correctness or not. The approach of an ecological psychology would aim to identify what kinds of awareness the subject gains through the use of language to develop a certain propensity --- what Gibson calls a "subjective determinant tendency" (Gibson, 1966) --- which makes one susceptible to detecting a particular affordance.

Firstly, this chapter will look into the cultural significance of the concept of *mitate*, which is applied in conjunction with the use of Japanese language. The mix of creative activities exploring the concept of *mitate* explore it precisely because the multiple interpretations of a subject matter lead to a flexible shift of perception. These disciplines can summon that certain awareness because it is nurtured through dealing with the Japanese language. We will see this trope becoming more prominent when the subject deals with technologies. Computer systems in particular have a limited capacity to handle the Japanese linguistic system with its complex configurations. We find that the subject is constantly forced into negotiating with its limitations, detecting new affordances to work with the system.

Noting the fact that language is nevertheless primarily considered to function as a meaning definer, we will also look into Richard Rorty's pragmatic approach to language functioning relationally, generating multiple-interpretations, and offering consequent freedoms of choice (Rorty, 1979/1991). However, the application of Rorty's proposition to analyze the interactive relationship between the Japanese linguistic system and the subject, perhaps falls somewhat short. We realize that it does not fully comprehend the nature of these interactivities, in particular how language-use affects both the subject and the milieu. We need, therefore, to avoid taking the risk of allowing Rorty's understanding of language to become a normative, because it aligns with and re-enforces his view of language as having a fixed use as a meaning-definer, without any potentiality to change or be transformed.

Language-use is not just about circumscribed repetition, but in fact its use initiates a spatial configuration of relations --- through activities, processes,

transformations and possibilities (Reed, 1996; Thibault, 2005). Examination of the multi-functional, performative qualities of the Japanese linguistic system allows us to see its influence on the subject ultimately instigating an enactment of *kyara-play*. We can extend an understanding of the dynamic interactivities transforming the use of language, by taking into account how language behaves as an active agent that can shape performativity as well as bear influence --- as Gibson insists --- on one's perceptions from an ecological point of view (Hodges, 2007/2009; Hodges & Fowler, 2010). Language-use, we should remember, is an intermediary whose impact needs to be analyzed in relation to the integration of the other intermediaries, which form cultural identities (Golonka, 2015; Costall, 1995/2012).

To underpin these propositions, this chapter therefore specifically focuses on five features of the Japanese linguistic system itself which all encompass the notion of "the self" as being an equivocal entity, fluidly but temporarily performed in relation to circumstances. As a fundamental premise it acknowledges that the Japanese linguistic system requires the subject to be aware of multiple choices and interpretations to sustain flexibility as one's perceptions alter according to circumstances, and propagates the understanding that the Japanese language gains further complexity because it performs as image.

We will first look into how the availability of multiple-definitions of personal pronouns encourages the speaker and the listener to define their spatio-temporal relationship to reflect the specificities of a communication space. We will see how the "I" is transformed by choices which encourage the performativity of circumselves. Put simply, the equivocal "I" acts as a catalyst for *kyara-play*, stressing the importance of recognizing how language-use ties in with the concept of *seken*, constantly reinforcing the idea that "the self" needs to be circumstantially defined.

Secondly, we will see how language functions, so-to-speak, as a costume one can wear, transforming oneself into the desired *kyara*. Noting that a speech-style can create a bond connecting individuals thereby affirming a sense of community (speech community), we acknowledge that speaking a dialect can also function similarly (Tanaka, Y. 2012). We then move onto the sociolinguist, Kinsui Satoshi's work on role-language used by characters appearing in fiction (i.e. manga/anime characters) (Kinsui, 2003). This helps us

to understand that a certain speech style or a catchphrase can index or tag the *kyara* one plays. Examinations of several case studies taken from the mass media --- cinema, TV programmes, newspapers --- enable us to see that role-language reflects its milieu. Interestingly, we will also see that role-language is used ubiquitously, from the dubbing of foreign films to news broadcasting. Perhaps featuring celebrities allowed their “*kyara-dachi*,” we can grasp how role-language is pushed to emphasise the accessibility of one’s personality.

Thirdly, we demonstrate that language allows the subject to charter the self, making explicit to others one’s stand position in relation to *ba*. We will look into the intricate use of formal language (*keigo*),⁵⁷ which allows the subject to either exhibit or wrap intentions. The latter --- particularly --- creating an obscurity that, like reading air, demands both the speaker’s and the listener’s intuition of clues to signpost and justify the nature of the communication.

Fourthly, it offers some examples of how the availability of a large number of homonyms has re-enforced the *mitate*-awareness throughout history, which is explored in various forms of wordplay. We will see how this particular focus of perceiving an image as “what-it-does-not-seem-to-be” is widely applied in Japanese visual culture up till the present time. For example, we can cite the ways “*furigana*” --- an aid for reading *kanji* --- is commonly used for inventing a new pronunciation of the existing *kanji*. This makes us realize that language itself also plays multiple *kyara* by indexing it with multiple pronunciations. Additionally, technology-based communication increasingly complicates the ways the subject handles the Japanese linguistic system. The subject constantly attempts to adapt to the mediated environment, yet nevertheless, a detected new affordance might be perceived either positively or negatively according to circumstances.

Lastly, it demonstrates how the complex Japanese writing system (JWS) --- the three notation types of *kanji*, *hiragana* and *katakana*, and *rōmaji*, the alphabet script --- can enable a single word to convey fluid changes of impression and visual image. We examine whether the use of multimodal texts in the West functions similarly to the ways the JWS mixed-and-matched script

⁵⁷ The Japanese language has several types of honorific language (*keigo*), *sonkeigo* (literally translated as respect language), *kenjōgo* (humble language), and *teineigo* (polite language) (Ōishi, H. 1975; Kindaichi, 1988).

styles do, that are constantly experimented with by the mass media. We will then look into the transformation method, "*ryakuji*," which morphs certain Japanese words into a shortened or simplified form. Despite *ryakuji* often being depicted in this way, people appear to be capable of identifying which word it is, and this consequently raises the question of how the subject is able to process obscure information gauged from an imperfectly depicted word, and additionally make sense of it. Gibson (1966/1986) offers an invaluable clue on this when he tells us that the subject perceives an object by scanning its invariants --- detecting its affordances --- not by scrutinizing its details. We can confirm Gibson's claim simply, when we remember how we recognize a friend from a distance without seeing his or her face.

We may speculate consequently that the Japanese language user is constantly trained to cope with these complex scanning activities, as well as handling its equivocal functions, homonyms and multiply-scriptable JWS. We can conclude therefore, that language is a versatile trans-medium, changing its function according to which context it is in. Dealing with these acute activities, the subject generates an approach to flexibly adaptable circumselves by playing *kyara*.

4.2 Mitate-awareness induced via the use of language and technologies

Mitate, as one of the primary Japanese cultural concepts, demonstrates why we consider the subject to be so clearly influenced by the use of Japanese language. The present day use of the term *mitate* is derived directly from the traditional idea of it, but we first need to gauge how *mitate* has indeed been so influentially applied to a wide range of cultural activities for decades, from high art to public leisure. Referencing the inclination to both perceive language as image and visa versa, the linguists, Moriya Michiyo and Ikegami Yoshihiko, point out that its impact on Japanese language users even extends to elementary and junior high school students (Moriya & Ikegami, 2012).

We can acknowledge the influence of *mitate* throughout the most iconic forms of Japanese culture, from kabuki to "*haikai* (俳諧)," the tea ceremony to, most significantly, manga and its related productions (Yamaguchi & Takahashi, 1996; Isozaki, 1990; Okada, T. 1996). We can recognize here the repeated methodology of its use throughout. At its core the cultural value prescribed to

mitate exists in its attempts to shift or transform the subject's existing perception of a subject matter. We find, for example, that in the usage of "*mitateru*" --- the act of *mitate* --- that its meaning "to perceive A as B" (Kamen, 2017) defines a replacement whereby one thing can serve to illuminate the nature of another. This methodology, that defines the practical use of *mitate* constructions, aims to create a freshness or even a moment of enlightened perception by offering the fact that A and B are generally perceived as dissimilar kinds, but are being used to throw open the qualities of each that might otherwise be hidden (Hattori, 1975; B. Zhu, 2010; Mabuchi, 2005; Suzuki, Hiroyuki, 1996). Successful *mitate*, in this sense, is conceived to offer an exceptional and sometimes unconventionally drastic leap in sense (Hattori, 1975; Morioka, 1992), creating what we might call "burlesque" effects, and this "visual punning," "superimposition" or "allusion" (Hirano, Katsuya, 2014, p107) becomes an improvisatory expression which indeed echoes the ways of detecting affordance.

In the context of the tea ceremony, the subject might be encouraged to use *mitate* in order to explore a new possibility for making use of an object or realizing a new significance for it, that would not originally be included in the tea ceremony. In such ways the spirit of *mitate* is understood to express "an exceptional aesthetic awareness" (Omotesanke Fushin'an, n.d.).⁵⁸ Or, using the same composite elements of a well-known classic painting depicting a nobleman and a courtesan, *mitate* would allow the later replacement of those figures with --- let's say --- a tramp and a geisha in order to jog people's accepted assumptions. In short, an object in a certain given context can be allowed to represent something displaced from what it in fact is.⁵⁹ *Mitate* applications like these are still popular, and we will see the methodology experimented with by the two artists, Murakami and Aida in chapter six.

The well-established Japanese architect, Isozaki Arata, who is also the author of *Mitate no shuhō* [Mitate method] (1990), has offered insights into the core of *mitate*. Isozaki tries to indicate the kinds of cycles that *mitate*, as a

⁵⁸ See <http://www.omotesenke.jp/english/list6/list6-3/list6-3-1/>.

⁵⁹ In a contemporary example, as part of a promotional campaign for the Japanese Philharmonic Orchestra, the advertising director Ikeda Shinichi uses the *mitate* method to show a micro SD-card containing a piece of classical music to be used as a medical pill, which can be prescribed by a chemist for an individual's health condition or needs. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=7&v=DK55Nd3qUqQ.

trans-medium, can instigate as it travels through the number of transformational processes a single subject matter can conjure. He writes: “starting off from linguistic functions such as metaphor, a wordplay, we get the common consent (consensus) of a natural form (e.g. Fuji mountain), which is then abstracted (to a rising triangle-form), encoded (affix the lettering “八”), then transferred (to a fan-shape), and with the habit of nature-modeling, miniaturized (to an artificial hill), and finally symbolised (spreading out like an open fan)” (Isozaki, 1990, p.126).

Having noted the inspirational drive the equivocal functions of the Japanese language have had on the varied cultural activities that explore *mitate* applications, we also recognised the evolving propensity for the subject to detect affordance in its flexible shift of perception. We now need to scrutinize how a pragmatic approach to the language enables us to trace a non-representational aspect of its functions.

4.3 Language functions relationally: Non-representational language

Language-use can be considered as often formed and particularised to evoke the uniqueness of a group of people. People may even suggest that, having no equivalents in a foreign language, certain “untranslatable words” --- the German “*schnapsidee*,” Japanese “*wabi-sabi*,” Portuguese “*saudade*,” etc. (Robson, 2017) --- authenticate the cultural significance of a language. Observing these tropes, linguistic anthropologists or sociolinguists often claim that ideological filters dictate how people make use of language in the ways they do (Kroskrity, 1993/2004; Silverstein, 1979). Japanese linguist, Ishiguro Kei (2013), or the novelist, Roger Pulvers (2014), are also broadly in concordance with this conclusion, granting uniqueness consequently to the complexities of their linguistic system, which then automatically authenticates a Japaneseness (Sadanobu, 2011a; Shimizu, Y. 2000).

However, it is important to observe the historical facts behind the development of a language, in terms of analyzing its cultural significances. Saitō Takashi (2003), the sociolinguist and author of a million-seller book praising the Japanese language, appears to be simply proclaiming that the Japanese language mirrors the Japanese sensibility. However, it is misleading to plainly suggest that the Japanese tailor their language to suit their thinking sensibility

without recognizing certain historical factors that took a crucial part in its linguistic formation (Komori, Y. 2003; Segawa, 2012). The so-called “Japanese language boom” emerged in the beginning of the 21st century⁶⁰ and continued up to the present time. It is criticized for partaking in a blatant nationalism, and its regime has been observed to have connotations similar to *nihonjinron* (Matsushita, 2016; Segawa, 2012).

Putting such an ontological claim in perspective, we can refer to the linguist, Okimori Takuya (2014), who tells us that the Japanese imported *kanji* around the 5th century, having no previous form of written language. *Kanji* was then introduced with two reading choices: “*on’yomi*,” which is derived from the Chinese pronunciation, and “*kun’yomi*,” which is the indigenous Japanese reading, invented by the Japanese to allow additional meanings. Another linguist, Sasahara Hiroyuki (2014), draws our attention to the fact that whilst “*kun’yomi*” increased the meanings of *kanji*, many *kanji* pronunciations were simplified, and these factors caused the creation of a large number of homonyms --- multiple *kanji* having the same pronunciation.⁶¹ Without recognizing the validity of these historical facts, it is perhaps rather simplistic to state that the Japanese linguistic system simply mirrors Japanese sensibilities.

What we need, instead, is to scrutinize what kind of affordance is detected in the use of language, and how linguistic functions transform through use, especially in relation to technologies. Advocating that a reciprocal relationship between language and the subject is fundamentally universal, this chapter also offers examples of equivalent approaches to language-use found elsewhere in the West in order to appreciate their similarities and differences. These examinations will consequently help us register that when a linguistic system does perhaps not carry such an integrated equivocality or flexibility, the subject often attempts to identify a new affordance through an alternative linguistic function.

Arguing against ideology-driven language use, Richard Rorty (1991) expresses an anti-representationalist view on language, endorsing the

⁶⁰ It is commonly thought that the boom started from the sociolinguist Ōno Susumu’s *Nihongo renshūchyō* [Exercise book of Japanese language] (1999) (Matsushita, 2016).

⁶¹ Around the 9th century, *katakana* was developed as a simplified form of *kanji* as an aid for reading the “*kun’yomi*” of *kanji*. *Hiragana* was also developed as a “deformed” version of *kanji* around that time. *Katakana* started to be used for depicting words imported from abroad since around the 18th century.

pragmatic consequence of discourse and action. Concluding that language functions as “a toolbox,”⁶² Rorty claims that, in the context of social usage, language can be temporarily stabilized for practical purposes, but that it fundamentally functions relationally thereby preventing meaning from being objectively defined. His view seems to position language as a medium for “altering ourselves and our environment to suit our aspirations” (Rorty, 1991, p.81), placing its efficacy very much under the will of the subject. This one-way, toolbox approach to language, whilst sailing close to our concept of *kyara-play* as a shaping of affordance (aspirations), does not recognize the fact that language is one of the crucial intermediaries constituting our ecological conditions. Far from being a passive tool simply used and controlled by the subject, its use influences perception and works to form the fabric of the milieu. It is in this sense, very much an active participant in the interactivity of the subject and the environment as post-Gibsonians, Ed Baggs (2015), Reed (1996) and Paul Thibault (2005) proclaim. Language, they assert, can be best understood as “action,” simultaneously integrating with the ecological conditions.

Whilst inevitably acknowledging the contingency of language creating the dynamic and complex language-orientated character of culture, it is evident and equally inevitable that Rorty’s framework, examining the general use of primarily the English language, would not be entirely conducive to our understanding of the conduit between the Japanese language and the *mitate-awareness*, inviting the subject to detect a particular affordance as part of that complex matrix whereby the subject defines “the self.”

We can therefore say that the subject learns to identify a certain affordance in the processes of dealing with a linguistic system by coordinating multimodal perceptions (Hodges, 2007/2009; Hodges & Fowler, 2010). Recognizing that language, as an intermediary constituent of the mediated environment, develops a mutually interdependent relationship with the subject (Bickhard, 2007), the impact of its use should clearly not be restricted to the narrowing scope of phenomenologists --- including Rorty --- who hold that the subject is able to take control of language to make it “get us what we want” (Rorty, 1991,

⁶² Rorty writes that “language has a way of grabbing hold of causal forces and making them do what we want, altering ourselves and our environment to suit our aspirations” (Rorty, 1991, p.81).

p.68). His position does not take into account the ecological perspective we wish to maintain, which, as we have noted above, would show that language is not a passive communication tool, but actually carries performative, functional and dynamic qualities involving multi-dimensional factors: perception for example, and the notions of body and space.

This mutually interdependent relationship between the subject and the ecological conditions --- including language-use --- remains the same to all cultures (Bickhard, 2015; Gibson, 1986; Tomasello, 2005). This chapter, however, aims to show that the impact of language-use on the subject's perception is perhaps more clearly expressed when a language works in the specific ways that we find in Japanese. Just as meanings of words change over a period of time, new words are constantly invented by people, and the functions of language are progressively transformed through its use (Curzan, 2014; McKean, 2014).

Indeed, the Japanese linguistic system offers numerous examples that enable us to recognise this impact more clearly. It especially requires the subject to pay attention to the frequency of word and image links, and how certain linguistic functions --- like words with multiple meanings --- demand appropriate interpretation. In this context, Gibson is an invaluable guide helping us understand why the Japanese language can invite the subject to perceive a particular affordance through a fluid interaction with its equivocal nature, helping the language's performativity to evolve further (Hodges & Fowler, 2010; Lima, 2013; Spitzmüller, 2015).

Engagement with the equivocal functions embedded in the Japanese language creates an integrated and fluid relationship between language and image, inspiring the subject to unlock a self-equivocality by playing *kyara*. It is this dynamic --- the ways visual thinking is influenced by verbal thinking in Japan --- that integrates Gibson's relevance with this chapter, and gives us a perspective on Rorty's position on language as a toolbox in the service of, and controlled by, the subject.

Clearly recognizing the impact of language-use on perception as being paramount, Gibson tells us that if "perceptual identifying is not theoretically separable from verbal naming, then perceiving is perforce limited, as verbalizing is limited, and perception is to that extent distorted" (Gibson, 1966, p.281). To explain his concept of "subjective determinant tendency," Gibson

takes the example of a group of physically interactive people who, using the same language, develop a mutual inclination to perceive an image in a certain way. Confirming his belief that verbal thinking shapes visual thinking (Gibson, 1966, pp.280-282), this example helps us to unpack how the complexities of the Japanese language influence the subject's perception and the activities subsequently enacted.

We maintain the proposition that the application of Gibson's affordance to language-use is crucial, because it helps us trace how language-use incorporates multimodal perceptions, whereby affordance becomes relationally detected. Extending Gibson's concept further, this chapter aims to demonstrate how language performs as a trans-medium, functioning as a vehicle to promote a certain awareness, and inviting the subject to detect a particular affordance in the mediated environment. Consequently, we will see the flexible ways language and image integrate and interchange, both of them being equivocal yet influencing not only the subject's perception but also shaping the milieu of the mediated environment.

The contention that language-use engages and activates according to circumstances is a factor neglected by some academics working in this field of study --- the American philosopher Donald Davidson (1978/1984) for example. His analysis primarily focuses on what language is or is not capable of doing, allowing it a kind of solitary omnipotence to do its job. Relational factors like ecological conditions --- crucial to our argument --- are taken as secondary or even non-significant contributors, as is the fact that language-use --- as we have already accepted --- encourages the subject to develop a propensity to think, perceive and behave in certain ways, and as an intermediary, helps form the mediated environment that interacts with the subject.

When Davidson allows that a "metaphor is the dreamwork of language" (Davidson, 1978, p.31), he could be in some sense touching on the equivocal qualities we may consider to be at the heart of metaphor, but certainly at the heart of the Japanese linguistic system. Would we indeed write or speak a metaphor if our regular language-use offered a continual stream open to variable interpretation? It is true that Davidson is discussing metaphor and whether or not it has special meanings, whereas we are primarily discussing the fundamental disciplines of Japanese language and its relation to the equivocal. But he continues, telling us that "whether or not metaphor depends on new or

extended meanings, it certainly depends in some way on the original meanings; an adequate account of metaphor must allow that the primary or original meanings of words remain active in their metaphorical setting" (Davidson, 1978, p.34). Interestingly enough, he does not consider either where new or extended meanings may come from, nor indeed what the phrase "original meanings" may indeed mean. Interpretation comes from somewhere after all, and "original meanings" surely point to the existence of other factors shaping how language moves, and alters our use of it.⁶³

We need, therefore, to grasp the performative qualities of language-use, whereby the meanings of words are often defined relationally. In this condition of subjective interpretation, the corollary of this suggests there is no way of defining "true" or "objective" meaning, and instead take the use of language --- as Rorty tells us --- as a toolbox for the subject to apply. This dynamic of multiple-interpretations is a ubiquitous feature of the Japanese language. We can trace its scope for promoting changes within language-use, creating ambivalences which afford the space for flexibilities and maneuverings to alter and add to existing language performativity. How we "read a language," depends on where we are coming from, and it is this interactive quality that fires our debate about its use.

Davidson (1978) does in fact point out that the act of interpretation is itself a work of the imagination, and refers as an example to Wittgenstein's notorious duck-rabbit drawing. He informs us that when the drawing is shown to an individual, he or she may be able to see the duck or the rabbit or indeed both in the image. Davidson tries to convince us that we can all imagine a drawing that can be seen both as a duck and as a rabbit. But not everyone would be able to imagine such an image or such a drawing because --- as we are recognising with Gibson's argument throughout this chapter --- the subject's imagination falls under the influence of particular language-use and a particular milieu, which are both ingrained into one's thinking sensibility (Gibson, 1971).

⁶³ Deleuze and Guattari point out that language is not a static or insular element, but both its function and meaning are transformed via communication. They state: "if language always seems to presuppose itself, if we cannot assign it a nonlinguistic point of departure, it is because language does not operate between something seen [or felt] and something said, but always goes from saying to saying. [...] It is in this sense that language is the transmission of the word as order-word, not the communication of a sign as information" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp.76-77).

How the subject responds to language and image is consequently different according to one's cultural milieu.

We have to acknowledge that a metaphor --- as both a function of language and as a visual stimulant --- will not necessarily generate the same responses from everyone. Davidson (1984) adds to the quagmire of meaning with his "holistic" approach, which seems to grant meaning to communication in a compositional way, in which a word's meaning can only be acknowledged as a part of the whole. Davidson, however, did not take his compositional --- indeed his holistic --- understandings of language that degree further to include the interactivities that underscore the subject and the milieu. In Japanese language-use, the context --- as a wider definition of composition --- is paramount, providing meaning and implication in the way we can think of metaphor. The complex mutuality of verbal-visual influences that we are witnessing via Gibson's argument stands in opposition to any take on language as an entity of itself and fundamentally subject-controlled.

As we have observed, Gibson calls the process of dealing with the stimulus of an image the "subjective determinant tendency." He suggests that, neurologically-speaking, we can all perceive an image in the same way, but nevertheless sometimes interpret and respond to its stimulus differently. We do this because we help ourselves in our interpretive quest by inventing an additional context (meaning) in the processes of making sense of it (Gibson, 1966).

In this way, our interpretation of an image is not a discovery of the truth contained in it, as though having been defined, it becomes a fixed entity. Our interpretation instead, is a reflection of our awareness or propensity, which emerges through a constant interactivity with the intermediaries, of which language-use is perhaps one of the most influential elements. The Japanese, we might find ourselves thinking, seem in many ways less concerned with definition or meaning-as-truth in Japanese language-use, but more concerned with how it carries possibilities they can then interpret.

4.4 Language performs differently according to circumstances

Questions of how and why language-use plays an important role for the identification of "the self" brings all kinds of issues surrounding language under

a microscope. We specifically focus on how language performs as a reflection of a certain thinking sensibility, underscoring the ways the subject identifies "the self."

Looking into Rorty's pragmatic analysis of language as a toolbox strictly at the service of the subject, we find a connection here when he discusses the "I" or "the self" in Western languages having no objective truth, but necessitating a relational interpretation according to the specifics of the communication taking place. We can acknowledge here the circumstance defining the equivocal that lies in much of Japanese communications (Kimura, B. 1970; Moriya, 2013). Rorty thinks that such multiple interpretations drive the contingency of language, and --- in his application of pluralism --- of "the self" and community, but its benefit is that it ultimately generates a freedom of linguistic interpretation which in turn generates a corresponding freedom in social interactivity. This is crucial because he is ostensibly recognising here something of the mutuality between language as part of the environment and the subject that underpins our argument. Language, we have argued, is not the toolbox of the subject but a mutual reflector, the two-way mirror of communication.

Indeed, an analysis of how Japanese language offers multiple choices of personal pronouns helps us follow more clearly how these complex processes of use in fact shape the subject's perception of "the self." Whilst Rorty can touch on the relational in language, the actual functioning of the Japanese linguistic system indicates that the subject has to handle the availabilities of multiple choices with an appropriateness specifically in relation to the circumstances. The interactivity within the mutually interdependent relationship between the subject and language constantly challenges what language-use is capable of performing. It involves the medial processes that transform what language may mean as well as how it functions. As a consequence, its impact on the subject does not have a standard outcome: all language nurtures and requires a certain awareness and of course integrates with other intermediaries, shaping pluralistic and individual identities (Rivers & Houghton, 2013).

Examining the issues around first person pronouns we see that the Japanese language offers more than fifty words addressing "the self." Everyone throughout daily life has to, or is encouraged to learn how to make the correct choice of pronoun according to the factors of gender, age,

occupation, socio-cultural trends, and the psychological distance between the speaker and the listener. We can agree with the linguist, Makino Seiichi (2018), who argues that whilst the English language mainly uses the single first person pronoun "I," and supports the idea of the subject being fixed, the centre, as-it-were, of the world around him or her, the Japanese language offers multiple definitions of "I," nourishing perhaps a different self-awareness. With the subject being relationally defined in multiple ways, the subject has to recognize identity issues more acutely. The Japanese psychologist, Kimura Bin (1972), we must point out however, only sees that the use of language reveals or mirrors a psychological distance between the speaker and the listener, but does not take into account the impact of the communication space.

Several academics --- Lebra and Suzuki Takao for example --- draw our attention to these variable pronoun and speech-style factors that Japanese people use as a means of communicating relationally (Bachnik, 1992a; Lebra, 1986; Suzuki, T. 1986). For further reference we see that the sociolinguist, Yonekawa Akihiko (1996a/2006), claims that the use of person pronouns reveals how the individual relationally defines "the self" in multiple ways, whilst the sociologist, Hamaguchi (1985/2003), simply equates the availability of multiple personal pronoun options as proof of the Japanese having a complex vision about interpersonal relationships.⁶⁴

These kinds of examples underpin a central problem for those commentators who note that self-referencing as circumselves assumes in "the Japanese" a one-way cause-and-effect transaction, whereby it becomes the people who decide to make a complex use of the Japanese language in order to play circumselves, rather than view the process as a reciprocal activity between the milieu (including the language) and the subject. Failing to recognise that language per se is not equipped to define objective reality, they remain unable to articulate how the use of language influences and is influenced by the subject.

Analysis of Japanese language-use, following the agenda of subject-as-controller, typically attempts to convince us that the skill with which

⁶⁴ Hamaguchi claims that language-use reveals what the consciousness of self is "for a contextual model": the use of the Japanese language then illustrates that "selfless is not constant like the ego but denotes a fluid concept which changed through time and situations according to interpersonal relationships" (Hamaguchi, 1985, p.302).

Japanese people handle the multiple choices of first, second and third person pronouns to make an appropriate circumstantial choice in addressing the speaker and the listener, acts as proof for what they call Japanese-ness (Kubozono, 2002; Ishiguro, K. 2013). Commentaries like this primarily focus on an analysis from an ideological point of view of how the individual responds to the psychological need to handle the multiple options of --- in this case --- personal pronouns. However, we should acknowledge how these multiple choices can activate an awareness of fluidity in identity issues, which underpins the aspiration to play *kyara*. It is important to note that the Japanese may be considered "collectivistic," but the linguistic system affords the subject to relationally define multiple-selves (Hasegawa & Hirose, 2005), and in so doing enables the subject to detect affordance in what the environment itself affords.

The sociolinguist, Nakamura Momoko (2007), suggests we think of language as a resource enabling us to create "the self." Language is simply taken as a resource in the pragmatic sense; there is no judgment-call ruling on what is the right or wrong use or meaning of language since it is perceived as a living thing, reflecting the milieu of a specific period. Nakamura tells us that recently a group of young girls drew attention from the media for addressing themselves by the male-specific personal pronoun "*boku*," and were criticized for this seemingly incorrect use of language. This occurrence attracted various comments, from the sociolinguist, Nishida Takumasa (2012), who speculated about popular, female manga character inspiration, to Nakamura Momoko (2007), whose claims of empowerment, refer to Butler's work on issues of gender as indoctrinated by mass media and typified by the use of certain words, etc. The girls' particular choice of the personal pronoun "*boku*" was perhaps a marker igniting a shift, a flexibility in gender norms, a non-categorical self.

Language historian, Anne Curzan (2014), argues that "a word in real use" changes over a period of time. We occasionally bump into a newly-created word in our everyday life --- "LOL," "tweet," for example --- so if there is no suitable word to express a certain feeling or subject matter (Koenig, 2016), the individual may detect a new affordance, inventing a new form.

4.5 Language-use defines the speaker's *kyara*- play

The availability of multiple personal pronouns in Japanese makes explicit the subject's inclination to explore the idea of circumselves, whilst English, for example, offers "I" as the only choice. Nevertheless, it is important to note that as sociolinguists Kobayashi Sūichi (2005) and Inamura Sumiyo (2009) argue, other language speakers have alternative ways of indicating that the subject defines multiple-selves circumstantially differently. The subject speaking English might make a specific choice of verb, perhaps placing a certain emphasis on intonation.

The use of speech-styles, adopted by a group of people to define and identify their mutual belonging, also allows the subject to define the self in unique ways, presenting oneself as a member of a certain "speech community."⁶⁵

In Japan this can also take on an extra dimension when individuals change their speech styles in order to ensure their belonging to *seken*, the concept of which constantly demands that the subject be aware of the negotiations implicit in the language itself, as it affords the possibility of defining "the self" in relation to *ba*. It is from this consequent and necessary flexibility that the essential means for performing role-play in the re-defining of belonging is sustained. Specific language-use functions then as a signpost to indicate which *kyara* one is playing in a given situation. This offers an explanation for why we can argue that the act of playing *kyara* takes a didactic approach, which is to say that performing a *kyara* primarily demonstrates the fact that one wishes to engage with the situational circumstance to ensure one's belonging (i.e. via *seken*) by engaging and speaking the language in certain ways. How well a *kyara* is played can in fact be seen as a secondary issue.

With all its concomitant equivocal factors, the Japanese language lends itself to being readily extrapolated into "cos-playing," "role-playing," "translating," and "dubbing," each of which, allowing full rein to the web of interpretation and choice, can offer a temporary distillation of a *kyara* of self. Several Japanese sociolinguists such as Tanaka Yukari (2011/2012), Kinsui

⁶⁵ In Japan, *wakamonogo* is commonly used by the youth, and *giarugo* is spoken amongst those between their teens and thirty, who might typically spend time around Shibuya ward, Tokyo City (Yonekawa, 1996a). We can similarly think of the London cockney and the use of rhyming slang, or indeed the English aristocracy, or the African American Ebonics speakers, emphasising their African roots.

(2003), and Nakamura Momoko (2007/2013), pick up on these interesting phenomena and attempt to explore how the use of the language reveals something of Japanese cultural identities.

In this context, we can acknowledge the fact that a change of social climate also affects the ways the subject perceives a certain type of language. In Japan up until the 1970's, with the government pursuing a standard language policy, speaking a dialect was generally perceived negatively, revealing too much of one's roots. However, as Tanaka Yukari (2011) points out, since the mid 1990's the mass media began to feature a positive image for dialect speakers thus turning public opinion. It became apparent via very successful TV dramas like *Ama chan* (2013),⁶⁶ that speaking a fake dialect became a trendy matter of choice whereby anyone could "learn to speak" a dialect without actually having any personal background involved in it. Tanaka coined the term "dialect cosplay" to capture the gist of this flexible choice of speech styles as a means of playing a character by speaking and --- so to say --- wearing a fake-dialect as a costume, and comments that "the concept of 'dialect cosplay' functions as a communication tool which oils smooth communication (...) so it is important to fully commit oneself to pretend to be someone else when one speaks a fake dialect" (Tanaka, Y. 2011).

We can see through this thread, that dialect cosplay and its implicit allowance of identity-pretense is morphing gradually into a clear linguistic-kyara-play kinship, something that the work of Kinsui (2003) hints at. Kinsui, observing how a subject can be attracted to certain speech-styles that can define a character's role, coined the term "role-language" (*yakuwarigo*),⁶⁷ and traced its presence, linking certain speech styles to particular characters and images, down through the history of the Japanese linguistic system.⁶⁸ His main aim seems to be to convince us that role-language can be a distinctive enough indicator for the subject to take note of and then remember how a

⁶⁶ Kudō, Kankurō, (2013). *Ama chan*. Tokyo: NHK.

⁶⁷ Kinsui points out that role-language has two unique features: first, the majority who grew up in Japan can easily identify a character type from role-language. And secondly, despite the fact that role-language has no practical use in people's daily life, many Japanese gain enough knowledge to identify a character type signified by the role-language used. Its widespread popularity is also indicated by the amount of academic work attempting to analyze its impact on people's perception (Moreno & McCafferty, 2011; Fukushima, 2012; Nishida, T. 2010).

⁶⁸ Kinsui tells us that the historical root of *yakuwarigo* currently used for signifying an eccentric old man's character dates back to the Edo period.

particular character speaks (Teshigawara & Kinsui, 2011). He wants it to set a style in a functional, packaged sense, rather than using language as a malleable expresser of the subject in situ.

Noting that those fictional characters are recognized by their signature looks and speech styles, we can see that there is a close link between role-language and kyara-play, since the individual aims to signpost a played kyara by using certain catchphrases. We could argue consequently, that the reason the subject may express interest in role-language is because it demonstrates how language-use can indeed function as a signpost to indicate that the subject is playing kyara, as well as which kyara is in fact being played in its --- the subject's --- reality. Essentially it is the possible fluidity of language that is important here. Role-language is an indicator affording freedoms of expression that we could say then offer freedoms to "the self."

4.6 Double translation: Message into image, image into kyara

The idea that a certain language-use is indicative of a subject playing kyara is extrapolated further in the mass media's various attitudes to translating foreign speech. Typically, in the case of Japan, dubbing a foreign actor's speech on film customarily involves role-language use, and the sometimes extreme juxtaposing of diametrically opposite cultures and languages invite the viewer to apply the *mitate*-awareness as a means of dealing with the experience. One has to try to see something as-not-what-it-seems in order to give quality to the moment, but more importantly Japanese dubbing involves the idea of establishing cliché-as-caricature as a means of re-enforcing the fiction to achieve a genre specific verisimilitude.

We can surmise that dubbing a foreign actors' speech in a foreign film involves double-translations. Traditionally, a foreign actor's speech is translated into role-language in order to emphasize the very fact that one does not speak Japanese when acting the role (Tori, n.d.b). In other words, the foreign actor's non-Japanese speech is first translated into standard Japanese --- its basic meaning is digested --- and then it is interpreted into a Japanese role-language in order to caricature the role that the actor plays. The viewer then learns to match the actor's look (image) to his or her voice (context) --- both equivocal elements it must be noted.

Those who assume that a certain film is appreciated because it delineates a reminiscent image of reality, may puzzle when they learn from Carolina Moreno and Kevin McCafferty (2011) that the viewer in general prefers to see a fictional character using a non-standard speech-style, rather than their daily speech-style. We realize from Tori Miki's observation why it is so uncommon for a dubbed film to portray a character speaking a straightforward, standardized Japanese (Tori, n.d. a/b). Yet we should note that language fundamentally functions similarly, as such a tendency is also found elsewhere --- in Spanish or English-speaking countries, for example (Fukushima, 2012; Moreno & McCafferty, 2011; Palma, 2012).

Perhaps the reason we prefer to see a foreign actor speaking role-language is because the cinema succeeds in conjuring up an impression of reality by achieving a genre-specific verisimilitude. As Steve Neale (1980)⁶⁹ points out, we are conscious of watching fiction no matter how good a film is. Therefore, a fictional character speaking a daily-used speech style could consequently trigger the uncanny valley symptom --- too close to reality to set off an empathetic feeling towards it as soon as we realize it is fiction.

Facing this array of paradoxes, we need to return to Gibson who points us in the right direction, telling us that no matter how real an image appears to be, we will never be fooled by its artificially created seeming-reality because the image is "framed" (Gibson, 1971, pp.32-33). Reality, Gibson is reminding us, has no frame. Even seeing a digital photograph immaculately capturing a detailed image, we are still able to spot that it is artificial.

Realizing the fact that translated and dubbed versions of cultural identities are filtered via someone's perceptions (the translator's or the dub-actor's), and shaped into their prototype or icon, the subject would find another layer to the realisation that things can be re-contextualized and indeed re-formed. We can apply Gibson's affordance theory to perceive our translator as a third-party

⁶⁹ Steve Neale makes a useful remark on the distinctions between "reality" and "verisimilitude": "reality" as a concept from literary history which underlines the factual in fiction, whereas "verisimilitude" refers to what the dominant culture generally accepts as credible, suitable and/or proper. Two forms of verisimilitude can be distinguished: "cultural verisimilitude," in which a character-play becomes increasingly real and which refers to the discourse(s) of society, and "generic verisimilitude," so allowing for the "considerable play with fantasy inside the bounds of generic credibility --- i.e. singing about your problems in the musical" (Neale, 1980, p.360).

filter, directing how to characterize a foreigner's identity and speech by nominating a particular use of language, and a similar logic can also be applied to the subject acting as a director and choosing which *kyara* to play.

Interestingly, even the Japanese mass media applies the idea of circumselves by using role-language as a tool for the modification or reduction of character portrayal, when, for example, translating a featured foreigner's or celebrity's comments (Komatsu, 2013; Kumayasu, 2000; Mizumoto & Fukumori, 2007; Nishida, T. 2010/2012; Shimizu, Y. 2002). Giving us a clear example of the relational issues surrounding identity, and the central totem of the "I" in particular that Japanese language-use can illuminate so acutely (Ōta, M. 2009, Takatori 2014).⁷⁰ The sociolinguist researcher, Ōta Makie, offers useful case studies, examining either dubbed or telop versions of 760 sentences which are taken from 166 interviews with Olympic athletics' stars done by the Japanese national broadcaster (NHK). She finds out that role-language is specifically used for "*kyara-dachi* athletes" who are seen as superstars, competitive divas or protagonists. Interestingly, the directors making these programmes admitted to Ōta that they specifically used a role-language style of translation because it functions as an iconic symbol, palpably gauging each athlete's personality for the viewer.

Ōta refers to Kinsui (2003/2007), who suggests that after World War Two, a popular hero appearing in manga was typically a brave, honest, self-made, rational and clever male who addressed himself as "*boku*." But Kinsui also tells us that shortly after, a popular male hero figure became a man with physical strength, who, being reckless, called himself "*ore*." For Ōta, this socio-cultural background is the X-factor, influencing people working in mass media to use "*ore*" for Usain Bolt --- the Jamaican sprinter who has won six Olympic gold medals. When Bolt said "I am the No. 1," the "I" was generally translated into "*ore*," as he indeed fits into the prototype hero figure, symbolizing a machismo masculinity. Whilst seeing Bolt as a superhero might not be so readily expressed in English, the language only offering "I" to address the self, it is

⁷⁰ The linguist, Takatori Yuki (2014), tells us how the Japanese media interpret and translate foreign athletes' interviews in discriminatory ways. She has revealed the use of certain post-positional particles (or auxiliary verbs called *tenioha*, which form the endings of Japanese words) as a means of stereotypically portraying foreign athletes in parallel links to manga or anime characters.

nevertheless possible to see the mass media in the West describing him as a “superhero” or “superman” (Morrison, 2012; Staniforth, 2016).

What is interesting here, is that the notion of “the self” is also defined differently according to context. Ōta substantiates this view, telling us that Bolt’s comments taken from different occasions required translations of his use of “I” by different first person pronouns. When chatting at a private occasion for example, his “I” was translated to “*boku*,” but when musing about his future on the other hand, it was interpreted as “*watashi*,” the usual, non-gender or value-biased form for “I.” We should make clear that the translator's use of personal pronouns was a reflection of the ways a Japanese individual in everyday life may address him or herself differently according to the prevailing circumstances. In this respect, it needs to be understood that the particular use of language enables the subject to attune with circumstances from a phenomenological point of view.

4.7.1 Mapping “the self” in *seken*’s spatial complex

As a barometer of the distance between the speaker and the listener in relation to circumstances, the use of language can be considered to serve the function of “mapping the self.” That is to say, when one pronounces the word “I,” implicit within its meanings are references to where “I” am, and when and to whom “I” am talking (Nakamura, Y. 1982; Shibata, M. 2010). Indeed, “the worlds of all languages are ordered and categorized according to their distance --- spatial, temporal, biological, and metaphorical --- from the first person, the speaker”(Becker & Oka, 1974). Nevertheless, Alton Becker and Gusti Oka acknowledge that the Japanese language has particularly complex and fundamental ways of defining the relationship between the speaker and the addressee based on degrees of social distance, as well as deference and respect.

The issue of “the self” and the circumstance has drawn the attention of commentators such as John Fischer (1964) or Austin Berque (1992), who write about the various ways that the Japanese linguistic system allows the subject to omit self-reference. Fischer, for example, points out that certain individuals will address others only by what he calls “zero form” --- the omission of self-reference --- nor use a second person pronoun or the addressee’s name,

whilst others may regularly use multiple linguistic forms in designating "self" and "addressee" (Fischer, J. 1964, pp.117-122).

Berque, on the other hand, draws our attention to the fact that the Japanese language often omits the subject, making the listener constantly speculate about who or what a speaker may actually be referring to (Berque, 1992). He tells us that "a statement like *samui*" ("I am cold" or "it is cold") where, at least on a grammatical level, it is not clear whether it is the subject or the environment which is or feels cold," and questions whether "the environment (or the predicate) is subjectivized, or (...) on the contrary, the subject is (...) "environmentalized or contextualized" (Berque, 1992, p.96). He also sees that such a tendency is manifested as the "subjectification of nature" in the Japanese *haiku* (a specific form of poetry), pointing out that *haiku* often omit the subject who would be observing nature, so giving the impression that nature itself depicts its image unobserved by the poet. He claims that the linguistic system affords to de-centralize the subject, promoting the subject to have a relative position which lends importance to the notion of a place.

However, as the theatre director and professor of communication-design, Hirata Oriza (2012/2013) points out, it is misleading to simply state that the Japanese language indicates the subject as being "non-egocentric," just because it sometimes allows the subject in a sentence-structure to be omitted. Hirata draws our attention to the fact that the Japanese linguistic system has certain particles and auxiliary verbs which allow the speaker's intention to be signposted without using the first person pronoun. He also points out that English, on the other hand, does not have words functioning in exactly the same way, but its system offers an alternative way of making clear the speaker's intention --- placing a certain emphasis on intonation, word order, etc. (Inoue & Hirata, 2003, pp.48-57). It is too simplistic, therefore, to claim that the Japanese linguistic system mirrors the Japanese thinking-sensibility: it is mandatory that we acknowledge that subject has to learn how to use language (Yoshimasu, G. & Yoshimasu, M. 1982).

Furthermore, as sociolinguists Kobayashi Shūichi (2005) and Inamura (2009) argue, regardless of whether the subject omits self-reference or not, the perspective focusing the issue of self here points to the temporary state of *ba*. The particular use of language indicates that in a certain circumstance, the notion of "the space" is more important than the subject per se, as the subject

is being circumselves, a reflector of the mediated environment. This issue of space becomes more complex when considering factors of distance, both physical and ethical.

Whilst the use of person pronouns and *keigo* are the common denominators indicating how the subject assesses the socio-psychological distance between the speaker and the listener, we can see that these central mediators in the Japanese linguistic system constantly reinforce the idea that the subject exists as a part of *seken*, an imagined phenomenological entity.

Daily verbal protocols exist that are commonly used for demonstrating the fact that one's thinking is in line with *seken* (Abe, 1995; Kōkami 2009). However, since such complex language-use rules are intuited and developed as common knowledge gained from everyday experiences, these foundations inevitably cause speculation about how-to-say or what-to-do in order to engage with circumstances through the continual observation of others and by reading air. This speculative and sensitized use of language reinforces the concept of *seken* as a continuous influence on the individual unavoidably playing a double role. *Seken's* power play concerns both what others might think of one's use of language and performance, whilst also acting as a representative of *seken* to judge the same of others' behaviour. The idea of juggling one's perception about others as a realisation of the equivocal parallels the concept of *seken* as an overriding sensor for social harmony and "the correct thing to do." The necessary performance of requisite roles in order to adapt to circumstances, and make life work out as seamlessly as it can, keys in a demand for fluid *kyara*-play. Largely governed and indoctrinated by mass media, circumstantial criteria are constantly factored into communication and confirm the etiquette necessary for social well-being. We can say that "*seken* rules."

Consequently, we should accept as fact that the standard knowledge of Japanese language-use is shared amongst people via the concept of *seken*, which itself is supported by the idea that the individual represents "the self" differently according to circumstances. Clearly, certain aspects of language-use function as indicators of the specificities of a circumstance, and the ways the individual speaks and behaves are influenced by how the distinction between *uchi* and *soto*, and this leads one to decide which behavioural code --- "*omote*" (front, public face) or "*ura*" (back, private face) --- to show. *Omote* and *ura* are used for defining the subject's representation and one's responses to each

other circumstantially, and are again picked up by certain commentators who claim that the complexity of issues defining *omote* and *ura* emblemize Japanese sensibilities.

The Japanese psychiatrist, Doi Takeo, claims that *omote* (the face) may not express *ura* (the mind) because they are in a dyadic relationship --- as the old proverb says, "Devil-mask, Buddha-mind" (*kimen bushin*) written in *kanji* --- the "front" visual image (face) may hide the mind from the spectator. He points out that the two sides form a single entity which itself indicates what to show or hide. In other words, when the Japanese look at *omote*, they see not only *omote* but also *ura* through *omote* (Doi, Takeo, 1985, p.12). Such rhetoric is sometimes applied in essentialist thinking, with its need to convince us that it is the Japanese who have the sensibilities to make use of language, not the other way around. Nevertheless, it is thought-provoking to see that these paired words are in fact used as a vehicle for describing how the subject changes his or her perception according to circumstances. As we will see in the next section, many *kanji* come with multiple pronunciation options, yet what is more interesting to note is that in certain circumstances a new pronunciation can also be invented. The fact that a Japanese language-user occasionally faces the paradoxical situation of recognizing a *kanji* but being unsure how to pronounce it, might reverberate with the dyadic *omote-ura* relationship preached by the old proverb above.

4.7.2 Keigo: Positioning the self

Like many other languages, Japanese has an honorific form called *keigo* (Ide, Carnes, Ogino, & Kawasaki, 2005), which is also subject to equivocal functions in its circumstantial affordance flexibilities. In general, the subject uses *keigo* in order to demonstrate his or her respect to the listener (Coulmas, 2005; Sakamoto & Nishikata, 2009). However, on some occasions the subject can also use it to indicatively express a psychological distance from the listener or convey even the unfavourable (Nakamura, M. 2013). By using *keigo* deliberately, one can consequently let the other party know that one is aware of what is going on underneath the exchange of polite gestures without fracturing protocols. In this way, *keigo* functions as a trans-mediator that invites multiple interpretations and obscures the speaker's intentions.

Joy Hendry describes this function as a type of “wrapping” similar to using language as “a kind of armour, to wrap up and protect the nerves which may be lurking underneath, and (...) to put some deflecting distance between oneself and a threatening world which one may encounter ‘out there’” (Hendry, 1995, p.62). And to clarify her point, Hendry chooses Tanizaki Junichiro, the well-known Japanese novelist, who, stating that the use of language mirrors the Japanese way of thinking,⁷¹ concludes that the use of keigo reveals a culturally distinctive Japanese-ness.

Hendry writes that “the variability of the relationship between the said and the unsaid, illustrating that forms of linguistic politeness may here be interpreted as one example of a ‘wrapping’ principle” (Hendry, 2017, p.273). Thinking *keigo* is culturally distinctive amongst other forms of indirect communication that one can find in Japan, Hendry writes that the Japanese “are also described as using polite behaviour to protect themselves from the harshness of direct exchanges by appropriately wrapping their *honne* (true mind)” (Hendry, 2017, p.282). Hendry's idea of language as protective wrapping is striking, but it needs to be reinstated to allow its dynamic multi-dimensional factors more prominence than simply wrapping the mind. Language is indeed used as a tool for gauging or mapping the self in the world, but these multiple interpretations of keigo-use reinforce how *kyara*-play can be seen as a method to deflect, protect and indeed hide “the self.” One may think of it allows the subject to let others know one’s stand position, and indicatively shows a distance between them.

Interestingly, a public consensus of participants aged from 15 to 60, organized by the Asahi Shinbun (2014), tells us that across all generations, it is young people who almost totally recognize the importance of *keigo*-use, helping them to gauge and articulate a distance between the speaker and the listener. Whilst formal language-use is generally conceived as a social skill that the individual learns through working experiences, the result of the consensus indicates that the Japanese youth, who perhaps may not even have work experiences, recognize how language functions as a vital tool for positioning “the self” in relation to circumstances.

⁷¹ Using paper as a metaphor, Tanizaki advises potential writers to avoid being too clear: “we Japanese scorn the bald fact, [...] we consider it good form to keep a thin sheet of paper between the fact or the object and the words that give expression to it” (Tanizaki, 1955, p.15).

Although there are marginal principles on how to use *keigo* shared amongst people, there is no definite rule for its use (Coulmas, 2005). “*Baito-keigo*” however, is a recently noted use. Conceived primarily for dealing with certain ambivalent situations effectively, it enables the individual to play an expected role, being spoken amongst young people who work as part-time staff at family restaurants and convenient stores. Instructed to use *baito-keigo* by their employers who provide job manuals specifying politeness, it nevertheless triggers a certain amount of public criticism because *baito-keigo* contains corrupted usages of *keigo* (Horasawa & Oka, 2006; Liu, 2011; Yonekawa, 1996b).

What is also interesting to note here, is that these issues surrounding *baito-keigo* have revealed that individuals find it increasingly troublesome to justify *keigo* at work, because demographic changes have led to the deconstruction of the pre-existing hierarchical system based on seniority. Facing an ambivalent situation where the individual may be unsure whether to use *keigo* to, for example, one’s younger senior or older subordinate, we can readily find people who are perplexed by these situations, and ask for online help. Some express unease using *keigo* to a junior (Kuwano, 2018; Yonekawa, 2006); others see it as a case-by-case issue (From A, 2018; Mizuki, 2019; Suzuki, R, 2017). However, there are those who recognize that language can indeed be an ultimate tool, and feel that *keigo* should be used with and between everyone, thereby offering protection from *seken*-critiques ubiquitously prying into everyday life sequences (From A, 2016; ppp_com, 2013).

4.8 A proliferation of homonyms re-enforcing the mitate-awareness

Language forms a particular environment in which the subject is encouraged to detect certain affordances. Examining the Japanese language, we see that use of a large number of homonyms has combined with other factors to encourage a particular thinking --- the mitate-awareness. It enable the perception of an image as what-it-does-not-seem-to-be, an attitude as well as a conceptual proposition which --- as we have discussed earlier --- has helped form Japanese cultural identities throughout history. Dealing with homonyms confirms the idea that in some situations the realisation of multiple meanings can only become clear when an auditory cue is translated into a written form.

Terry Joyce, Bor Hodošček and Nishina Kikuko all point to the complex dealings the Japanese have with the high incidence of homophones in the language (Joyce, Hodošček & Nishina, 2012). Indeed, there are a substantial number of Japanese words which are phonologically identical, but when written down their difference becomes instantly visible (Asahi Shinbun Kōetsu Sentā, 2018; Gendai Gengo Kenkyūkai, 1994; Wada, M. 2005). To look at just one example here, according to the established Japanese dictionary *Kōjien*, the word “*koushyō*” has forty-eight homonyms, and depending upon its written form could mean an artisan, a special factory, a public document, a beautiful smile, a bite scar... etc. (Nihon Kanji Kentei Kyōkai, n.d.; Shinmura, 2008).

This gets more complicated: Japanese has a strong tendency to be a head-final language (i.e. the subject is addressed at the end of a sentence), in contrast to English which is a head-initial language, the subject being defined in the beginning of a sentence (Hirata, 2015). Indeed, the individual has to constantly juggle with the possible interpretations of a sentence (especially when it is spoken), and in some situations, when a sentence comes to the end and finally defines its subject, the listener may have to completely scrap the initial interpretation.⁷²

One can easily appreciate then how a language that is constantly involved in the act of mix-and-matching mental images can demonstrate Gibson’s understanding of how verbal thinking influences visual thinking, referencing his “subjective determinant tendency,” with its implicit the *mitate*-awareness. The inspiration to shift, adapt and alter what a word may mean enhances the fluid interchange between a two-dimensional image and a three-dimensional object that a word signifies. In Gibsonian terms the subject is encouraged to perceive a particular affordance (i.e. equivocal language performativity) in the Japanese linguistic environment, and we could use as a prominent and literary example of this the case of the Japanese poets inventing *kakekotoba* (meaning “the

⁷² One can readily find dozens of examples of how Japanese people have been perplexed by wrong interpretations due to the availability of homonyms and the “head-final” Japanese language sentence structure. For example, “*kono niūsu wa aru seijika no oshyoku jiken nitsuite hōdō shite iru*” [this news tells us about a politician’s corruption/food voucher] “*denshya ga futsū dakara kuruma de ikimashyō*” [the train is interrupted/or is a common or (too) normal vehicle, so let’s go by a car].

rhetoric of using paronomasia") and using the effect of homonyms to shift their imagination via its *mitate* displacements (Moriya, 2013).

As Nagashima Heiyō (2006) and Nanette Gottlieb (2010a) point out, there is the long history of wordplay in Japan, from the puns in the 8th century collection of Japanese verse called the *Manyōshū* up to more recent literature. Enjoying the abundant availability of homonyms in the Japanese language, Japanese poetry applies a *mitate*, *kakekotoba* makes unexpected associations between two words having the same pronunciation. The Japanese poet Ono no Komachi, for example, in one of her poems paired two words “降る” (fall) and “経る”(pass, go through) having the same pronunciation “*furu*,” and from this point of departure was encouraged to inspire the reader’s imagination (Moriya, 2013).

But the creative pleasure using homonyms can also find it made more evident in the collaborative poetry-making known as “*renga*” (collaborative poetry) which is one of the most important literary arts in pre-modern Japan.⁷³ This is a form of creativity --- maybe primarily an entertainment --- which involves a circle of authors working together. Taking the content of the previously made up poem, *renga* encourages the next poet to compete with the previous poet’s innovations and imagination via the application of *mitate*, and endeavors in this way to spin fruitful and invigorating creations continuously.

Tracing such a significant influence as the *mitate*-awareness throughout Japanese socio-cultural contexts has encouraged us to recognize how manga has also been enriched by its influence. The subject becomes attuned to seeing movement depicted in a two-dimensional abstract form as a consequence of what has been learnt through dealing with the Japanese ecological conditions. It is natural therefore that perceptions have been affected by this, and in many ways we can assume that reading manga constantly requires the subject to detect a particular affordance as a means of making sense. These detected affordances no doubt mirror and reveal how the subject has learnt to perceive *relative* meanings or values in the mediated environment.

It is also vital to note that handling homonyms gets further complicated when dealing with technologies, especially in relation to the use of the

⁷³ One of the most famous masters of *renga* is Matsuo Bashō.

computer system. As we briefly noted, each *kanji* generally has two readings: “*on’yomi*” and “*kun’yomi*,” and due to the ways *kanji* was developed, a Japanese language-user is required to deal with a number of homonyms.⁷⁴ To put this into perspective, one can note that there are approximately one hundred different versions of *kanji* pronounced as “*be*,” which is commonly used for the surname “*Watanabe*” (Sasahara, 2013).⁷⁵ Complications do not stop here, since the Japanese family-register law permits the application of “*ateji*” ---the invention of new pronunciations used with the existing *kanji*.⁷⁶

These factors accumulate to create a rather extraordinary situation whereby the subject is unable to input the *kanji* used for describing certain names of companies, locations and individuals because the standard computer system only offers the inputting of “*jōyō kanji*” (the issuing of a list of *kanji* for daily use) (Yasuoka, 2006b). Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the use of non-*jōyō kanji*, which is no longer in regular use, is considered to afford a distinguished identity --- even though one would have the problem of being unable to type it into a standard computer.

We can also see that companies even play different *kyara* by “wearing” different notation types according to circumstances. The well-established drug store chain, “*Matsumoto Kiyoshi*,” still uses non-*jōyō kanji*, but this company also uses its *katakana* notation for certain occasions, such as advertising products to the public or online (Joyce & Matsumoto, 2016).

Dealing with dozens of homonyms necessitates constantly checking whether one has made the correct word choice when one types it on a computer. It is a well-known fact that the computer conversion system often

⁷⁴ It is believed that the Japanese language probably has the largest number of homonyms in the world today (Takasugi, n.d.). The Japanese linguist, Kindaichi Haruhiko (1988), mentions that the Japanese language has only 112 beats (Japanese pronunciation is counted in beats (in English, mora) in comparison with the Chinese language which has 411 beats, and the English language --- working in syllables ---- with a huge number of beats, approximating eighty thousand. Despite the fact that the Japanese language has the least number of beats amongst the three, the established Japanese language dictionary lists over 750,000 words in comparison to the Oxford English Dictionary which contains 600,000 words.

⁷⁵ In China, the individual is only permitted to use one *kanji* for the surname and first name, and its pronunciation has to be *on’yomi*. This leads to more than 270,000 individuals, for example, having the same surname and first name Zhang Wei (張偉) (Sasahara, 2013).

⁷⁶ This might also explain why in recent years an increased number of parents have invented so-called “*kirakira* names,” whose pronunciation it is impossible to guess (Fukuda, M. 2012; Shūkan Gendai, 2014).

brings up the wrong choices of a word because there are dozens of words having the same pronunciation but different meanings (Kallen & Dhonnacha, 2010). Sunakawa Chiho (2008) offers the example that typing the text “sankyu” brings up conversion options of “サンキュー” (thank you), “産休” (maternal leave), “三級” (level three), and “三球” (three balls).

It is clearly easy to acknowledge that the technologically-mediated environment offers affordances that the contemporary Japanese may be very willing to accept in regard to this fluidity of perception, necessitated by this aspect of language-use, and the sheer complexity of the Japanese linguistic system can force the subject to constantly check whether one’s use is indeed correct or not. We might think this is similar to the ways English grammar can be checked on a computer system, but it is important to consider the fact that even for the simple single pronunciation input “a” (a:), a Japanese language programme can bring up somewhat more than thirty options --- in addition to various types of *kanji*, *hiragana* and *katakana*.

It is therefore easy to imagine how the vast number of homonym availability complicates conversion processes even further. One may identify a positive affordance in this perhaps, because a misconversion can create the subliminal effect of *mitate* application, creating an effect of punning by activating an unexpected shift to one’s perception. The elementary school teacher, Kitakawa Makoto, for example, confirms this positive affordance, and cheerfully talks about hilarious examples presented by his pupils, who offer “unimaginable” and shocking conversions done by the computer system (Nishimura, 2014; Akizuki, 2009). Perhaps, it creates a similar effect to bilingual puns found in German newspapers, that Sebastian Knospe (2015) has investigated. On the other hand, some individuals perceived a negative affordance after the embarrassment of accidentally sending emails with incorrectly converted words to their clients (Wada, R. 2017). Obviously, dealing with technologies creates more fun for some but trouble for others: affordance can be perceived positively or negatively or both, as Gibson says.

In the next section, we will see how this logic is extensively used to create a certain impression by the choice of Japanese writing system (JWS) one makes. Our grasp of the equivocal at the centre of these seeming linguistic sleights of hand can then more readily register them as one more layer of influence and inspiration dependent on the subject’s skilled honing of the *mitate*-awareness,

opening the doors to the perception of the self as equivocal, able then to perform the act of kyara-play.

4.9 Multimodal text and JWS, and Gibson's visual field

We can argue that Japanese language-use, linguistic attitudes that transcend the didactic intent of orthographic reforms with its four JWS, homonyms and circumstantial demands, promotes a particular awareness which allows the possibility for the subject to imagine and realise that "the self" can indeed also be equivocal.

One of the very real complexities of the Japanese language is in this writing system because JWS can act as a means of re-energizing a word to give it a freshness in the minds of people. Fundamentally, JWS consists of three notation systems: *hiragana* (Japanese syllabary, used for Japanese language words), *kanji* (Chinese syllabary, used for Japanese language words) and *katakana* (Japanese syllabary, specifically used for the transcription of foreign language words into Japanese). In addition to these three forms, the use of *rōmaji* (the English alphabet) has become popular to depict the abbreviation of certain words, and so the individual has to increasingly deal with four different writing systems in everyday life sequences.

The complexities of dealing with multiply scripted language can be appreciated when we learn that whilst Koreans use the Hangeul language and *kanji* but generally use Hangeul in fictional literature, the Chinese only use *kanji*, and the rest of Indo-European languages mainly use a single notation altered from alphabets (Kitahara, 2012). The impact of dealing with the intricacies of a mixed-script use of JWS is recognized by commentators from various professions --- academics, novelists, broadcast writers, journalists, advertisement designers, etc. (Honda, K. 2015; Kataoka. A. n.d.; Sobue, 2010). The linguist, Satō Eisaku, rightly points out that "With Japanese, various scripts provide numerous communicative and expressive functions which allow users to adapt new concepts, creatively represent their ideas and critically convey their viewpoints" (Satō, E 2018, p.313). We could think of multiply scriptable JWS offering the subject the possibility of experimenting with language as a creative tool, affording an inventiveness stemming from the impression qualities each JWS carries, factors eagerly picked up on by the mass media.

There are dozens of commentaries analyzing these JWS qualities (Cinra Henshūbu, 2010), but there still remains no usage regulation. Certain sociolinguists like Narita Tetsuo or Sakakibara Hiroyuki, make this point of view explicit, telling us that JWS has no strict rule for choosing the correct notation for a word, and consequently the majority of appropriate notations, which change from time to time, are defined by their common use (Maeda, Y. 2014; Narita & Sakakibara, 2004; Kubozono, 2002). Analyzing whether any particular notation-type creates a definite impression of hardness or softness with a word, the two linguists, Satō Eisaku (2015) and Ishiguro Kei (2015), argue that there is no stabilized reception of JWS. Everything has been dealt with case-by-case, and they suggest that the act of switching notation itself carries the core value. In this respect, we can argue again that a pragmatic approach can be best suited for analyzing its impact.

A change of notation style is typically introduced when the mass media attempts to change in relation to the accepted perceptions about the existing image a word can signify. What is important here, is to recognize the fact that a change of impression can be made by switching the notation system of a word, although its pronunciation and fundamental meaning remains the same. Uncertain use of a word can clearly result in uncertain meanings and unpredictable interpretations, and it is reasonable to suggest that Japanese people have developed a propensity to “look at” a written word, not only in order to grasp its meaning, but importantly also to perceive it as an image they can sense a certain feeling about.

This would suggest that a word written by the *hiragana*, *kanji*, *katakana* or *rōmaji* notation referring to the same subject matter but presented by a different notation type, would offer different additional impressions that can be vital in certain circumstances. We can of course imagine immediately that advertising, for example, would benefit hugely from this: the subliminal --- after all --- having long been one of its weapons.⁷⁷ The mass media in fact circulates its authority on such issues and lays down the standard understanding of what the specific notation of a word could or should mean, and encourages the individual to mimic its directives. In particular, *katakana* notation is extensively

⁷⁷ The word *kētai* (a mobile phone), used to be written by *kanji* but is now commonly written by *katakana* notation, giving the impression of a mobile phone as a contemporary, sleek, global gadget (Okugakiuchi, 2010).

used for infusing an international feeling to a subject matter (Kay, 1995; Rebuck, 2002; Stanlaw, 2004). For example, when Japanese sportsmen --- like the baseball players Suzuki Ichirō or Matsui Hideki --- received international attention and recognition, their names began to be spelt in *katakana* (Narita & Sakakibara, 2004) as though to both grant status and award merit.

Even Japanese corporations are sensitive about how a change of notation can offer a different impression and many of them have converted their name notation from *kanji* or *hiragana* to *katakana* or *rōmaji* in order to present themselves more as international entities (Hayashi, H. 2000/2006).⁷⁸

A change of notation for a word from, for example, *kanji* to *katakana* can create a new dimension in the way people respond to it. But why this should happen and why these effects are so substantial are phenomena that commentators cannot consolidate, because the impression of a word depicted in a certain written style could change in relation to the milieu. This is a precise reason why dozens of research reports and articles analyzing this “uncanny factor” behind the changes of notation type, seem to evade definitive analysis (Narita & Sakakibara, 2004; Mochizuki, 2012; Ishiwata, 1989; Amanuma, 1989). Perhaps, in certain cases, one may be able to offer some plausible explanations (e.g. the change of gender-specified personal pronouns after World War Two, for example (Nakamura, M. 2007)) but it is very difficult to identify a golden rule that unpacks every change.

Novelists are clearly very sensitive to these issues. Kuroda Natsuko and Shimizu Yoshinori,⁷⁹ for example, think that the use of *hiragana* invites the reader to be intuitive and freely imagine the meaning of a word, whereas they see *kanji* as imposing refined or restricted meanings (Makino, S. 2018). On the

⁷⁸ When we realize the fact that the majority of Japanese company names used to be written by *kanji* notation before 1945, the current market situation has made a rather large shift. In 2004, around 40 percent of the major Japanese company names listed in the First Section of the Tokyo Stock Exchange were written by *katakana*, and around 80 percent of companies listed in the Market of the high-growth and emerging stocks (i.e. TSE Mothers and OSE Hercules) used names written by *katakana* (Hayashi, H. 2006). There are even dozens of companies which originally had their name noted by *kanji* but later changed over to *katakana* (e.g. Nissan, Toyota, Casio, Yamaha, etc.) (Hayashi, H. 2006).

⁷⁹ The novelist, Shimizu (2002), pinpoints this when telling us that the word *onna*, meaning “a woman,” could be visually imagined differently depending upon how it is notated. He tells us that this is why Japanese novelists may carefully choose the notation type of a word. Similarly, Ishiguro Kei (2013) points out that the word *otoko*, meaning “a man,” gives different impression according to its notation type.

other hand, Akizuki Kōtarō (2009) points out that words, which would normally be written in *hiragana* or *kanji* are increasingly written in *katakana* in order to give a fresh look. Indeed, *katakana* is often used for giving an international look and flavour (Katakanago Kenkyūkaigi, 2016; Kashino & Nakamura, 2013; Kobayashi, T. 1999; Nakamura, Y. 2001). We find, for example, that the use of *katakana* has steadily increased over the last couple of decades, and statistical evidence also offers a clear indication of its extensive use nowadays (Hosokawa, 2015; Kashino & Nakamura, 2013; Horio & Norimatsu, 2005; Rebeck, 2002). Individuals' responses to these indications lead us to think that it is precisely the change itself that is the key factor, as it allows a fluidity of movement to the osmotic way the language functions and combines with its environment.

The linguistic anthropologist James Stanlaw (2004), who specializes in "wasei eigo" (Japanese English, English language used in contemporary Japanese society), sees that the distinction between English and Japanese English becomes blurred. He suggests that Japanese English is fairly domesticated, and that teenagers often do not realize how many words they use have an English origin. Kallen Jeffrey and Esther Dhonnacha (2010) also support Stanlaw's view, pointing out that English is extensively adapted to Japanese use.

Interestingly, Hannah Kunert (2017) argues that *hiragana* is an equally effective typeface for changing the existing notion of a subject matter, to "soften" its impression. What is more important to note, however, is that there is now so much attentive use of *katakana* infusing an international glamour or mystique, that *hiragana* can be used as an effective way of self-orientalizing, creating a salient, sophisticatedly subtle beauty with a good-old Japanese feel. Dozens of commercial products and advertising campaigns make effective, mitate-awareness use of *hiragana* (Moronaga, 2017; Raksul, n.d.) , taking advantage of the flexible perceptual shifts in what multiply-scripted JWS affords.

4.10.1 Typography, multimodal text, and JWS

One may speculate about whether the multi-choice of JWS has a similar impact to the Western application of typography. However, it is important to note that whilst typography is a form of typesetting which allows the shapes and forms of

words to be aesthetically experimented with, the multi-choice of JWS --- which also allows typographical choice --- enhances a dual perspective of language, which can both direct a definition and meaning as well as signify itself as an image in its own right.

Nevertheless, it is useful to look into the various empirical studies conducted by Eva Brumberger, Charles Kostelnick, Roger Parker and Cyril Burt, as they demonstrate how the “personality” of typefaces and texts were acknowledged by the public (Brumberger, 2003; Kostelnick, 1990; Parker, 2006; Burt, 1959). We can readily recognize that making use of various font styles can indeed create certain impressions --- comics probably in all languages use this approach continually (Huang & Archer, 2014).⁸⁰ Jeffrey Kallen and Esther Dhonnacha, for example, show that the Irish tourist board makes effective use of a Celtic typography to authenticate its advertisements (Kallen & Dhonnacha, 2010). Indeed, recognizing the connotative power of a typeface to carry more meaning than the words it depicts (Leeuwen, 2005; Walker, 2000), many companies attempt to represent their business and product by carefully choosing their font type (Doyle & Bottomley, 2009). It becomes a common sense factor that choosing (or not choosing) a suitable typeface can severely affect a consumer’s perception of an actual product (Schorn, Sperdin & Ploner, 2014).

Kress Gunther and Theo van Leeuwen (2006) argue that multimodal texts containing both image and written words formulate a “visual identity,” so that individuals *read* multimodal texts using a “visual grammar” to interpret the meanings of, and connections between, the various elements represented --- font types, text layout, etc. Whilst Carey Jewitt, Johnnes Bezemer and Kay O’Halloran (2016) claim that perceptions of the multimodal text demand a discourse analysis, Jürgen Spitzmüller (2012) draws our attention to the fact that these presumed graphic ideologies of “visual grammar” may only partially be a collective knowledge, yet remain permanently subject to negotiation. Language, we can agree, is a living medium having no definite, fixed formula guaranteed.

4.10.2 Unintelligable words have meaning

⁸⁰ Yamane Kazuma (1986) analyzes how young girls develop *hentai-shyōjyo moji* (transformed young girl’s notation type) to give a cute impression.

It is worthwhile noting that those semiologists analyzing the effect of multimodal texts appear to think that the meanings of a word enables the word to function like a pictogram, offering a narrative (Wetzel, 2010) as well as a language to support the creation of an aesthetically appealing image in multimodal text. Multiple scripts of JWS, on the other hand, tend to primarily aim at shifting the existing perception of a subject matter. Unrecognized words, whose meanings are not known to the public, can thereby create a positive effect because the unspecified image of the words can express a special feeling of foreignness.

Mix-scripted JWS often creates an ambivalent situation whereby the subject partially understands the meaning of the written words, but may nevertheless be unfamiliar with certain of the depicted *kanji* or alphabets. It is a stylistic approach often used by the mass media, and relies specifically upon the subject's imagination to make sense with the visual information as a total picture. In this way, the words' unfamiliar looks can even be seen as attractive. As Samuel Hayakawa (1978) claims, the individual can be constantly guessing what an unidentifiable subject matter or message is, through --- for instance --- the maze of missed words during a conversation, yet by analyzing it in relation to circumstances and one's experiences, one is generally able to identify and understand what is being meant.

Fujioka Wakao, the advertising director of the hugely successful Japanese Rail campaign entitled "Discover Japan" (1976-1976), believed that using *katakana* in their advertising campaign was a successful way to refresh the attitude that the Japanese viewed their own country with (Fujioka & Arai, 2011; Kuwamoto, 2013; Hayashi, M. 2007). Fujioka points out that, although the majority of Japanese did not know what the English word "discover" actually meant, they intuited that the foreign look of the word itself in addition to the *katakana* notation signified something new, unexplainable and inviting. The fact that the campaign title, "Discover Japan," was heavily criticized for signifying the Westernization/Americanization of the Japan Rail company re-enforced how much *katakana* notation invigorated and influenced people's perceptions not only of its meaning --- as Marilyn Ivy (1988) attests --- but primarily simply because of its looks.⁸¹

⁸¹ Ivy argues that the use of *katakana* encourages the exoticizing of the country (Ivy, 1988).

We can see from this discussion, with its numerous examples, that a constant juggling of suitable notation systems, and the identification of the correct written form for homonyms for example, reinforce the idea that the Japanese language remains fundamentally equivocal and its function --- to define meaning but equally to give an impression --- changes flexibly in relation to circumstances.

4.11.1 Morphologic effects of JWS

With the constant conversion activities carried out in the use of JWS, it can be argued that the subject can take an unrecognized word as a catalyst for the imagination rather than as a block to one's attention.

Unusual orthography use can also be found in the names of products or businesses elsewhere (E. Davies, 1987; Renner, 2015), and unusual spelling, letterforms or punctuation are used diacritically, aiming to envisage an exotic brand image or purvey an international appeal (Blommaert, 2013; Dickinson, 2015; Jaworski, 2015). We can think of the American ice-cream brand "Häagen-Dazs," or the graphic play of words used in the "FCUK" logo of the UK clothing retailer, French Connection, as examples.

Orthographic representation and variation within the Japanese writing system are also noted (Joyce, Hodošček, & Nishina, 2012). Terry Joyce and Masuda Hisashi offer various examples of orthographic variation which encourage us to realize how frequently the Japanese language-user has to deal with mixed scripts, and learn to use the imagination throughout everyday life experiences (Joyce & Masuda, 2016).⁸² We can further argue that this constant use of the imagination to comprehend information in these ways, would invariably foster the *mitate*-awareness and the reading of air that underpin the *circumself* variability of *kyara*-play.

The English language can be appreciated for carrying a global identity in certain countries such as Finland and Japan (Mitsutomi, 2013), but its use attracts further complications when artfully mixed-and-matched with JWS (Tranter, 2008; J. Hogan, 2010). Stanlaw (2004) and Robert Mckenzie (2008) both point out that the mass media often manipulates multiply-scriptable JWS,

⁸² "Onions" can be written in five ways: 玉ねぎ、タマネギ、たまねぎ、玉葱、玉ネギ.

encouraging the individual to juggle with the possible interpretations of a Japanese-English not necessarily meaning the same as the original English would, being altered to suit its domestic use. Being surrounded by advertising posters, shops, and commercial products which mix unfamiliar characters, the subject inevitably has to participate in a guessing game, constantly speculating how to make sense with what Jürgen Spitzmüller (2015) calls the “linguistic landscape.”

As the sociolinguist Kitahara Yasuo (2008) and the novelist Roger Pulvers (2014) demonstrate, *rōmaji* is increasingly used for company names and for the abbreviation of words. Its use is not only seen as convenient, but also conceived as creating a smart look. Furthermore, being used for a wordplay, its use enhances a sense of community as the subject can create codes understood only amongst friends.⁸³

Looking at the inventive use of English in Japanese-English, Stanlaw claims that English signs are not simply imitations of the West, but “represent a highly creative use of visual language, both as a linguistic and artistic form of communication” (Stanlaw, 2004, p.145). Interestingly, Stanlaw closely observes the multiple ways the Japanese word, *gohan* (rice) is depicted: in *kanji* (御飯), *hiragana* (ごはん), and *katakana* (ゴハン) or (ライス), yet in announcing “heuristic tendencies rather than any fast rules,” he also realizes that there is no cogent usage of JWS.

Another dimension complicating JWS is the extended use of “*furigana*” (pronunciation directives), explained by Wilkerson Kyōko and Wilkerson Douglas (2000) with a wide range of examples, demonstrating how a writer makes a conscious decision about the pronunciation of words.⁸⁴

The understanding of the look of a word cannot however automatically fix its meaning. This is also reinforced by the availability of a Japanese linguistic system called *ateji* (meaning ‘a phonetic equivalent’), which allows the subject to invent a substitute character for a personal need. We find this occurring more frequently nowadays in Japan in various socio-cultural contexts --- with

⁸³ The ways a word is shortened can be noted in the inventive mixed-use of JWS: “KY” (*Kūki ga Yomenai*, meaning “unable to read air”), “3M” (*Maji de Mō Muri* whose three M’s mean “honestly, it is impossible”) or “JK” (*Jyoshi Kōsei*, a high school girl).

⁸⁴ The kanji (女) (woman) can be read as “onna” alone, and “jo” or “nyo” when combined with another character, as in 女性 “josei” (female) and 女人 “nyonin” (woman) (Wilkerson & Wilkerson, 2000, p.247).

commercial products, location names, pop-songs, literature, and even with the naming of children, when the parents want to create a new phonetic reading of an existing word (Okada, M. 2012; Itō, H. 2015). *Furigana* in fact plays a vital part in introducing *ateji*. In examples that illustrate how the application of *mitate* creates a shocking effect, shifting one's perceptions, we can witness the use of *furigana* and *ateji* in written song lyrics that appear outrageously different from the song's actually sung language. (Dhits, n.d.; Ukita, 2014).⁸⁵

4.11.2 The issue of anamorphism and word identification

All the ambiguous, yet clearly validated changes of impression created by the interchangeable depiction of words demands the subject to pay close attention to the actual way a word looks. We can understand this encouraging the idea that the visual impression of a word can, in certain instances, be considered as important as its meaning, and in certain other instances --- as we have just seen in the "Discover Japan" example --- even overshadow its existing meaning. As a consequence of this, it becomes important to give credibility to the notion that the daily use of the Japanese language requires the subject to train the eye to recognise form relating to meaning differently than is required with Western languages. The components of a particular word's written character can indicate approaches to the logic of meaning, making the visual evidence both a training for the eye and a means of forming and identifying meaning, and as such, the complexity of the "picture" of a word is immediately apparent. We could say that the Japanese are required to "read the air" or scan the invariants of written language, just as they are required to do situationally of its use elsewhere. With such a complexity of registering what is, from what might be, the issues of *kyara*-play as a fundamental in the positioning of fluid identities, and the *mitate*-awareness as a means of absorbing their requirements, become vital tools for daily life.

⁸⁵ *Ateji* is typically inconsistent and has an eclectic feel. For example, the standard pronunciation of "時代" is "*jidai*," meaning "an era," but its new pronunciation is "*toki*," which means "a time." "運命" is pronounced "*unmei*" and means "destiny" but has an invented pronunciation "*sadame*." "毒薬" is pronounced "*dokuyaku*" but its new, given pronunciation is "*poizun*," written in *katakana*.

To clarify this point further, Satō Eisaku's *Mienai moji to mieru moji* [Visible words and invisible words] (2013), offers us numerous examples that demonstrate how many Japanese words are relationally identified by the ways they look --- by each components' compositional balance, or by their form or shape, governed by, for example, different typefaces. We can consequently allow ourselves the assumption that Japanese people are accustomed to the idea and habit of judging a word by its looks (Satō, E. 2011/2013/2015).

Figure 2, for example, shows how a single word can be perceived as multiple words with various meanings: "kuchi" (meaning "a mouth" in *kanji* notation), "ro" (*katakana* notation of "ro"), "ni" (*hiragana* notation of "ni"). To further add to this complexity, when our perception of a word's background is shifted to white as opposed to black, it can even be perceived as "kai" (meaning "a time" in *kanji* notation) (Satō, E. 2013, p.140).

Figure 2. (Satō, E. 2013, p.140)

Extraordinarily, and adding yet another layer to the theme of equivocality in the Japanese language, since there is no strict rule governing how a word should actually be depicted in any of the notation forms, the subject is required to "look at" which word is being referenced by mix-and-match possible options, expedited no doubt through intuition, in order to identify a most suitable choice whenever and wherever.

Furthermore, the existence of advanced technology also influences the visual representation of words in direct and interesting ways. Due to the limited number of pixels available on a display screen, certain *kanji* with an over-complicated form are necessarily converted into a simplified form so that they can be actually used and shown to viewers.⁸⁶ To solve the problem of

⁸⁶ Such a way of simplifying *kanji* by keeping an outline frame and omitting its contents, is not only applied by computer systems but also used elsewhere. The Japanese highway system, for example, uses some location names depicted by *kanji* in simplified forms (Naganuma, 2015).

depicting such *kanji*, Japanese computer programme designers have decided to work with the outline and omit the substance of the script, because they believe that such a simplification will still enable “the individual to recognize which *kanji* is depicted” as “people generally recognize *kanji* by its ‘look’ not by scrutinizing its every component” (Nagamura, 2015).

To the question of how it is possible to identify which word is written, one may speculate that correct stroke order may render a *kanji* or a *katakana* correctly recognizable. However, things are not that straightforward. We know, for example, that computer programmers struggle to develop a handwritten language recognition software to meet the demand from a business industry which endeavours to control information by digital data, switching from paper. Although many attempts were made, the existing handwritten recognition system still relies upon the human eye to check that words are in fact accurately recognized.⁸⁷

The ways the subject sees and recognizes an image, and understands its meaning, is a skill learnt from everyday life experience. As the distinguished font designer, Satō Keinosuke (1959) comments, each business sector tends to use a certain typeface to complement the nature of their business. Satō, for example, points out that banks generally use the *Minchō* or Gothic typeface in order to conjure up a dignified, reliable authority, and of course the mass media mediates such information widely enough for people to identify the wordage.

Gibson’s understanding of the fact that we learn to identify an object by scanning its invariants (i.e. perceiving affordance) through everyday experiences (Gibson, 1986, p.139), helps us to understand the complexity of such situations where the subject is capable of identifying words but the computer may not necessarily be able to do so. Offering dozens of clipped images showing parts of an unspecified object, Gibson makes us realize that we are capable of identifying what an object is although certain information is missing. He argues that the subject is able to recognize what an object is by scanning its invariances --- its surface density, the light and shade of its shadow, and its outlined silhouette --- not by scrutinizing the object’s details (Gibson, 1986, p.77).

⁸⁷ Handwritten recognition programs have been developed for decades, but software data still needs to be checked by humans as a machine can only scan words according to input data (Kawakami, J. 2017).

To understand this perceptual ability further, Gibson urges us to recognize the difference between what he calls the “visual field” and the “visual world” --- what kind of image an optical function captures in reality, and how we perceive and make sense with it. For example, when we look at a plate on a table, we can recognise that its shape is a circle (i.e. its visual world) although what the eye actually sees is the orbit shape of a plate (i.e. its visual field). At the same time, Gibson also encourages us to recognize the fact that we perceive an object in relation to what is next to it,⁸⁸ and via various specificities are able to identify what that object is.

These factors ultimately help us to understand why the subject who is supported by the influence of the *mitate*-awareness, is capable of identifying what is written, although certain words are altered or distorted. Adding to this point of view, Ory Bartal (2013) offers some useful examples, demonstrating how advertisement posters explore the idea of a mixed-use of words and image in a single context, can appeal aesthetically as well as jog the viewer’s imagination effectively.

Exploring the hieroglyphic features of *kanji* --- which often take the traceable form of an object’s silhouette --- the poster (Figure 3) depicts a *kanji* “貴,” which means “precious,” but the lower part of the ideogram, “貝,” which means “shell” and can be used independently, is replaced with a drawing of a shell. Clearly applying *mitate*, the image encourages the viewer to experience the subliminal effect of seeing it as an image of a shell as well as reading it as a word. The poster is made for the Taiyō Kōbe bank, and clearly attempts to convey a sense of security and protection for the customer’s assets. Bartal describes this poster as showing “the etymological source of a word and the visual origin of the word, playing on the semiotic combination between text and image and thus suggesting a visual word game” (Bartal, 2013, p.63). Here, we may also choose to see the mix of word and image achieving a *mitate* effect, with the transformation of the word creating an exhilarating moment during which its apprehension as either a word or an image is suspended.

⁸⁸ Earnest Gombrich (1982), who greatly admired Gibson’s work on perceptual behaviour, also studied this to show how we judge the size of an object by what is placed next to it.

Figure 3. (Bartal, 2012, p.63)

Figure 4. (Bartal, 2012, p.59)

Another example Bartal offers is a whisky company's poster, using a *hiragana* word, “う,” depicted in the shape of an eel (うなぎ) (Figure 4). But what is interesting to note, apart from its aesthetic qualities, is the fact that traditionally those who specialize in serving eel often use the single word, う, to signpost their business.⁸⁹ We can again note here that the concept of *ryakuji* --- using either a shortened or simplified form of a word to signify certain meanings --- creates a particular impact. The use of *ryakuji* has a long history as a wordplay which applies *mitate*. *Ryakuji*, is still commonly used in the present time, not only for wordplay but more commonly used as a sign, typically, of one single kanji used to signify --- for example --- switch on “入,” switch off “切,” etc. Once again, we note that the transformative activities of language influence the ways the subject perceives.

Calling himself a word hunter, the dictionary editor, Ima Hiroaki (2013), has attempted a visual language landscape of Tokyo by mapping the city's particular use of JWS. He has observed that certain districts have a visual identity which is influenced by local history as well as the individuals living or active in the area. In order to show its distinctive features, Ima divided the city into 24 districts which helps us see that each district has a particular use of JWS not found elsewhere.

⁸⁹ Its kanji version “鰻” is also commonly used as a sign.

We are shown that in the Shibuya district for example, popular for fashion trendy young people, "*wasei eigo*" is often used, which he describes as "Japanese language wearing the alphabet," a self-made, improvised version of English mixed with Japanese words, that English speakers might not even be able to make sense of (Shibazaki, Tamaoka & Takatori, 2007), but --- essentially --- in order to give an international feel (lima, 2013, pp.31-34). It is also interesting to note that there are certain words which have never been in dictionaries but are commonly used in everyday life (McKean, 2014; Curzan, 2014).

But what lima makes us realize is more complex and interesting, as he talks about the locally specialized use of words creating a specific atmosphere --- which one can find in the old Asakusa area. lima tells us that a number of shops and restaurants along the main street of Asakusa use "*hentaigana*," an obsolete form of *kana* letter, as well as an old writing style, "*sōhyotai*," which normal Japanese individuals are unable to read. lima informs us that such a rich variety of "unreadable words" gives the impression of visiting an extraordinarily unusual space, almost an Edo period time bubble. Language indeed functions as a device for shifting our perception of a space, and affords the creation of such eclectic impressions through walking the streets in Tokyo.

Language, we have come to appreciate, may define meanings but can also be perceived initially as an image, depending upon the ways a word is depicted situationally. It is therefore inevitable for the subject to engage with the kinds of impressions one can intuit from language-use, and in this way establish transformational additions to the subject-environment relationship. Appearance becomes a key player from the mediated environment, transposable as both inspiration and participant to the *kyara*-playing subject.

4.12 Conclusion

We can conclude that language functions as a trans-medium and through careful usage --- as we saw for example with role-language --- allows the subject to transform the self temporarily. The Japanese language offers choices that focus on the issue of the presentation of self, and as an intermediary in cultural life, the language is situated as a vehicle between the subject and the mediated environment, affording the subject an ability to manoeuvre changes

in perception of “the self” according to circumstances. We have examined how dealing with an equivocal linguistic performance engaging multiple choices of personal pronouns, homonyms and the availability of three notation types plus *rōmaji* use, activates and sustains the mitate-awareness. As a main artery, this sits centrally in the concept of “the self,” seen as a fluid entity, inspiring the subject to also express the equivocal through an involvement in kyara-play.

Just as he was able to do with his key theory of affordance, we have seen how Gibson’s understanding of visual thinking has strengthened our examination of the visual aspect Japanese linguistic systems can apply as a means to shift impressions. This has offered us an awareness that visual thinking can therefore both influence and be influenced by verbal thinking, which signposts the means by which language-use can influence the subject’s detection of affordance. An ecological psychology point of view embraces the fact that in any language-use, we constantly learn and train ourselves to deal with the specific features of a language, by scanning its invariants, etc. The individuals’ experience of the linguistic system itself changes, progressively affording how language may function. In these ways both the subject as well as language itself continuously changes and evolves. These energies feed continuously into the currents of milieu integrating with the subject to form Japanese cultural identities, and it is this that we most need to remind ourselves of: that language-use is a living thing whose use and impact will simultaneously change as a result of that dynamic interaction between the subject and the technologically-mediated environment.

Chapter 5 Media-mix: The subject moves fluidly between two and three dimensions

5.1.1 Introduction: Affordance and meme

In the previous chapters we have looked into how “ecological optics” --- Gibson’s term used to describe how we learn to perceive --- invite the Japanese subject to detect a particular affordance, which is mediated by kyara-play through the body as the signifying vehicle, to carry and signpost one's interactions with the mediated environment. We saw as a consequence how these reactions fall under the influence of the mitate-awareness, which has been developed via the complex web of processes whereby the subject learns to deal with the intermediaries that make up Japanese ecological conditions.

Leading us to see how affordance functions as a relational property, we intend to take this understanding further, and in this chapter attempt to demonstrate that various types of affordance can be detected in relation to a change or shift in the subject’s choice of medium or focus. A lot of literature exists on manga and its related activities, but in this chapter we will use affordance to offer another approach into the same material, and analyze it more specifically via the mitate-awareness.

Examining Japanese visual cultural formations --- and here we primarily mean manga and its media-mix conversions⁹⁰--- we can observe how detected affordance, the recipe book as it were for kyara-inspiration, is explored as multi-complex image configurations, widely spread and able to exert considerable cultural significance. To unpack these dynamic and interactive cultural flows, the application of the Richard Dawkins’ concept of meme --- which is further explored by Fuller --- gains full credibility (Dawkins, 1989; Fuller, 2005). Confirming its value in the shape-shifting web of cultural evolution, now woven with increasing complexity via interaction with cyber network systems (Parikka 2010, Hansen, M. 2004/2006), the concept of “meme” as a replicator can also be understood as kyara-play in certain of its forms, escalating fluid conversions between a two-dimensional image and a three-dimensional object.

⁹⁰ I use “media-mix” to define an approach to creating derivative works from manga, anime, games, etc. in multi-form productions across Japanese culture.

Such kyara-inspirations are actualized and enacted in relation to the availabilities and affordabilities of advanced technological devices. Three-dimensional computer graphics (3DCG) and digitalized information processors function as mediators or transformers affording the possibility of image as kyara to be configured or altered in flexible ways.

This activated mediation of meme goes beyond the standardized binary relationships such as material versus immaterial, fiction versus reality, or corporeal versus incorporeal. It offers various choices of who, in what way, and when the act of kyara-play is performed, and propagates culturally evolutionary processes which constantly configure Japanese cultural identities.

Suffice it to say, one should note that these affordances --- the affordances of meme --- are detected by the same principle and become influential cultural phenomena. Because of this we can say they are the outcome of a natural process whereby the subject --- precisely because he or she is influenced by the mitate-awareness --- is attracted to specifics in the mediated environment of daily life which allow, or even demand, certain kinds of attention and interpretation. Gibson refers to this act as "the picking up or scanning of invariants (i.e. affordance)" (Gibson, 1986, pp.139-142).

It can be agreed then that the influence of the mitate-awareness takes the form of what Gibson considers to be a flexibility of perception. That is to say, the subject develops certain "subjective determining tendencies"--- which we have described as the propensity to focus one's attention on certain things rather than others, at a given moment in time --- as a result of dealing with the intermediaries that constitute the ecological condition (Gibson, 1966, pp.248-249).

In the case of the Japanese ecological condition, this flexible, perceptual behaviour is manifested via an interchangeable and ubiquitous use of image and language. This usage appropriates and promotes the fluid conversion of a two-dimensional image into a three-dimensional object, mixing the two or even manifesting the reverse. In order to demonstrate the impact of these flexible perceptual activities, the chapter focuses on how Japanese visual culture is extensively engaged in this mitate-awareness, reconfirming an awareness of the fluid and equivocal that governs the issue of multiple identities, and exploration and enactment of kyara-play in multi-dimensional forms and contexts.

As a platform to explain this point of view, the hugely popular medium,

Japanese manga, will be examined enabling us to demonstrate how the manga assemblages of language and image influence and are influenced by the ways the subject comes to identify a particular affordance, kyara-play, in the processes of engaging with the intermediaries of Japanese language, technologies and history. Composed on a two-dimensional plane with language and image putting characters --- most often heroes and heroines --- in situational environments carried by a narrative, manga's subtext reveals and reminds us of how visual thinking is influenced by verbal thinking.

The purpose of this chapter then, is to specifically focus on how and why manga functions as a workshop that affords the subject to explore kyara-play in its multiple forms and contexts. By "workshop" we mean its "media-mixed" productions, including spin-offs⁹¹ and secondary creations.⁹² We can see that those products developed from manga may be superficially viewed as having no common ground for their creation, yet all of them may be said to be the outcome of a single factor central to this thesis: the subject being under the influence of the mitate-awareness, which grows out of that complex daily interaction between the subject and the ecological conditions.

To consolidate the idea of kyara-play as a functioning and detectable affordance in the subject's active engagement with Japanese ecological conditions, we will also analyze the experiments of the Japanese robot scientist, Ishiguro Hiroshi, especially his joint project, "android theatre," which he organises with the renown theatre director, Hirata Oriza. Fundamentally this chapter therefore argues that an ecological condition is the determinant factor that shapes creative activities, and that aesthetic values and ideologies --- the most commonly assumed influential factors --- also fall under its influence.

5.1.2 The manga springboard and kyara-play

There has been a lot of speculation about why manga has been so attractive to so many people --- in fact gaining in popularity over the decades. It is, after all,

⁹¹ Following the common use of the term "spin-off" in Japan, the thesis defines it as the ways a new media product is derived from an existing media product --- in this case anime, manga or the cinema -- by using an established character or setting (Nico Nico Pedia, n.d.).

⁹² Secondary creations are derivative works and typically involve media-mixed experimentations of existing stories which were once featured as manga, anime, cinema, etc.

simply a two-dimensional form using image and language to depict a story about particular characters. Certain commentators are inclined to suggest that there must be some inherent and charismatic Japaneseness behind the scenes enabling manga to be that influential (Koyama, Tamagawa & Koike, 2016; Makela, 2008; Rankin & Brown, 2012). Susan Napier (2001/2005), Okada Toshio (2005) and Mark MacWilliams (2008) for example, seem to agree that manga mirrors and nurtures Japanese aesthetical values and qualities.⁹³ Indeed, Ōtsuka Eiji (2001) and Roman Rosenbaum (2013) are also more or less convinced that the popularity and quality of manga can be justified by the creator's ability to capture reality, proving thereby that manga successfully reflects the contemporary aesthetic values and ideologies of Japan and the culture of its readers.

We can readily acknowledge however that their views, concurring with Saitō Nobuhiko's claim to a Japanese aesthetic sensibility being essential for the creation of manga, need to be examined further (Saitō, N. 2011). It is also clear that nothing is offered as a plausible explanation for why other countries' comics --- we can think immediately of the output of American and French comics --- are also gaining in popularity, the issue of which we discuss later.

Some commentators claim that manga's origins can be found in and around the 12th century (Takahata, 1999). We can begin to trace its popularity through its encouragement of a certain awareness regarding multi-functional Japanese language-use, manifesting its versatility in conjunction with the versatility of line-drawings able to "depict a word" as well as caricature an image, a movement and a space. Indeed it is through these versatilities --- which we have met in previous chapters --- that the equivocal can be juggled in regard to both language and image, reminding us that the application of the *mitate*-awareness becomes an essential tool for fully comprehending what manga is telling us. It is this very equivocality of language morphing into image, that allows manga to indeed be recognised as a pivotal platform from which the subject is able to observe, analyze and understand how affordances --- in

⁹³ The manga critique, Okada Toshio, points out that manga was important for many Japanese throughout history because it was especially used as a tool for voicing one's political views. He strongly feels that without acknowledging at least aspects specific to its historical background, its readers cannot therefore claim to "truly" understand what manga really means (Okada, T. 2005). This view inevitably leads to further debate on who may "own" or decide manga's true meaning or value.

particular expressed as kyara-play --- are detected in the processes of engaging with the Japanese ecological conditions. Indeed manga offers a mirror-milieu through which the subject can safely watch and explore the possibilities of action and performativity. The context may be two-dimensional, but it enables the third.

To gauge such complex cultural formations, an elaboration of Parikka's understanding of the double notion of "milieu-media" would help us to visualize how manga sets up a virtual two-dimensional space forming a pseudo-milieu (Parikka, 2010). Indeed, it shapes what is possible or not by addressing issues of narrative form, depiction and layout, instead of simply thinking manga is a visual story telling media.

In this respect, manga affords to be a springboard from which the subject can experiment with the idea of kyara-play from multi-dimensional aspects. After looking at how manga can function as an enriched source material for kyara-play, we will see how this aspect is fully explored by media-mixed conversions which experiment with changing the mode of expression, the medium or a sequential setting, to influence kyara-play performances and the outcome then of their reception.

5.2 Manga rules

In Japan, manga is available to the public in book and weekly or monthly magazine form, or even as an advertising method, and takes such an important and serious place in Japanese contemporary culture. We can gauge its cultural significance when we learn that one third of all published material in Japan takes the form of manga.⁹⁴ It has become the medium even for the publication of academic material,⁹⁵ and is widely recognised as the prime medium for the

⁹⁴ The number of copies of manga magazines and manga books sold in 2011 comprises 36 per cent of the total sales of published material (magazines and books), and the data indicates that one out of three published material is manga (Shuppan Shihyō, 2011).

⁹⁵ The new genre, called "a business light novel," combines a business text (dealing with various topics like accounting, marketing) with a "light novel" style manga illustration, and has won the sales' record for recent years. The main readers of the light novel genre, featuring an entertainment story with manga illustration, are middle-to high-school students (Watanabe, S. 2012a/2012b). However the use of manga as an illustrative text for non-entertainment subjects has attracted the older generations aged between 20-50 years old. Such a trend indicates that manga is indeed a widely-appreciated communication medium.

communication of all subjects in various genres, from business manuals and propaganda⁹⁶ to military enlistment and all the varieties of education media.

Manga is widely available from almost every bookshop and convenience store, and an individual is even able to indulge in so-called manga cafés that stock a vast number of manga books and magazines. Paying what appears to be an accessible fee, a customer can read as many manga as he or she likes in a choice of spaces offering open or private rooms with reclining reading chairs, chaise longue and sofas, toilets, washing-machines, showers, massage chairs, and food and unlimited juices, open 24 hours per day, 365 days a year.⁹⁷

The term “manga” itself has in fact been in existence since the 18th century.⁹⁸ As with the use of many other words within the Japanese language, there are the subtleties of notation choice available for the word itself, and as a consequence each notation can be perceived as offering a slightly different impression for what manga may be about.⁹⁹ We are reminded that the history of manga also reveals how ecological conditions with their intermediaries have exerted influence on the conventions of manga construction. The introduction of a panel layout system, the detailing of verbal communication, as well as the specifics of visual representation methods using 3DCG, all created transformations of manga. Whilst seeming superficially to be representative of stylistic modifications, purposefully signposts how and why the manga creator and reader come to perceive a particular affordance --- forming the meanings and values of manga --- in the mediated environment. A common sensibility

⁹⁶ Japanese military officers reflecting on how Mickey Mouse has perhaps come to signify the United States, commented on the use of Japanese manga characters for military posters as being vital since they will represent the “Japanese spirit.” See <http://www.mod.go.jp/gsd/f/jieikanbosyu/sp/chihon/vol07.html>.

⁹⁷ Amongst the manga café chains, Kaiteki Club has the largest share in the market, and each branch stocks more than 30,000 manga books and provides food, drinks, wi-fi, online games, and some branches also have shower rooms. The approximate total number of manga cafés is 2,500 across Japan.

⁹⁸ The public first began to make active use of the term around the Meiji restoration period towards the beginning of the 20th century when the *kanji* notated “manga” was used as the translation of the western word “comic” or “cartoon” (Ishiko, 1988). In the present time, manga can be notated by either *kanji*, *hiragana*, or *katakana*, and additionally the word “comic” itself may also be used. Whilst some may argue that *kanji* notated manga conjures the old-school manga, whilst *katakana* notation may be considered to appeal to a more modern sensibility.

⁹⁹ The manga creator, Ishimori Shyōtarō (1965) points out that the *katakana* notation of manga was first used by Tezuka Osamu who defined himself as a *katakana* notated manga creator in order to distinguish his work from pre-existing manga, which was notated by *kanji*.

and means of perception grant admission to the manga grammar and indeed give rise to its popularity.

We can note that whilst manga and western comics share the same principle of composing language and image to tell a story about their characters, an examination of manga enables us to trace the shaping of language and image through ecological optics. In this respect, the cultural significance of manga needs firstly to be understood as evidence pointing to the fact that both the manga creator and the reader have shared a similar experience in having learnt to perceive, and project, meaning and value by making use of the image and the equivocal through their Japanese language familiarity.

In particular, the ways these two elements switch or exceed their pre-defined functions to generate multiple interpretations --- whereby an image can function in a way similar to language, and conversely language can be perceived as image according to the context --- are the critical factors. They --- the equivocal functions of language --- guide us to acknowledge that the formation and comprehension of manga are both deeply ingrained with the *mitate*-awareness, which flows through these two-way transformations, making possible manga's creation and appreciation. Instead of analyzing manga via a reductive *nihonjinron* filter, our approach here allows the creative status of manga to grow through an acknowledgement of these sophistications of appreciation.

The investigation therefore, of how the two components of manga --- image (i.e. panel layout and line drawings) and language (i.e. speech balloons and onomatopoeia) --- are formulated according to a set of rules defined by a so-called "manga grammar," is crucial. There is no strict sense --- we could say "grammar book" --- of how manga makes use of language and image in order to tell a story. However, since manga is a mass communication medium, specific usage has become established. It is therefore possible to find certain standardized and conventional modes used for specific expressions --- how to depict movement, sound, atmosphere or feelings. Consequently both the manga creator and the reader need to master this code reading technique, known as manga grammar (Itō, G. 2005; Natsume, 1988; Saitō, N. 2011).

The consequent implication behind this approach to an understanding of manga leads us to the surprising conclusion that reading manga does not come,

as-it-were, naturally. In fact we have to recognise that it is mandatory for the reader to learn how to perceive how an image is depicted, and how language is formulated in manga, in order to make sense of it.¹⁰⁰ Indeed we could say that reading and “digesting” manga is in fact a skill, and an appreciation of the equivocality central to Japanese language may be mandatory for achieving a fully comprehensive interpretation of it.

In addition, some “manga grammar” is used for defining the specificities of a particular genre. The reader is indeed bound to be aware of the fact that both image and language are depicted differently according to the manga genre at hand.¹⁰¹ We can recognize this if, for example, it is a *shōjyo* (girl’s) manga being read --- a manga written for female readers who are presumed to be interested in romance and love stories --- or whether the reader is focusing on a *shōnen* (boy’s) manga, and perhaps more into action or sports stories.

Acknowledging the complexity and layered consequence of these variations, the chapter will focus on this, the most widely read, *shōnen* manga genre. We will analyse how their standard features help us to perceive how ecological conditions --- especially the speed of life itself --- influence both the creation and appreciation of manga throughout its own history, and help us realise and value how the cultivation of manga feeds and activates a sensibility that fosters the methodology of *kyara-play*.

We should address the impact changes to the ecological conditions have had on the subject’s detection of affordance in the processes of both reading and indeed creating manga. The diversity of the individuals’ creative vision was difficult to gauge before the 1990’s, when the personal computer was introduced.

The 21st century mediated-environment has produced technologies, especially the Internet system, which has opened up possibilities for the individual aspiring to be a manga creator. The possibility now to show one’s work to the public online connects people internationally and, with such

¹⁰⁰ Itō Mizuko, Okabe Daisuke and Tsuji Izumi argue against the common accusation of manga being too easy to read and by constraining youth’s ability to think holds them in a passive self-satisfied state (Itō, Okabe & Tsuji, 2012).

¹⁰¹ Whilst several genres (e.g. *yaoi*, and four-strip comics) exist in Japan, *shōnen manga* (whose targeted readers are not gender specific, and aged from 10 to 50) is the most widely read genre, covering a wide range of topics from sports to thrillers, SF, action drama etc.). *Shōjyo manga* (targeting females aged from 10 to 50), features romance and love stories (Natsume, 1988).

recognition, opens now the possibility to become a professional manga creator (Barubora, 2015; Nakano, H. 2015). As Ōta Katsushi and Shimada Kazushi (2015) point out, it is a social phenomenon that the popularity of manga is no longer judged by its sales record but by its far more influential online reviews.

Clearly the establishment manga industry faces the ambivalence of no longer being able to control what kinds of manga are acceptable (Barubora, 2015; Nagaoka, 2010), yet nevertheless gains the benefit of being able to check readers' reactions online instantly --- even down to which page a reader stops reading a particular manga --- and can thereby adjust and respond suitably (Ōta & Shimada, 2015).

The impact of the technologically-mediated environment on the creation and representation of manga can therefore be broadly viewed two ways. Firstly, the format of manga can be chosen either in paper or digitally, each format coming with certain editorial requirements --- panel layout, font types, choices of colour, etc. Secondly, the publication style itself, which can be selected from magazines or online SNS like pixiv, Twitter, mobile sites, Facebook and blogs.

Examination of developments in manga format necessitates looking into the two prime elements of manga composition --- panel layout and the use of line drawings. Those elements are often considered to be a by-product of the manga creator's aesthetic and ideological stance. However, our aim is to show that they indicate how ecological optics takes root in, and influences, the sensibility through which the subject perceives and interacts with the technologically-mediated environment.

5.3 Manga: Panel layout

In some ways, what is known as panel layout --- the actual and generally rectangular frame of each visual/language instance in manga --- functions as the frame of vision through which the world is depicted. We can relate this similarly to the ways camera shots are composed in the creation of a film. The cinema we can observe however, offers the possibility of instant, multi-directional perception simply because the camera offers a fluid scope, and, as with film, is not tied down by the ways language is commonly written.

Before the 2000's, there were certain established rules and restrictions applied to manga. A limited choice of font type, a certain panel layout style,

and monochrome printing unified its editorial format and cut costs.¹⁰² Manga was primarily a paper-based publication controlled by several major players of the industry publishing weekly magazines, like *Shyōnen Jampu* and *Sandē*.

Before the introduction of personal computers, Japanese language was generally written vertically but read from right to left and top to bottom. This written formation dictated the ways the paper-based Japanese manga panels' layout depicted movement and the passage of time --- directed from right to left (Ishiko, 1988; Shimizu, I. 1991). This paper-format manga, though still the main production, is gradually being challenged and changed by the new digital formats which clearly indicate the impact of ecological conditions, encouraging the detection of a new affordance to its creation.

Fundamentally, manga's panel layout intuitively works with the accustomed eye movement of the Japanese reader. The paper-format manga, for example, reinforces the idea that a cause and effect relationship --- in a sense the flow of narrative --- needs to be assessed and analyzed by reading and looking from the right (i.e. the past and/or the present) to the left (i.e. the future).¹⁰³ As with western comics in paper-format, we are compelled to realise it is the language that directs the flow of time and movement.¹⁰⁴

Given that the timescale by which the viewer is allowed to engage with manga or the cinema is clearly different for each, it is observable that on the one side manga uses an inconsistent variety of panel sizes in order to create a contrast between a specific image depicted in certain panels, from those shown in the rest of the page. As well as aiming to keep the reader attentive, this also invites the reader therefore to interpret what is happening as it were "manually," by taking one's own time in an "analogue" way. Cinema, on the other hand, is shot within a unifying frame and operates via mechanisms beyond the viewer's

¹⁰² Colour is only used for special editions, and the choice of font-type used for manga was traditionally limited (mainly using *minchyō*, antique and gothic font types), since words need to be readable even though they are printed on cheap, coarse paper, typically used for manga publication (Ōta & Shimada, 2015).

¹⁰³ Japanese language can also be written horizontally however, and in this case it needs to be read from left to right, yet the majority of published material still maintains the traditionally used right-hand side page turning style.

¹⁰⁴ English comics' panel layout depicts movements directed from left to right. Consequently, when manga is translated into English, its panel layout is generally converted to its mirror version in order to adapt to those readers who are accustomed to reading language from left to right. Thierry Groensteen (2009) refers to Tintin's creator, Hergé's comment on the ways language-use influences how a manga creator depicts movement and creates a visual narrative.

control, such that the viewer is clearly unable, and indeed not allowed, to change its already fixed frame of time reference.

Whilst a cinematic sense of time and space are often considered to emblemize how the invention of the camera has dramatically shifted the ways the majority of us perceive the world. We remember how Walter Benjamin (1935/2008) talked about “mechanical reproduction” shaping human sense perception.

Several manga commentators, like Brigitte Richard (2014) and the well-established animator, Takahata Isao (1999), speculate about whether panel layout in manga originally grew out of the tradition of Japanese scroll painting to be later developed by ukiyo-e artists like Katsushika Hokusai in the 19th century. But others, such as the manga creator and critic, Natsume Fukunosuke (1988), claim that the panel system was copied from Western comic creators like Rodolphe Töpffer as far back as the 1850's.¹⁰⁵ Thinking through a possible way of explaining whether changes in ecological conditions shaped the ways manga has been formulated, this thesis has no intention to justify which claim is right or wrong. However, it is interesting to note that those possible panel layout inventors --- Hokusai (1760-1849) and Töpffer (1799-1846) --- lived in a similar period between the 18th and 19th centuries, a period of time in which the individual experienced dramatic changes in the speed of life.

Technological inventions cannot be regarded simply as a replacement of an old method with a new form. Such changes can entirely alter cultural practices, and have vast influence on the nature of our relationships with a space, and on our framed-vision of the world. Jeffrey Mastern, Peter Stallybrass and Nancy Vickers pertinently ask us to imagine “how the writing hand was itself shaped in the nineteenth century by printed penmanship manuals; how the ‘voice’ was transformed by the telegraph and the radio” (Mastern, Stallybrass & Vickers, 1997, p.6). It is true that the impact of the industrial revolution and when it occurred in the West and in Japan, perhaps cannot be easily compared. Nevertheless, when we take a look at such circumstances from a larger scale retrospective time frame, it is plausible to think that at the time,

¹⁰⁵ Takahata believes that a prototype of manga is a scroll painting was made in the 15th century which was further developed by Hokusai. Natsume disputes this claim, pointing out that Japanese manga creators copied panel layout system from the Western comic creators (i.e. Rodolphe Töpffer) in and around beginning of the 19th century.

various technological and scientific inventions --- the introduction of train systems, the availability of the camera as examples --- boosted the mobility and flexibility of people's lives and changed, not only the ways the individual perceives landscapes, but also influenced how one understands one's relationship to space and time.

This leads us to speculate that the reason why panel layout moved on from scroll painting (or indeed was copied from the Western comic), is because in many ways pre-existent notions of continuous space and time, which were associated with manually produced scrolls, fell out of date in relation to the changes within ecological conditions. The individual was driven to learn and adapt to a new way of seeing: there was no longer a unified arrow of time within a technologically-mediated environment. This new sprung urbanised condition, in which a population's experiences altered personal time frame and concentration spans, consequently afforded the individual the scope to anticipate and experiment with new ideas, and indeed a new sense of time and fragmentation.

Significantly, 21st century technology makes explicit how changes to ecological conditions have influenced the subject's perception. The new digital-format manga allows a creator to be free from the pre-existent restrictions of font type and colour choice, for example, but also requires alterations to the standard formation protocols that applied to paper-format manga.

In effect, the new creator is being asked to act upon the detection of a new affordance. The ubiquity, not to mention the relative technical ease of production, lends manga creation to become in effect an extension of kyara-play. With the protocol of adaption then being mandatory, the digital-format of manga needs to be presented effectively to the reader who reads it by either double-clicking or scrolling a screen monitor. In this respect, the traditional manga panel layout, based on two facing pages, may not necessarily be easy to read in a digital-format. Furthermore, a single panel, depicted on a double-page, aiming to capture the reader's special attention becomes absolutely meaningless (Neguro, Soga & Taki, 2013).

The editor of manga magazine "SS," Amano Masano (2015), visualises digital manga having two future directions. One is to consolidate existing manga techniques to create an illusion of reality which can even compete with

live-action film. The other issue is to indulge a freeform of creative expression whereby one's own work can be both created and published without restrictions imposed by pre-existing manga formation protocols.

The manga creator, Oku Hiroya, tells us that his *GANTZ* is created in the same ways as a Hollywood film: photo-shooting locations, converting the image to CG, creating 3D models of humans and objects, and manipulating those images by computer software etc (Shimada, K. 2015). Sakamoto Shinichi's *Inosan* (2015-), on the other hand, skillfully combines manual handwriting with digital techniques, conjuring up a distinctive surrealist impression.

Exploring a freeform creative expression, Murai's *Tori no me* [Bird eyes] (2013),¹⁰⁶ can be seen as a unique example showing what a version of a scroll painting in the digital era can be. Whilst telling a story about a tribe hunting birds, the usual squared panel morphs into the silhouette of a bird flying into sky when the narrative gets to its climax. Shimada Kazushi (2015) points out that Murai applies *mitate*, using the silhouette of bird flying in consecutive movements as panels, to tell the story inside the silhouettes (Shimada, K. 2015, p.95). What is also interesting to note is that this work embraces interactive activities. The speed of the reader scrolling a monitor anticipates the changes to the speed of the bird falling to the ground.

Just as technologies affect our sense of space and time, it is important to note that the formation of manga needs to adapt carefully according to the device one chooses to publish on, whether it be a computer, iPad, or mobile (Shimada, K. 2015). The device will also affect what kind of manga is suitable to be presented as well as how long it takes to finish reading it (Ōta & Shimada, 2015). Adapting to Twitter's quick-and-easy, user-friendly features, the account, named "Tsui4," features a simple four-strip comic, with illustrations and short comments.¹⁰⁷ Manga creators publishing their work via mobiles, typically create a quick short story a reader can finish whilst making a short trip (Amano, 2015).

Looking at these variable approaches to manga creation and formatting, one may think of manga itself exploring multiply transformable circumstances, changing its expressive form and characteristic features according to circumstances/devices.

¹⁰⁶ See <http://mavo.takekuma.jp/viewer.php?id=162>.

¹⁰⁷ See https://twitter.com/twi_yon.

5.4 Manga: Eisenstein and the *mitate*-awareness

Gibson's understanding that everything is relationally defined confirms the fact that both Sergei Eisenstein and manga creators gained inspiration indirectly from the *mitate*-awareness, which allows the subject to activate a fluid perceptual conversion of subject matter in multi-dimensions. Whilst Japanese manga creators can admit to inspiration from Eisenstein's montage theory, Eisenstein himself was originally inspired by the forms of *mitate* used in kabuki, which gave him the clue that showing two images simultaneously would encourage a viewer to interpret them relationally (Eisenstein, 1949/1977).

Indeed, there is a substantial quota of theory from manga critics like Ōtsuka Eiji (2012) or Itō Gō (2005), that proclaims Eisenstein's theory of montage as a primary influence in the creation of manga. Ōtsuka refers to Eisenstein as being inspired by a construction within kabuki that encourages the subject to perceive something that is not actually shown, in the process of developing a narrative. Without acknowledging the effect of *mitate*, he argues that Eisenstein's acknowledgement of the cultural significance of kabuki acted as a catalyst for certain Japanese manga creators to adapt Eisenstein's theory of montage.¹⁰⁸

We would prefer not to consider Eisenstein's montage theory or his ideological proposition as the guiding inspiration for manga and its stylistic conventions. Instead, we would choose to consider the catalyzing interactivities between the subject and the intermediaries that underpin a constant everyday attuning of the *mitate*-awareness. We therefore acknowledge the *mitate*-awareness as the guiding energy that had Eisenstein focused on kabuki, and gave him an awareness through its consequent lessons of perception into the conceptual switches apparent in it.

In relation to this specific kabuki context, it is important to note that the *mitate*-awareness is not an ideological stance, but in fact functions rather as a visual rhetoric, which invites or even challenges the subject to change the ways he or she perceives. The ways kabuki applies *mitate* on occasion or indeed to its

¹⁰⁸ Ōtsuka writes that "the reason why forms of expression used in manga and Japanese culture appear to be dealing with a database system containing sample codes" is because such a method of logical thinking was brought into Japan by Eisenstein during the 1920's to 1930's" (Ōtsuka, 2012, p.54).

entire narrative framework, can create some mesmerizing visual effects, and is a further indication of how creatively versatile *mitate* can be.

Kabuki's dramaturgical method consists of two elements: "*sekai*" (the dramatic world) and "*shukō*" (an innovative plot plan). *Sekai* refers to the background sequences of publicly well-known literary works, legends, or historical events. We can think of which era a story is told from and where it occurred; and what kinds of characters appeared in it and what the genre of the story was. *Shukō*, on the other hand, manages to conceal within its *métier* social satire, or even rumours and criticisms, which were otherwise forbidden to the public eye. *Mitate* became a decisive element within *shukō*, a device which aims to give to its contemporary audience new twists to these publicly known works and events, that reflect the current affairs of the time (Hattori, 1975; Miura, H. 1996; W. Lee, 2015).

This kind of constructive sleight of hand enabled kabuki to maintain its cultural importance, especially during the Edo period, but it continuously maintains its pertinence in the present time. In an initially astonishing venture that reflects both the technologically-mediated contemporaneous era and a flexibility of identity, kabuki can now be found to apply *mitate* to further blur the boundary between reality and fiction, sometimes bringing two iconic representations of different eras to perform together. There are now kabuki productions that call upon the actors to perform as manga characters, or collaborate with the vocaloid, Hatsune Miku, by projecting the fictional figure onto a three-dimensional monitor set up in the theatre.¹⁰⁹

5.5 Manga: Perception, the caricature, the visual, *mitate* again

Questions of how and why manga is appreciated lead us to revisit the supposition that the subject is not a passive observer, and that one is inevitably an active meaning maker, analyzing what an image may signify. That perception once again becomes the guiding vehicle through this maze is no longer a surprise. According to Gibson, this act of "meaningful perception" is largely influenced by "the personality and the culture of the perceiver" (Gibson, 1950, p.213). This stimulates the subject to pay attention to one certain thing rather

¹⁰⁹ Since 1986, the contemporaneous version of kabuki, known as "Super Kabuki," has been performed. Since 2015, it also features the popular manga, *One Piece* (1997-).

than to something else, which can even lead to a distortion of how the subject does actually perceive something.

The question --- the nature --- of what was known as "caricatures," but which we can refer to as "reduced visual characteristics," essential of course to manga, becomes extremely relevant at this point. When looking at these visual reductions, the reader is immediately invited to be involved in an act of interpretation, much like with the recognition of a word by its image, as we noted in chapter four.

The art historian, Gombrich tells us "(w)hat we experience as a good likeness in a caricature, or even in a portrait, is not necessarily a replica of anything seen" (Gombrich, 1977, p.292). He thought that "caricatures" reveal how the individual learns to perceive, and talked about the ways the caricaturist, Rodolphe Töpffers, was capable of demonstrating the secret of physiognomic expression. Nevertheless, Gombrich was unable to offer any plausible explanation as to why Töpffers, who only offered "minimum clues," successfully managed to trace physiognomic expression.

This issue is best examined with reference to Gibson, who offers a more concise explanation about exactly what caricatures are capable of doing. He points out that "caricature" is "not (the) reduction but enhancement" of "invariants"--- an object's key element which distinguishes it from others --- and caricature is a mixture of "two kinds of specification (...) by projection (and) by convention." It is, he suggests, "an effort at displaying relevant information" (Gibson, 1971, p.29). In other words, such a "caricature" can be faithful to certain features of a man that distinguish him from all other men. It may, therefore, truly represent him in a higher sense of the term, and we consequently would appreciate the "caricature" for offering insightful information about that specific person (Gibson, 1973, p.44).

This point of view helps us to understand how manga works extensively with these perceptual functions and invents a "visual language" by making use of a variety of devices within visual rhetoric --- the use, for example, of caricatures, deformed or visual metaphor. In this respect, manga's formulation of image explicitly reveals culturally significant meanings and values broadly accepted in Japan, and reveals the subject as someone who practices to perceive something as what it is not, under the guiding influence of the *mitate*-awareness.

Tezuka Osamu, who is considered to be the father of Japanese manga, is known for inventing "*manpu*," a visual language which is vital for the individual to master in terms of encoding-decoding manga (Kōno, F. 2018).

The Japanese calligrapher, Tsujii Keiun (1993), argues that an extensive familiarity with visual language is activated in the use of Japanese language. He refers to *shōkei moji* --- a type of *kanji* which functions similarly to a hieroglyph --- which keeps the traced outline of an object that a word signifies.¹¹⁰ It is difficult to assess how much the use of *shōkei moji* has influenced --- or continues to influence --- inventions of visual language. Nevertheless, one must note that Japanese people are familiar with the idea that the subject is continually being invited to detect what a word affords --- its meaning or visual image --- according to which context it is presented in. Indeed, it is crucial to recognize that manga constantly applies the *mitate*-awareness, which, we remember, encourages the individual to perceive what is depicted as something else.

We have already discovered that reading manga cannot be accomplished without learning "manga grammar." The subject is encouraged to intuit the arrival of a new bright idea when one sees an electric light bulb depicted above a character's head. Looking at a star pictured in a character's eye, one does not discover a beauty but one knows that the star represents beauty; and seeing the distorted shape of a car, one intuits that the car is in motion.

The hyper-technological environment of course also influences the ways manga depicts an image. These days many manga creators will use computer graphics software --- such as 3DCG --- in order to execute images with meticulous detail (Fujitsu, 2015; Shinogi, 2015). This perhaps offers an especially contemporary gloss to image depiction, but may of course be primarily economic, and because the technology is simply there to use.

However, instead of making completely digitalized images, manga creators often prefer to combine an analogue, manually hand-drawn character and a digitally executed background sequence. Asserting these kinds of creative freedoms supports the fundamental notion of manga indeed being primarily conceived to depict just how one perceives "the self" in relation to the world, and not thereby a showcase for whether computer graphics are capable of

¹¹⁰ At elementary schools, all pupils are taught about how *shōkei moji* is developed from an object's outline shape that the *kanji* signifies (Tsujii, 1993).

depicting images accurately or not. Manga exists “to show our vision of the world,”¹¹¹ and the impressions we get from the world we live in.

Unsurprisingly therefore, a character --- as a representative of living beings --- is still preferred to be drawn by hand, the method clearly allowing a manga creator to enhance distinctive features more truthfully. We are reminded here of Gibson's comment that, “the caricature may be a poor projection (but it affords) good information about (the character)” (Gibson, 1973, p.43). He seems to be forecasting that existing computer programmes will be incapable of capturing a character's true life like qualities, because they have not been programmed to show how a living being detects affordance. This observation places us in the developmental struggles of robotics that we discuss later in the chapter.

5.6 Sensing text: Manga's speech balloons and onomatopoeia

The use of language in manga --- we are primarily considering here speech balloons and onomatopoeia --- relies heavily on the reader's mitate-thinking antennae. With this as the key we can appreciate how readily language can be seen as an image or even heard as a sound, feeding material to the subject that tunes the constant appreciation of the equivocal, a two-way interactivity that lies at the heart of kyara-play enactment.

A speech balloon represents a text which can be anything from a character's comment to a story's background narration. But unlike with a literary novel, various types of speech balloon are also used as visual signposts, specifying who or what produced a given type of sound. The individual is expected to intuitively guess the sound maker's profile, whether human, animal or something mechanical for example, by simply looking at how the specific speech balloon has been visually depicted, before even reading the text inserted into it.¹¹²

¹¹¹ The animator, Hosoda Mamoru, thinks that a manga creator ought to use computer graphics to capture a specific feel or a certain spatial texture of the world, but believes it is not however appropriate to use it for certain other sequences (Tsukada, 2016, p.56). This kind of view seems diametrically opposite to Mark Hansen's view on “multiplexing,” which he describes as generating a stereoscopic image unavoidably influencing our perception of reality (Hansen, M. 2006).

¹¹² A speech balloon visually illustrates both sound quality and texture. For example, a round-shaped speech balloon depicted with a plain line means that a speech is actually being spoken, whilst with a dotted line it indicates a monologue which is inaudible (what the character

Onomatopoeia is a living and expanding form of language–use throughout Japan, seen and heard throughout the media and advertising, as well as extensively used in manga. In a sense we could think of it as a verbal form of kyara-play, a performative invention used to highlight a circumstance, whether that is in manga or advertising. Importantly throughout manga, onomatopoeia --- the formation of a word from a sound associated with what is named¹¹³--- can become a visual sound which is metaphorically depicted in pictorial language. Significantly, the onomatopoeia used in manga deals with a complex set of rules, via which the reader is expected to attune with a sound by recognition of the qualities implicit in an onomatopoeic word. The quality of a sound --- its volume, characteristic texture, etc. --- is visually depicted in differing ways according to the existing “manga grammar,” and the subject is expected to gauge what an image affords according to that type of sound.¹¹⁴

But fundamentally the subject has to learn to perceive a certain word as sound via the application of the *mitate*-awareness.¹¹⁵ Reading manga reinforces the idea that a word may not mean the way it actually looks, and conversely a word may require the subject to perceive what it is not, a sound for example that one cannot actually hear.

It is true that every language has various types of onomatopoeia, but it is important to note that the Japanese language is granted as having five times more onomatopoeia than the English language appears to have (Kubozono, 2017). This fact is rendered less surprising when one remembers the position that manga holds in the culture of the Japanese people. Interestingly, we also witness that contemporary Japanese manga and media culture actively invents new onomatopoeia, which in fact may have no referential meaning or even

is thinking). A comment conjuring aggression or anger is often depicted with a jagged sharp line whilst a square-shaped speech balloon is used for representing a sound which has a mechanical texture (e.g. human’s voice via a telephone or a speaker) or indeed even a foreign speech.

¹¹³ Japanese onomatopoeia is also known as sound symbolic or for mimetic words, but the thesis uses the general meaning the word conveys (Yoshikawa, C. 2013; Hayakawa, F. 2015; Ono, Masahiro, 2012).

¹¹⁴ By following the law of perspective, a change of sound volume is depicted by a change of font-size, and the quality or texture of sound (e.g. the banging of a loud-sound) can be depicted in a three-dimensional cubic form. Even a “silence” can be depicted in a specific way (Natsume (2003/2013)).

¹¹⁵ Eisenstein pointed out that in kabuki we actually “hear movement” and “see sound” (Eisenstein, 1949, p.22)]

sound mimicking justification (Kubozono, 2017; Nakazato, 2016). This trend may also reconfirm the fact that the use of language and image are subject to the influence of the *mitate*-awareness itself, as a means by which the equivocal can be registered and made sense of.

So far, we have looked at how Japanese manga has interactively engaged with the technologically-mediated environment, being both an influence on as well as influenced by ecological optics and the *mitate*-awareness. We can further recognise that certain features of Japanese television programmes --- especially variety programmes --- extend these cultural vehicles through the extensive use of the TV *telop* --- which we can call a form of subtitle --- as a visual image.

Originally the *telop* was invented as a visual aid to clarify audio information by inserting a text when its recorded sound quality was poor. However, these days almost all Japanese variety programs uses *telops* which are specifically designed to create visual effects, with the intention being to appeal to the viewer by informing him/her about what kind of programme is being shown, or emphasising or passing a commentary on what a person is talking about (Maree, 2014; Shiomi, 2001; Shitara, 2005/2006)--- although nowadays there are of course hardly ever any crucial audibility problems.¹¹⁶

Significantly, Japanese TV *telop* design uses various font types with multiple colours, which specifically work on the idea of defining “the persona of typeface and text.” This enhancement of the psychological power of typeface design and usage has the clear intention of portraying the personality of a programme: whether that programme offers comedy or deals with a serious story, and then as a means of “catching the viewer’s attention and preventing the zapping and changing of channels” (Fujii, 2016).¹¹⁷ The ways variety programmes make use of *telops* allow the individual viewer to develop an ability to perceive it, not simply as a text message, but as the carrier of implied

¹¹⁶ Its cultural significance is supported by the fact that more than 75% of programmes broadcast during prime time (i.e. 7-10pm) are variety programmes. There is even “a *telop* designer” who specializes in creating *telop* designs that visually signpost the uniqueness of a programme (Shitara, 2005/2006).

¹¹⁷ Fujii Kentarō is the first TV director who designed *telops* “in order to visually define the uniqueness of the programme” (Fujii, 2016, p.23).

and hidden meanings that the words do not actually convey per se.¹¹⁸

5.7 Anime: The moving, two-dimensional image

The word “anime” is the abbreviated Japanese form of “animation,” and it refers to an imaging technique that depicts movement by assembling a number of static images. Some may prefer to use the word “anime” in order to distinguish Japanese animation from the non-Japanese productions, but there is no strict measure brought to confining what the word “anime” stands for. In fact in Japan, the word anime is used for both Japanese productions and those animated films from the rest of the world (Tsugata, 2014). For this thesis, we do indeed use the term “anime” for both Japanese and non-Japanese animated films.

Anime frequently likes to convert material from other sources --- particularly from manga, fictional literature, cinema, and even digital games. However, in this thesis we specifically focus on the anime developed from manga. This will allow us to see what kind of affordance the subject identifies in terms of transforming static images into the moving images of anime. As with manga we are concerned here with anime fulfilling a central part in Japanese contemporary culture, and supplying consequently considerable influence to the environment --- indeed to the lives --- of the Japanese people. And, as with manga, this influence cannot be over-emphasized.

We are concerned here with a specific development of intention and ideas that makes it possible to analyze clearly what Japanese anime attempts to achieve, and how this differs from the creative aims of Western anime (which we will discuss through a focus on Disney). The most significant distinguishing feature between the two lies in the fact that they detect a different affordance in the use of technologies. By using various kinds of advanced technologies, Disney attempts to create anime to replicate reality as closely as possible.

¹¹⁸ When the Japanese emperor announced his resignation on 8th August 2016, six Japanese TV stations were given the exact same visually recorded material by the Imperial Household Agency for broadcasting purposes. However, when they came to broadcast the material, each station inserted the emperor’s comment as a telop with various differing designs. Viewers immediately responded to the ways each station used their different telop design, and began tweeting about the different impressions they gave, and offered comments on which TV station’s telop, for example, showed the most respect to the emperor (Excite News, 2016).

Hand-drawn animation is virtually swept away by technology.¹¹⁹ Japanese anime, on the other hand, is interested in establishing “verisimilitudes,” which is to say that they look for a version of reality that only anime can reach for and achieve. These different creative approaches reflect differences of vision, which in turn reflect a consequent encouragement for both the animator and the viewer to detect a particular affordance, signaling the kinds of meaning and values identifiable in the making of anime.

Technically speaking, the fundamental difference between Japanese anime and Walt Disney productions can be focused on the number of cells (picture frames) contained in the creation of each approach to anime. Whilst Japanese anime uses a “cell form” which limits the number of cells used to illustrate the movement of a particular object --- a character or maybe a background sequence --- Disney anime uses the “full cell” approach, which enables an animator to depict the flow of movement in more detail.¹²⁰

In other words, Japanese anime attempts to enhance the impact of “*kime-pose*” --- loosely translated as “a caricatured movement”--- which is an approach to illustration originally captured in manga’s panel layout. As a consequence we can consider that the aim here is to find a way of making anime which affords the viewer the capability to perceive (and appreciate) a total flow of movement, without actually depicting it.

Disney, on the other hand, aims to depict a seamless flow of movement and expects anime to replicate, or at least offer, a closer look at the ways we see movement in reality. It consequently attempts to remove any of the gaps created by manga’s or a western comic’s panel layout, signifying instead a unified, singular movement flow. We might be led to thinking that the engagement of interpretation, of the mindful imagination of the viewer, is perhaps placed less in demand in this approach, and the implications of this offer an interesting focus on both the Japanese viewer’s and creator’s visual perception psychology.

The contemporary Japanese artist, Murakami Takashi points out, whilst Disney attempts to create 3D via anime by digitally tracing every movement of

¹¹⁹ For the past decade, Disney’s hand-drawn animation sector has faced a dramatic downsizing (Alberge, 2006)

¹²⁰ Originally, Disney’s full cell used to have twenty-four frames per second whilst Japanese anime’s cell form used eight frames per second.

a character, Japanese animators manually make anime to be a two-dimensional picture card show, inviting the viewer to see a partial element to encounter its total picture (Murakami, 1999c). Indeed these differing expectations of intentionality lead us to realize the fact that the Japanese animator's approach shares a parallel understanding to the ways "caricature" also functions on the two-dimensional plane.

This point of view is indeed accurately diagnosed by Gibson who told us that "caricature" is not a reduction of invariants, but its manifestation (Gibson, 1973). In other words, the attempt of a Japanese animator in making use of "*kime-pose*" can be recognised as a means of inviting the viewer to perceive something that the anime itself does not actually depict, but nevertheless does represent. Again, we can see the influence of the *mitate*-awareness at work, inviting the subject to detect a particular affordance in the image before the eyes --- seeing a static caricatured movement, but being able to perceive it as a total flow of movement nevertheless.

Following this line of thinking, Japanese animators continuously use technology as one of the vital tools according to sequences, and attempt to achieve their version of verisimilitude --- a reality that anime can only, intentionally, approximate to.

What we are recognising throughout this exploration of the *mitate*-awareness in relation to manga and anime, is the development of an awareness that enables certain Japanese subjects to tune affordance in a way that allows perception to become the vehicle, granting the means to play *kyara* as a methodology for primarily urban social living. Indeed --- and crucially for the central theme of this thesis --- what the subject detects as affordance in the processes of dealing with anime, consequently reveals the ways the subject learns to perceive. In particular, what kind of "subjective determinant tendency" is being promoted.

In the case of the Japanese "subjective determinant tendency," the propensity of seeing a partial element and from this intuit its total picture (e.g. seeing a *kime-pose* and then intuiting a character's personality), may be the primary enabling factor. Whilst in the case of Disney, it perhaps advances the tendency to recognise the total picture as an assemblage of many fragmented elements. We can extrapolate from this a parallel phenomenon in the playing of *kyara*, where it is clear that the performing of the action (of *kyara*-play) --- the

performativity itself --- behaves as an indicator of the person playing it. Indeed, as we have observed in earlier chapters, we can say that kyara-play becomes the flag-waver signposting the individual in the circumstance of life.

Although the Japanese creators and Disney necessarily approached anime differently in relation to their funding availabilities, in many ways Japanese animators may not originally have had much choice but to deal with the given situation.¹²¹ What is important to recognize, however, is the fact that the specifics of anime's creative history have placed contingencies that directed the sensibility of perception and interpretation of an image responsibly, integral to the shaping being shaped interaction between the subject and the mediated environment. This is crucial to understand because it expands the central claim of this thesis, of an awareness formed within many Japanese that makes possible, and underpins, their need to create and play kyara.

One must note that the ways manga is converted to anime can be different according to the genre type --- action, comedy, etc. --- as each genre's dynamic of movement is commonly depicted differently. Advanced technologies render this factor more explicitly. The animator, Hiramatsu Noriko (2016), for example, points out that reducing the number of cells is much more suited for gag comedy manga because it conjures up the impression of an abrupt shock, or a surprising moment triggered by jokes better than the full use of CG cells, which create a smooth movement. The animator, Suhyun Chen (2016), on the other hand, skillfully makes use of 3D to depict a sharp, translucent bullet shot movement, emphasised with fluorescent colours in order to divert the viewer's attention from the background sequence depicted in 2D.

Thomas Lamarre (2006a) examines how Japanese animation can convey the impression of movement by minimal means, using multi-plane cameras. This approach encourages the viewer to read situationally, filling the gap between what is shown and what is intended. Analyzing "how technologies think of

¹²¹ Inspired by Walt Disney, who began producing his series of animation films from 1923 onwards, Japanese animators such as Mori Yasuji and Daikuhara Akira were motivated to create Japanese anime. However, unlike the Disney corporation, Japanese creators lacked sufficient financial resources and as a result were compelled to invent their own original and cheaper means of producing anime --- their own cell form. The solution indicated that whilst Disney created full-cell animation which afforded them the possibility of depicting the full flow of movement, Japanese anime used cell anime which uses a limited number of cells, and perhaps demands more from the viewer's imagination.

anime,” Lamarre attempts to demonstrate how the contemporary transmedia ecologies of Japan function within a complex set of power relations and techno-social arrangements (Lamarre, 2009/2018). Aware of the various transformations of anime into other forms of secondary production --- the proliferation of games, toys etc. --- Lamarre suggests that social and economic issues should not take precedence over the moving image. However, he also gives precedence to technologies in the creative hierarchy, granting less to the affordance interplay between the creator as human and the technological environment. This could perhaps be more acceptable if it were to acknowledge the creative dynamic and the need to find expression that this interactivity can catalyse.

Commenting that soft (i.e. manga, anime) does not make hard (i.e. technologies like the computer or digital camera), but hard does make soft, Ōta Katsushi and Shimada Kazushi (2015) may appear to share a similar vision with Lamarre. But we can note their recognition that technologies open up possibilities for manga and anime creators, spurring on responses and affordances as the motivational circumstances and intentional drives differ for each. Creative differences become more visible, especially in relation to digital manga formations. Advanced technologies afford anime creators the possibility of expressing their vision more freely, without being filtered by commercial industry.

5.8 *Dōjinshi* as a provisional domain of kyara-play

Manga and anime fandom culture¹²² is a kind of showcase for how a hyper technologically-mediated environment affords a myriad of possibilities to explore kyara-play. Its experimentations can take various forms of expression in multi-dimensional space, but we can appraise the recurring application of the mitate-awareness as a core issue. The individual may use his or her own body by dressing up to perform as a particular character, known as cosplay, perhaps visiting theatrically set spaces like maid or butler themed cafés etc. to perform a kyara; or by using another entity, like an anime or well-known actor’s character to experiment with, as a kyara-play embodiment. These activities can take a

¹²² I define “manga and anime fandom culture” in a broader sense, including anyone --- such as otaku --- who is interested in media-mixed activities.

two-dimensional or a three-dimensional form, or even a 2.5 dimension¹²³ where two and three-dimensional elements are juxtaposed in a single platform.

These multi-forms of cultural experimentation may appear to be eclectic and without any cohesive motivation linking them, but we can suggest that they all relate to a single factor. The individual's primary concern and interest in this context, is in how far the act of kyara-play can be exploited in relation to *ba*, the specificity of a space mediated by hyper technologies. The essential feature of *ba* for us is that it invites perception and then summons performance: it calls the subject to perceive the qualities of a situation which then determines how one spins kyara. In this way a special quality is garnered for a site-specific performance, the strategy of which reflects the ways the individual plays kyara in everyday life.

An important variant on the idea of using an alternative medium to activate kyara-play are the creative activities called "spin-offs," or "secondary creations (*niji sōsaku*)," both of which are primarily derivative works. Spin-offs and secondary creations typically involve media-mixed experimentations of existing stories, which were once featured as manga, anime, cinema films, or what in Japan are called "game novels" (fictionalised versions of digital games).

Our attention is firstly drawn to one of the most interesting activities of secondary creation, generally carried out as a form of *dōjinshi*.¹²⁴ This is the manga and anime fan circles' or communities' self-published work, which specifically explores the idea of kyara-play.¹²⁵ *Dōjinshi* provides a space where the individual manga fan is able to create and even publish a derivative work from an existing story, re-writing or re-inventing the original work as authors in their own right. What we find here is that an established character is used as a device to experiment with the concept of kyara-play, by placing the "hero"

¹²³ The term, 2.5 dimension began to be used around 2010, and refers to cultural activities combining fiction and reality (Iwashita, H. 2015).

¹²⁴ "Spin-off" and *dōjinshi* share similar interests and activities, but whilst spin-off productions are made legally, *dōjinshi*'s productions are made illegally. These products are available in various types of media and so we find an anime theme song being released as a CD, or a role-playing game could be converted into a novel.

¹²⁵ According to the Comic Market's report published in 2011, the estimated number of manga and anime circle communities participating in Comic Market is 22,000, and they distributed more than 9.25 million booklets during the three-day event. More than half of the members of *dōjinshi* circles are adults, students being only 9.5%, female members 65%, and male at 35% (Comic Market, 2011).

character into a different context. It is then possible to see how a change in an anime or manga story's background sequence actually influences a main character's personality or behavior, or how the same story can be interpreted differently from the perspective of a sub-character's point of view.¹²⁶ The transplanting of an original manga character into what is usually a totally different context or circumstance, becomes a clear vehicle for the mitate-awareness to activate kyara-play.

Existing work analyzing this phenomenon, from commentators like Ōtsuka (2012), Saitō Tamaki (2011), and Azuma Hiroki (2001/2007), speculates that individuals are involved in secondary creations because they have certain ideological issues to address and comprehend.¹²⁷ We are obliged, consequently, to conclude that these critiques appear unwilling to recognize the fact that *dōjinshi* functions as a workshop for the individual to explore the concept of kyara-play two-dimensionally, by setting up a manga or anime character to perform another kyara in the various sequences shown.

Ōtsuka (2012), for example, suggests that those individuals are merely "consuming stories" which are already assembled via the existing story telling system, marketed by and promoting Japanese consumer culture which offers "a framed vision of the world." Indeed, he seems to recognize this aspect of Japanese culture as a passive engagement, refusing to acknowledge that these derivative manga creations are being used as exercise arenas in two-dimensional form to develop strategies for kyara-play. Far from being simply extensions of a consumerist culture, these works exhibit a very real creative productivity feeding off the mitate-awareness as an approach to exploration.

Ōtsuka's analysis delivers a character used simply as a device enabling individuals to communicate with each other. We would suggest however, that being under the influence of the mitate-awareness --- which we would argue acts as the conceptual catalyst for what Ōtsuka calls, "a framed vision of the

¹²⁶ Second creation can take any form as a re-interpretation of the original --- a parody or comedy, etc.

¹²⁷ Saitō (2011) thinks that "the act of creating a new story by removing an established character out of the existing story setting and placing it in a new environment enables the individual to feel that he/she has the power to control its performance. He also sees that an established character is used as a communication device which allows the individual to communicate with others.

world" --- the individual detects a particular affordance, granting meaning and value to the invention of a new story involving an established character. Far from being a mere re-iteration, the new re-configuration affords the possibility to realise clearly that even though an individual may attempt to live life "ideologically," how one perceives "the self" changes in relation to the surrounding ecological condition. The individual and the mediated environment have mutually interdependent relationships, and this living environment --- the background sequence --- governs and is governed by each character in its midst.

The manga critic, Itō Gō supports this position. He tells us that the individual is attracted to a character who has "the room to invent a new feature," or "the versatility to flexibly adapt to a new story setting" (Itō, G. 2005). These indicators in fact echo the idea we have maintained elsewhere, that a flexible adaptability to circumstance is one of the most desirable abilities for the individual playing kyara. Observations such as these enable us to acknowledge clearly that a secondary creation is in fact an alternative medium that affords the individual to "test out" the interactivity between the subject and the mediated environment, that in turn promotes the act of playing kyara.

5.9 The Hatsune Miku hub

Possibly one of the most notable and hugely popular cases exploring the idea of the "personification of the voice"--- which, let us note, is an example of creating a virtual character to play kyara --- is demonstrated by Hatsune Miku. This is the name given to the Japanese vocal android, featured as a "humanoid persona voiced by a singing synthesizer application developed by Crypton Future Media" in 2007 (Nakagawa & Itō, 2014). Hatsune Miku comes as an application usable by anyone with the correct computer. When users input their own composed song with its own lyrics, Hatsune Miku sings the song with the music played by the computer software.

Far more versatile than a karaoke machine, Hatsune Miku can be understood as an "N-dimensional creative" material (Hamano, 2009).¹²⁸ Unlike

¹²⁸ I use Hamano Satoshi's definition of "N-dimensional creative," which refers to a work itself, like Hatsune Miku and its software, as also having multiple functions such as a database, a

a general, derivative-creation spin-off from existing manga or anime content, N-dimensional creative material links with a cyber network communication platform, and has a database which allows the user to assemble, or alter and create, his or her own work. It consequently allows the user to choose and perform a desirable kyara, and act as a composer (of a song Miku sings), as an illustrator (of Miku's outfits and its background sequences), or as a choreographer (of how Miku dances with music), or even as an animator (creating a video), etc. Whilst Hatsune Miku is specifically a computer programmed, animated character, which can sing and dance in cyber space, the users can feed their own fantasies into her qualifying Hatsune Miku as "affording something that humans cannot provide" (Tomita, 2013, p.54). We can understand this better when we realise that the software provides a platform where the user and Hatsune Miku can both be an instrument (Ōsugi, 2008) or collaborate, and through this collaboration of invention and creation "offer an experience for the individual who lets Miku perform a song on behalf of 'the self'" (Linh, 2013; Uchida, S. 2013).

One might feel that Hatsune Miku could be just a hyped-up fad. However, it is crucial to recognize that Hatsune Miku very much functions as a "communication hub" (kz, 2013), affording the expression of one's own creative activities, but featuring Miku to catch attention. This enables individuals to connect with others sharing similar interests and aspirations (Katagiri, 2013; Kawakami & Sasaki, 2013). We can imagine a creative platform called Hatsune Miku, functioning similarly to other SNS like Facebook, Twitter or YouTube. What is more, since Miku's existence is incomplete without the user's engagement, it affirms empathy. In this respect, Hatsune Miku can be understood as a multiply adaptable receptor, allowing the user to interact with others in multi-dimensional ways by filtering through Miku, acting out kyara on one's behalf.

Interestingly, Miku's popularity seems to be supported specifically by the fact that Miku is machine made, functioning as a *carte blanche*, allowing the individual a certain freedom of expression. Miku's fans and music "composers" claim that its mechanical voice is its core attraction, whereby Miku is considered a system rather than an anime character (mothy_akunop, 2013; kz, 2013).

network system and a communication platform, and that these activities involve and allow multi-dimensional collaborative forms and contexts.

Mothy_akunop (penname), creator of videos and songs featuring Hatsune Miku, enjoys a huge popularity. He considers Miku's mechanical voice as much more versatile, and more capable of delivering a "composition" than a human singer, who cannot completely eliminate the personal touch (mothy_akunop, 2013, p39).

Hatsune Miku related songs are very popular choices at karaoke bars. Kawakami Nobuo and Sasaki Wataru (2013) point out that because Miku is non-human, the individual is considered to be the original creator, no one thinking that a vocaloid can claim "to create." Katagiri Takanori (2013), the founder of pixiv,¹²⁹ which allows individuals to upload their work online, succinctly describes Hatsune Miku as "a product of the modern Internet environment." He points out that similar attempts at introducing virtual idols or vocaloids were made before, but they failed because the Internet system was not ready to support the user's demands --- sharing work with the public and interacting with others who have similar aspirations, etc. Situations like this have therefore changed: increasing numbers of online communication platforms like pixiv or Niko Niko Dōga fuel the individual's creative appetite, clearly boosting Miku's popularity.

Or include in Mark Hansen offers some pertinent comments on the complexities of this issue of human machine collaboration. He refers to multiplexing as a means of adding depth to a three-dimensional experience (the Hatsune Miku experience in this case), in a way comparable to the effect cinema had on a two-dimensional awareness. Hansen refers to the media artist, Myron Kruger, who commented that "three-dimensional space is more, not less, intuitive than two-dimensional space (...) Three-dimensional space is what we evolved to understand. It is more primitive, not more advanced [than two-dimensional space]" (cited in Hansen, M. 2006, p.3).

Machines, we can say, enable an environment that affords a "multiple reality," and when we witness the collaborations between a computer owner and a phenomenon like Hatsune Miku, we are witnessing "the fluid and functional crossings between virtual and physical realms." It defines the mixed reality of a technologically-mediated environment whose affordances in a sense are epitomised by the kyara-playing Hatsune Miku experience.

¹²⁹ Pixiv was founded in 2007, the same year Hatsune Miku was released. The website is mainly supported by the younger generation who are more familiar with digital manga.

Hatsune Miku clearly has collaborated with real humans extensively, but whilst we readily acknowledge the private theatre of the individual at home, we also have to realise Miku is called upon to perform in anything from live concerts, films, games, novels, and kabuki to featuring alongside classical orchestras.

Significantly, therefore, we must take note of the fact that those collaborations take place in a variety of settings not only limited to a cyber space, but also happening in live reality. Hatsune Miku's live concerts --- where her features are projected onto a special "transparent" monitor --- were held at one of the largest event spaces in Tokyo attracting an approximate audience of ten thousand.¹³⁰

Hatsune Miku is also invited to act as a prima donna and has performed with three hundred musicians at classical music concerts.¹³¹ Furthermore, she played the role of being the partner to the famous traditional kabuki actor, Nakamura Shidō,¹³² and their collaboration was featured alongside the catch phrase: the old meets the new --- Japanese tradition reborn via a collaboration with a vocaloid. The importance of these events is clear. We can safely assume that an engagement between the human and the machine has been accepted into the mainstream of Japanese culture, signifying also an awareness and acceptance of what Jaime del Val calls "multi-dimensional perception" (Val, 2013).

5.10.1 The 2.5 dimension: Manga and its secondary productions, spin-offs, and media-mix

In manga and anime-related forms and contexts, the fluid self as kyara-play is conducted through the 2.5 dimension, which becomes the marginal point

¹³⁰ The two-day concerts were held at Tokyo Dome in 2012, and concerts were also held in Los Angeles, Singapore, and Hong Kong, etc.

¹³¹ Tomita Isao (2013), who conducted the concert, explained that he wanted Hatsune Miku to perform as a prima donna because he sees it as a digital version of the Japanese traditional puppet theatre (ningyō jyōruri). Individuals attracted to Hatsune Miku can be found worldwide. Since the English version launched, Miku joined Lady Gaga's tour, and performed on David Letterman's US chat show, *The Late Show*, in 2013 (Hutchinson, 2014).

¹³² In 2018, the performances attracted more than 160 thousand visitors to the theatre, and six million viewers watched it via *Niko Niko Chyōkaigi* (off-line meetings) held at the Makuhari event space (Dwango, 2018).

where reality and the fictional world meets. The individual --- for example --- can wear specific costumes to play kyara at a maid or butler café,¹³³ and there are now quite a few pop-up spaces that feature reconstructed fictional scenes that originally appeared in manga or anime productions. These function as a 2.5 dimensional spaces, attractive to some individuals because they afford the possibility to actually experience the world where a fictional character lives (Ichiara, S. 2006).

An exploration of the fluid transition between a two-dimensional image and a three-dimensional object would inevitably recognise its alignment with the *mitate*-awareness. It is important to note again that the *mitate*-awareness explores the idea of the act of perceiving a thing as something else entirely --- more a matter not of the eye, but of the way one thinks --- although one is fully aware of the fact that no actual physical transformation has taken place. This somewhat obtuse logic of thinking is traditionally explored as the instigator of the flexible change in perception that allows the transformation of a two-dimensional image into a three-dimensional object, as witnessed in various forms of cultural production like kabuki and visual art.

However, in response to contemporary issues in the Japanese technologically-mediated environment, this logic of shifting one's perspective --- of allowing something to be transformed in the viewer's mind's eye into an image other than how it in fact appears "in reality" --- enters a new dimension. The subject juxtaposes a two-dimensional image and a three-dimensional object to create a 2.5 dimension, which engages specifically with the fact that the subject has learnt to perceive these shifts of intention and meaning. Indeed it could be suggested that the 2.5 dimension has demanded and enabled a new approach to seeing. These kinds of collaborations, in which a fictional character and a real human combine are widely accepted in certain circles in Japan, and certainly not as a gimmick, but as a unique work with a clear conceptual motivation.¹³⁴

¹³³ A maid café is a theatrical stage-set tea room where young girls dressed as maids offer waitress service calling customers "master," who in turn are expected to behave in a role-playing style, perhaps as the owner coming back to his home. There is also a butler's café where female customers are referred to as "princess" and are served by a man wearing a tuxedo.

¹³⁴ *Nodame Cantabile* (2001-2010) written by Ninomiya Tomoko, features a story about classical music students hoping to be successful musicians, and due to its high popularity

The critic, Ishioka Yoshiharu (2016), points out that the control methodology for the “reality-line” of a character --- making the appropriate choices for the representational method or technique used to depict the character according to sequences --- becomes a critical issue. He tells us that this approach to controlling the “reality-line” does not seek to justify suitability by the level of technological advancement it can demonstrate. But that the animator simply takes two-dimensional animation and 3D computer graphics as the available options, and so is encouraged to change the representational method of the same character according to how it will fit into a genre-specific verisimilitude (Ishioka, 2016, p.135). One can see that the idea of depicting a character differently, according to a type of verisimilitude, resonates with the idea of the subject playing *kyara* in order to fit into *seken* as both the conductor of circumstance and its milieu, guiding the way things need to be carried out. Indeed we could equate verisimilitude in anime with *seken* in society, both being the governing factor modifying circumstance.

Observing the motivation and conceptual construction behind the idea of a 2.5 dimension from an ecological point of view, we can see that fundamentally the same principle applies as it does to the interactivity between the subject and the mediated environment. We come back to a position acknowledging the influence of the *mitate*-awareness on the subject’s perception, identifying and activating a particular affordance in the processes of daily interaction with the prevailing ecological conditions. In regard to the 2.5 dimension we are discussing here, those detected affordances can take the form of cosplay, anime figures or indeed a 2.5 dimensional theatre performance.

Nevertheless it becomes apparent that the prime reason why the subject can be attracted to such transformations, is essentially because the flexible transition between a two-dimensional to a three-dimensional plane actually activates, and gives meaning to, the playing with or challenge of, one’s flexible

several CDs were also released. Those albums list the manga characters’ name as the actual performing musicians.

¹³⁵ *Show By Rock!!* (2013-) (Tokyo MX) was originally made as a rhythmic video game but has also been converted to anime. It features characters either aspiring to be, or who actually are musicians. In general they are represented in a two-dimensional animation format but when they play music, they are converted to three-dimensional computer graphics. The viewer can even assess the compatibility of the two-dimensional image and 3DCG online, just as an individual is able, for example, to check the compatibility between a manga character appearing in *A Prince of Tennis* (2003-2017) and an actor performing its 2.5 theatre play version.

change of perception in multi-dimensional spaces. The 2.5 dimension can be thought of as a shorthand for another form of kyara-play. It may not necessarily be performed by the use of the body --- performativity here taking on another aspect --- but has the added attraction of making it possible for others to take part in this interaction.

5.10.2 2.5 theatre performance

Whilst secondary creations use an established character previously featured in manga, the new trend of so-called 2.5 dimensional musical theatre performance takes another spin on kyara-play by inverting the act, such that a living human being performs as a manga character on a theatre stage.¹³⁶ Seeking to replicate as close an image as possible to the original manga character, a 2.5 dimensional theatre performance is an attempt by a human to convert “the self” into a fictional kyara.

Unlike a live action film converted from a manga or anime story, a 2.5 dimensional theatre play is a real-time, live performance that puts an actor on a platform to challenge a series of ecological conditions. How, for example, can the actor’s body, restricted by the law of gravity, replicate the endless freedom of a manga character’s movement? Or how can an image depicted in manga be recreated in a three-dimensional space, where the onlooker’s perception is not framed via panel layout?

In many ways, the success of 2.5 dimensional theatre performances is greatly enhanced by the application of the *mitate*-awareness. The physical magic of a tennis racket’s swing controlling how a tennis ball spins might, for example, be cleverly depicted by the complex use of lighting and a sound system. The viewer might be typically encouraged to intuit the total flow of movement via a *kime*-pose, a caricatured movement. Technological devices can manipulate the audience’s vision to afford the recreation of the original impression fused in the manga panel layout.

¹³⁶ This kind of attempt was already done by Takarazuka, the all-female musical theatre troupe which had been performing *The Rose of Versailles* (1972-1973), originally written as a manga story by Ikeda Riyoko. However, Takarazuka’s performance primarily focused on creating its own interpretation of the original manga, rather than being concerned with recreating an accurate image of the manga original. In this sense, what concerns this thesis --- an attempt to recreate a two-dimensional image depicted in manga by a three dimensional object --- is not focused on.

Matsuda Makoto, the producer of the play, *A Prince of Tennis* (2003-2017),¹³⁷ indeed stressed the importance of recognizing the fact that acting out a character from manga is not simply about “mimicking,” but that one needs in fact to understand how the character would behave when transformed into a human being. He tells us that when an actor needs to find some guidance in order to perform a character, the only way to find an answer is to read the original manga (Mutō, 2014).

Performing a manga character means to use a certain role-language and mimic its body language and behavioral roles. But unlike a method actor who seeks to conjure up an image marrying who the actor is with his or her own version of how a character can be, an actor performing in the 2.5 dimensional theatre has already got the character's visual and behavioural stamp. A 2.5 dimension theatre performance, in other words, is ultimately concerned with how perfectly the image represented by the original manga can be replicated;¹³⁸ the actor's own ideological intuitions about how to make sense of the character is relatively inconsequential.

A visit to a play's online website establishes this point of view straightaway. All actors replicate their manga characters' detailed looks in meticulous ways: face, hairstyle, costume, even physiognomical expressions --- there is no space allowed for “individuality” to add anything. Performing a character in the 2.5 dimension therefore “means dismissing ‘the self’ and being the character” (Satō, R. 2015). These websites can even allow the visitor to closely examine and assess the likeness of an actor to a character being played: when the visitor points a computer's cursor onto an actor's photo, it immediately switches to the original manga character's image, offering an immediate visual example of fluid identity change.¹³⁹

The act of kyara-play being explored via a 2.5 dimensional theatre performance is therefore one of many possible understandings of what kyara-play can mean to the individual. Affordance here is in the realization of an

¹³⁷ *Tennis no Ōjisama* [A prince of tennis] (Konomi, 1999-2008) is a sport manga story about how high school students win a tennis competition.

¹³⁸ Although a 2.5 dimensional theatre play is a relatively new trend starting from 2003, its popularity is constantly increasing. In 2013, seventy theatre plays were broadcast, and attracted an audience of more than 1.6 million. In 2016, AiiA, a theatre dedicated to 2.5 dimensional theatre plays was opened in Tokyo.

¹³⁹ See <https://www.tennimu.com/cast/>.

environment designed to bring a two-dimensional anime character into the realm of three-dimensional performance. The actor in these settings, being purposefully engaged in “self-obliteration,” is granted a particular affordance within the technology of the theatre space in order to replicate a non-living manga character.¹⁴⁰

This is not comparable to acting-roles outside the specifics of 2.5 dimensional theatre. In most acting engagements “the self” of the actor is preferably clear to the audience --- this is an actor acting. In 2.5 theatre, interpretation is not an actor’s goal: the exactness of the “part” has already been set in the manga itself. The *kyara-play*, therefore, resides in the transformation, witnessed by the audience, of a human into an anime character, and as Iwashita Hosei bears witness, the audience is able to enjoy this flexible switch between a two and three-dimension (Iwashita, H. 2015).

5.11 Kyara-play and Ishiguro and Hirata’s robot theatre performance

Visual representation is clearly a vital factor necessary to express and validate the act of *kyara-play*, and we have recognised that it can come to life either by capturing a caricatured movement (*kime-pose*), or by meticulously evoking the details of its original as we have seen in our previous discussion of 2.5 theatre.

However, in the case of robots --- which, we must acknowledge, are being increasingly folded into contemporary Japanese life --- the instance of visual representation takes on a different complexity. It stands as it were at the crossroads of another affordance in the potential theatrics of the subject dealing with and interacting with a fictional entity. The issue here is one of communication between the non-living and the living being, similar to the instances of the *kyara-playing* dynamic between a two-dimensional manga character and the three-dimensional theatre environment we previously looked into. We are examining the same protocol here: how the human engages with a robotic environment and detects affordance. *Kyara-play* --- as we will see with

¹⁴⁰ Yanai Kenji points out that although 2.5 dimensional theatre plays impose on each actor the suppression of individuality, they inevitably involve improvisations that do not exist in the original manga. This invites the audience to constantly shift its vision between two-dimensional (i.e. what one remembers seeing in the original manga) and three-dimensional (i.e. what one is watching as its theatre conversion), positioning a 2.5 dimension which becomes the conversion point between two and three-dimensionality (Yanai, 2015).

Ishiguro's work --- becomes the vehicle to explore this relationship from both sides, offering opportunities for the development of technique for each.

We can readily acknowledge that the visual appearance of a robot can affect the subject's ability and willingness to communicate with it or not, and there have been ongoing debates as to whether an android --- which we will define as a robot having a visually anonymous, non-resemblance to a human --- in fact enhances or obstructs communication with individuals.¹⁴¹

The issue of Human Robot Interactions (HRI) --- what affects a human's willingness to communicate with a robot --- is a widely discussed agenda, and there have been numerous attempts to search for a way to improve communication between the two. David Hansen (2009), for example, creates robots that can mimic human expression and emotion. Juzheng Zhang, Jianmin Zheng and Nadia Thaimann (2015) create a humanoid resembling humans, believing that similar looks will enhance communication between the two. Guy Hoffman (2011) or the artist Louis-Philippe Demers (2016) think that a robot's look is not so important, but that action coordination in robotics holds a vital key for improving HRI.¹⁴²

One can note that those analyses are based on what commentators expect a robot to represent in value or meaning. What a robot scientist or a commentator detects as affordance we can say mirrors his or her understanding of the nature of the relationship between the subject and the environment. Indeed, the Japanese robot scientist, Ishiguro Hiroshi, sees that "communicativity" with a robot can be improved in two ways: by an emphasis on the robot's specific character via caricatured features; or programming a robot to perform differently according to circumstances, just as humans do.

We could argue here that his work can be held as a series of experiments with the concept of kyara-play through the use of a unique device, the robot. Ishiguro points out that what we imagine as "human likeness" is in fact a learnt

¹⁴¹ The concept of "uncanny valley" defines the point at which a human's feeling towards a look-alike robot turns into an uncanny feeling when the presumed-human is detected in fact as an android (Kageki, 2012).

¹⁴² Meanwhile, Patrick Lin (2012) is concerned that "ethical issues" relating to robots would develop HRI, and so scrutinizes various topics ranging through social, cultural, sexual, legal and economical issues as possible links for improving interaction. Some of commentators --- such as James Hughes (2011) --- even go further, suggesting that Buddhist-doctrine-inspired "selfless robots" would promise the future development of HRI.

behaviour, and it is not, consequently, an inherited element that only a human can achieve. Ishiguro's claim is that a human life can be understood as being built upon a vast number of theatrical performances, and from our earliest days we all have to learn and practice how to act according to circumstances throughout our everyday life experiences (Ishiguro, H. 2015a, p.49). Ishiguro has come to realize that "human likeness" in the way we imagine "having a human quality such as emotion" would be, is basically validated by one's behavior. Indeed, we might say life can be all about a visually demonstrated series of performances --- what we term kyara-play. Ishiguro therefore believes that androids can also be seen as "having emotion," if they learn how to act differently in order to adapt to circumstances. In other words, we could say, if they learn to play kyara.

Ishiguro creates various types of robots, from a "geminoid," which is an android that has a striking resemblance to a specific human model, to a "telenoid," which, only having a torso, has a barely recognizable human appearance. Ishiguro's intention is to develop robots which are suitable for various tasks, and accomplish certain circumstantial requirements. A telenoid, for example, functions like a mobile phone, but has the shape of a torso, not a rectangular. It can be understood as an anthropomorphic machine, since it is specifically designed to keep a neutral appearance --- without gender or age-specified features. Its appearance effectively morphs into the image of whoever speaks out from the telenoid (Ishiguro, H. 2015b, p381). Ishiguro thinks that because a telenoid has such an obscure appearance, it enables the subject to project a desirable image onto it. This vision aligns him with the mitate-awareness, granting to the robot that which might almost not be there. Because of this sensibility he is able to identify a particular affordance, the idea of kyara-play, which opens the possibility for an android to be seen as both communicative and having emotion. One may also say that by using a robot, Ishiguro is exploring how ecological conditions influence the ways the subject interacts with the mediated environment, this being the blueprint for his continuing studies with robot behaviour.

Ishiguro's pragmatic approach to language-use also crucially mirrors how Japanese language-use places an emphasis on one's performativity in relation to a space. He points out that the impact of dealing with the Japanese language nurtures a certain awareness influencing one's cognitive abilities

(Ishiguro & Ikegami, 2016; Hirata & Ishiguro, 2010), and in his collaborations with the theatre director, Hirata, he is able to experiment with these ideas. Ishiguro and Hirata share the same vision: that the subject learns to behave, and becomes a human, seen as having a communicable *kokoro* (soul) (Hirata & Ishiguro, 2010). Not denying humans have a soul, they nevertheless stress the importance of recognizing that the subject, or a robot, can learn or be programmed to be seen as having communication abilities --- which they equate with a "soul." The two, Ishiguro and Hirata, have since 2008 been directing "android theatre performances," theatre plays featuring collaborations between human actors and the androids they perform with.

Working with Ishiguro, Hirata directs a mix of humans and robots as actors in their theatre plays. Hirata denies the value of "the Stanislavski system," which is applied by method actors claiming that an actor's innate or inherent ability to act, stamps the impression of reality onto a theatre play. Hirata's aim, on the other hand, is to demonstrate that the impression of "realness" can be achieved by specific instructions, rather than through any communicability of the soul (Hirata, Ishiguro & Kinsui, 2010).

Fundamentally, Hirata directs human actors and robots in the same way. The only differences we can find is an adjustment of body movement or speech tempo, verbally instructed by Hirata to human actors, whilst a programmer inputs data into computers for robots (Hirata & Ishiguro, 2010, pp18-19, 54-55). His specific direction method involves detailed observations of how the subject learns to speak and communicate using the Japanese language (Hirata, 2004/2015). He places a great emphasis on the ways Japanese language-use can constantly require the individual to read air, demanding one to signpost one's thinking via an awareness of social body-language protocols (Hirata, 2015; Inoue & Hirata, 2003). Hirata advocates what he calls the "Contemporary Colloquial Theatre Theory" (CCTT), proclaiming that language-use critically influences the nature of communication by implicitly, yet totally, enveloping the meanings of communication, not just by what one says or not, but by its nuances "floating in air," holding a vital key.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Hirata (2004/2015) draws our attention to the fact that the Japanese linguistic system allows flexible changes of word order. This is one reason why the Japanese individual may think speech used in daily-life is different from the language used elsewhere, a translated theatre script, for example, originally written in English.

Hirata particularly encourages an actor to pay attention to "*danchyōritsu*" --- "a gap" in a conversation created by the use of certain words which have no specific meaning (in English, we could think of "oh..." "well..." as examples). His focus is to "plant" or "feed" an affordance --- as "air" --- detectable in conversations to activate a certain reaction in his play. The use of *danchyōritsu* makes both the actor and the robot appear to be in real communication, mirroring the ways the individual detects affordance in everyday conversations by reading air.

In this way, unlike much standardized acting direction, which encourages an actor to perform from the somewhat ambiguous "inner-being within," CCTT goes to the diametrical opposite of giving precise instructions for an actor's body movement, articulating impact further by specifying the exact timing and duration of speech on stage (Ishiguro, H. 2015; Senda, 2007).

We must note here that the use of robots makes the effectiveness of Hirata's direction method more explicit. A mechanical artifact, a robot, is a blank page, unlike a human actor. We might convince ourselves that a human's innate abilities make the play appear to be real, but as Nakanishi Osamu (2013b) describes, Hirata's theatre plays are based on "relations." When someone sees "realness" in a robot, it is not because its appearance morphs into human form, but because the ways a robot responds to circumstances "relationally" gives the illusion of reality.

Goan Miki (2006) argues that Hirata's direction method can be understood as incorporating the ecological psychologists' concept of "micro-slip"¹⁴⁴ --- a slight caution-delay of movement which we habitually develop through everyday life activities. Goan draws our attention to the fact that Hirata often plants an occurrence of micro-slips by giving a specific instruction to an actor: to delay one's body movement by 0.3 seconds, stepping forward by 30 inches, etc. This planting of micro-slips greatly enhances the naturalness of an actor's movement. Micro-slips are known to highlight the gap between human and machine action patterns (Kobayashi & Yasuda, 2007), and Hirata's approach

¹⁴⁴ The concept of micro-slip is developed by ecological psychologists Reed and Désirée Schoenherr (1992), who refer to the fact that the subject generally hesitates, delays, or poses a second (normally 0.3 second) before one achieves a certain task, such as picking up a teacup.

facilitates audience appreciation of a robot's acting and communication abilities.

Thinking the act itself carries importance, Hirata's theatre direction takes a pragmatic approach whereby specific precision is reflected in his choice of robot to suit the narrative. For the play entitled *I, worker* (2008), Hirata uses wakamaru, a robot with a typically bulky, mechanical appearance. The play features two couples --- of robots and humans --- and we are told that both husbands have lost their will to work. This scenario sets up poignant implications. On one hand, a human withdrawing from social communication touches upon the serious social problem known as *hikikomori* --- individuals who lock themselves in their home for 24 hours a day, 365 days per year, a phenomenon which has been happening in Japan for decades (Sone, 2017, p.105). On the other hand, a robot specifically made for labour, is rendered worthless once losing its abilities, a situation that summons all the social, ethical and political issues surrounding robotics.

Instead of seeking a way for robots to replicate humans, Hirata's *Sayonara* (2008) offers the alternative of how robots may coexist with humans. The play is about a young woman who, suffering from a terminal illness, has a female geminoid that reads poetry to her. After the death of the young woman, we wonder about the value or purpose of the robot, only to discover that the geminoid has been asked to read poetry in Fukushima, where thousands of people died after nuclear explosions. Here we acknowledge the powerful image of a robot that can take up a mission which humans cannot accomplish.

Certain commentators want to establish whether Hirata's work shows how robots are able to introduce a new media dramaturgy to theatre performances (Eckersall, 2015; D'Cruz, 2014; Poulton, 2014), or whether he is making robots appear to be real (Hibino, 2012; Kimura Y. 2017; Nestruck, 2013). However, their comments fall somewhat short, evaluating Hirata's work without recognizing that it reflects the milieu of contemporary Japan, whilst addressing its engagement with the ethical issues of robotics.

We can sympathize with Miyake Akiyoshi (2016), who suggests that Hirata's theatre plays aim to depict circumstances which are reflective of the mediated environment rather than being simply a series of actions taking place. Miyake describes a character appearing in Hirata's work as "an anonymous self" embodied through dealing with *seken*. Hirata himself once pointed out that "a

human may not necessarily give a subjective view as we are also made to speak by our environment" (Hirata, 2004). We can allow ourselves to speculate that Hirata, positioning himself as a distant observer, simply shows "what it is to be human" by tracing how the subject interacts with a robot-mediated environment.

5.12 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter we have been looking into the effect of the ubiquitous *mitate*-awareness, integrated with ecological optics to influence both the creator and the reader of manga and the products -- anime, spin-offs, 2.5 theatre -- that are developed from it. As we have seen in previous chapters, the *mitate*-awareness is the primary trigger that invites the subject to detect particular kinds of affordances, which in turn lead to *kyara*-play. In relation to manga, these affordances are essentially no different, being triggered by the perceptive processes which here enable both the creator and the viewer to interact with the complexities of shifting dimensions, and indeed shifts between the human and the non-human (fictional or robotic). Equivocal functions and flexible adaptabilities are here just as they are in the open social world of *ba*.

Indeed, the impact of technology is manifested through *kyara*-play in relation to manga and its related products. We can recognise that a character from these fictions, placed in the artificial environment of a theatre, may be granted more flexibility and options for exploring the idea of *kyara*-play. Indeed, the freedoms offered in switching from a two-dimensional image to a three-dimensional being, or in the 2.5 dimensional world of android theatre, are more than a human might otherwise experiment with.

To reiterate: the function of the 2.5 theatre is to provide an arena whereby explorations in contrived circumstances can be witnessed by an audience, keen on seeing a *mitate* identity put under the microscope. In the manga/anime culture and its offshoots, the creator detects affordance in the technologies offered, and presents a character according to genre specific verisimilitude. One can recognise that this idea reflects how the subject is encouraged to play *kyara* in order to fit into *seken* --- *seken* being the theatre demanding role-play, another reality defined by its ecological condition. Manga and its various spin-offs are essentially a source for other forms of affordance, and these forms

--- as we have seen --- now deliberately involve studies in the world of robots.

The next chapter will engage an ecological art critique to demonstrate how the two artists, Murakami and Aida, are both greatly inspired by manga and anime. Both explore the possibilities of kyara-play throughout their work, and we will see how they conduct their lives as artists-in-the-world in relation to Japanese ecological conditions.

Chapter 6 Pulling the threads together: An ecological art critique of Murakami Takashi's "Superflat" and Aida Makoto's "Monument for Nothing"

6.1 Introduction to an ecological art critique

Throughout this thesis we have looked at how ecological conditions influence the ways the subject perceives and makes sense of the world he or she engages with. In the case of Japan, this constant interaction between the subject and the surrounding environment is manifested as a catalyst for circumselves --- the defining of the self in regard to circumstance --- enacted via the various strategies of kyara-play.

Looking briefly back over the chapters, we can see that chapter two examined the main groundwork analyzing how the performativity of kyara-play emerges in the due course of dealing with the very much alive and all pervasive concept of *seken*. This performativity allows the *assemblage* of those heterogeneous individuals to integrate with the various mediums of social infrastructure --- primarily mass media and the proliferation of technology. Kyara-play is empowered as a coping mechanism for the individual to deal with Japanese demographic changes, and through the daily complexity of these negotiation processes forms a milieu, which encourages the enactment of kyara-play. In chapter three, we examined how Gibson's theory of affordance helped us to understand that playing kyara is a means of improvising with the ecological conditions via the use of multimodal perceptions. With this intact we were able to recognise that kyara-play reflects both universal generalities as recognizable, mutually interdependent relationships between the subject and the environment; and specificities, which emerge as a result of dealing with those particular and influentially charged elements of Japanese ecological conditions.

Language enables kyara-play to extend its influence, and in chapter four we looked at how the use of Japanese language is crucial to shaping the subject's perceptions, acknowledging the impact of verbal thinking on visual thinking. It offers a clear explanation of how Japanese language-use promotes the *mitate*-awareness, which nurtures in the subject a propensity for pooling

multiple interpretations of social and cultural specificities, encouraging the perception of language as image. We could say that language is not static but is actually a transformative medium. Through its use, the subject detects a new affordance, seeing it as both image and as a definer of meanings.

Chapter five closely examined the Japanese visual cultural formations of manga and media-mixed activities, recognizing their impact as kyara-play inspirations in multi-dimensional forms and contexts. We saw how, incorporated with existent advanced technologies, the idea of kyara-play is spreading extensively, a process that continuously reconfigures Japanese cultural identities.

In this chapter six we will be able to trace how those various components, integral to the Japanese ecological conditions we looked at in the previous chapters, help us to understand those mechanisms --- both tacit and otherwise --- that enable the subject to detect the particular affordances arrived at during the complex processes of engaging with the mediated environment.

To pinpoint how these medial processes can take place in Japanese life, I have chosen to examine the activities of two contemporary artists, Murakami Takashi and Aida Makoto. The nature of their actual artwork and related activities help us trace how the living environment they inhabit influences their perceptions and definitions of the self. We will be able to see therefore how artistic vision and the rigour of life choices combine and find their way into image-making, furnishing us with a primary platform for our agenda of an ecological art critique. Indeed an examination of these two artists enables a comparison and analysis of the kind of affordances they detect in the processes of making their work. Profoundly aware of being contemporary Japanese artists, they both share certain fundamental similarities of intention and vision in their need to create work that reflects what they perceive to be the reality of Japan, or what can mirror reality for people in present day Japan (Aida & Murakami, 2013, p.63; Aida, M. 2012a; Murakami, T. 2012a). With a web of intersecting threads, both in their backgrounds and in their working lives, we can thereby assess whether or not they will detect a similar affordance, and register how they respond.

In fact both artists were born in the 1960's, and belong to the generation that experienced a series of geopolitically significant incidents, sharing the socio-culturally prominent phenomena that happened in the decades since.

Kyara-play emerged out of a milieu that was undergoing significant transitional processes. Of life defining importance to both Aida and Murakami was the dramatic shift in the Japanese demographic, occurring after the economic bubble that boosted Japan internationally burst in the years between 1991 and 1993. The consequence has been a period of prolonged economic reticence ever since, and we will be able to recognize how this translated into a difference in response from each artist.

Other significant events also triggered responses from the two artists. One of the prime incidents was the 1995 Tokyo subway attack by the Aum cult sect, which created panic, paranoia, and feelings of hopelessness in many people. The animation film often referred to by Murakami, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995-1996),¹⁴⁵ captures these responses sharply, and in itself became a cult-phenomenon (Miyadai, 1995; Murakami, H. 1997; Murakami, T. 2005). Similarly the Tohoku Earthquake and nuclear disaster of 2007 were huge occurrences for the Japanese nation, as we will see, and illicit striking responses from each artist.

From the early 1990's, personal computers became available to the public, shaping the ways we communicate and express ourselves. For Murakami and Aida --- perhaps especially for Murakami --- there is no doubt that the invention of computer cyber systems re-defined their creative methodology, and of course had a huge impact on the practical issues of running an art business on a domestic and global level.

Using this ever constant pulse between ecological data and the artists' perceptions and actions, this chapter is able to introduce an "ecological art critique" to open up a fresh possibility for understanding what art is and how it comes into existence. Unlike discourse analysis, which would evaluate a work of art's aesthetic or commercial values, our aim is to detect a new affordance in art. We intend therefore to view art as a medium which allows us to recognise how an ecological overview --- which would of course include demographic changes and indeed its metadata --- affects an artist's work as well as the ways the two artists, in our case here, might position themselves in relation to kyara-play.

An ecological art critique consequently can illuminate the fact that although the two artists share similar living experiences, their stand positions ---

¹⁴⁵ Anno, Hideaki. (1995-1996). *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Japan: TV Asahi.

what their art is, and where, how, and to whom they want to show their work --- have to be taken as one of the crucial deciding factors influencing their artistic endeavor. Being able to focus on such public figures as case studies enables us, for example, to trace the influence of the *mitate*-awareness in their work, or how they use *kyara*-play to present themselves to the public. We can also confirm a basic ground rule: similar circumstances but maybe different affordances; or similar affordances but perhaps perceived differently according to fluctuating circumstances.

To pull together the main threads of this thesis to reflect the complex improvisation of an artist's engagement with art-making, (Withagen & Chemero, 2012; Withagen & Kamp, 2018), it is perhaps advisable to have an insight into their working environment and some essential background information. We need to know where the two artists hold their stand positions in relation to the domestic and global art scenes, and to realize just what their artistic endeavours actually are.

We should acknowledge from the start what the implications are, to be a Japanese contemporary artist in both the domestic and the global art market, especially as the Western concept of art has been defined quite differently in Japan.

We will take Gibson's affordance as the key vehicle for crystallizing what kinds of affordance Murakami and Aida detect in the processes of making their work, and investigate their reasons so doing. And we will be analyzing certain of their work, comments, and activities in order to trace the influence those crucial key themes of this thesis --- *kyara*-play, the *mitate*-awareness, the impact of history, language and technologies onto subjectivities --- played in their decision making. Propelled by these conductive forces Murakami and Aida were able to take certain actions, inspired to choose particular material or creative methods for making their work, and able to represent their work in specific ways according to prevailing circumstances.

Doubtless the two artists have never thought about their work or themselves via the filter of affordance, but it is our concern here to validate how affordance processes the approach each makes to identify particular meanings or values in the environment. We can consider that this attunement transmits their negotiation of Japanese cultural identities and subjectivities through the act of making art.

6.2.1 A contemporary artist's playground: What is art in Japan?

When we come to consider the position Murakami and Aida hold as Japanese artists, one thing above all others becomes apparent: they both play kyara through their work, choosing and demanding an extraordinary flexibility within it that allows them to do just that. Murakami plays multiple kyara, offering a kind of blueprint for the kyara-playing Japanese individual. He appears to detect a positive affordance in it, commenting that,

After all, being an artist is like being a geisha, so it is probably easier to set up your kyara [...] intuiting the fact that an artist is often expected to perform as a clown. One can be successful up to a certain level, and this is demonstrated by myself and [another well known Japanese contemporary artist] Nara [Yoshitomo] (Murakami & Sawaragi, 2006, p.59).

Seeing it as a versatile medium, a tool to enable him to achieve his creative goals, Murakami also uses kyara-play to promote himself as an influential figure in the domestic and international art scenes. Amongst other things, we know he performs the role of a successful contemporary Japanese artist in the global art market, an art teacher, a gallerist, a business entrepreneur,¹⁴⁶ and an animator.

We will see that Aida, on the other hand, approaches the idea of kyara-play as a way of disclosing hidden agendas, unspoken social protocols or stigmas. His played kyara often invites controversy, being seen as criticism or parody, or taken as sarcasm. Aida is also known as a talented writer,¹⁴⁷ an ex-bar owner,¹⁴⁸ an occasional educator, and a performance artist. Yet he appears to have no premeditated career plan nor any aspiration to promote himself as a multi-tasking, skillful kyara-player. In contrast to Murakami, Aida's focus is firmly fixed in the domestic art scene, and he refuses to play the expected artist role in the global art market.

¹⁴⁶ Murakami even wrote the artists' self-help, business manual, *Geijitsu kigyōron* (2006), offering an extensive business plan on how to be successful in the art market.

¹⁴⁷ Aida wrote a personal memoir (1995), but also published two books containing selective essays which reveal aspects of his domestic life (Aida, M. 2012b/2015).

¹⁴⁸ Aida ran a tiny bar between 2011 to 2012 called *Geijitsu Kōminkan*, in Shinjuku, Tokyo city, as a communication space for artists.

Affordance is perceived according to one's needs and decisions, and indeed the art market as environment becomes the arena of their own choosing. We observe that kyara-play becomes the means by which each can negotiate in a sense their personal ambitions and perspectives, but can witness more intimately how each deals with the daily constructs of being an artist in the contemporary world. We could perhaps think of Murakami and Aida playing multiple kyara almost as a means of defining the *soto* (outside) and *uchi* (inside) of Japanese art --- one the outgoing, international art market playing artist with an eye for strategy; the other the nation's insider homeboy, welcomed by a Japanese public he often chooses to shock. Interestingly they both reflect the mechanics of kyara-play --- the need to, as it were, read the air of the art scene they consider relevant to themselves, and then formulate strategies and decisions as to which kyara their work may take. In so doing, they are necessarily also reflecting an aspiration for "the fluid self," using their own bodies as a medium to enact circumselves.¹⁴⁹

The fact that Murakami and Aida consider themselves to be heavily influenced by Japanese art and subculture is not a fact we can readily take for granted. To distinguish their work from the Western concept of art, we need to acknowledge the fact that this Western concept was first introduced into Japan in the Meiji restoration period at the end of the 19th century as a part of the nation's drive towards modernization (Sawaragi, 2001b; Tsuji, N. 2005).

The art historian Tsuji Nobuo (2005) tells us that historically, Japanese art was considered to be a part of "*geinō*" covering a range of creative activities that included painting, dance, theatre performance, and what the West would term "craft" disciplines like pottery making and flower arranging etc. Essentially therefore, the Japanese way of thinking about art was profoundly different from the Western concept, which at the time specifically referred to painting and sculpture. To make this point explicit, Aida and Murakami also point out that

¹⁴⁹ Murakami constantly runs multiple projects, shifting his role simultaneously: being an art collector, he exhibited at the Yokohama Art museum an eclectic mix of more than 5000 Japanese old masters' works, Eastern Asia and European antiques as well as contemporary works by artists like Anselm Kiefer (Suzuki, Yoshio, 2016). He also maintains a collaboration with a sake maker and designs the bottles (Hasegawa, A. 2016), and runs a café "Bar Zingaro." Aida, on the other hand, writes novels, occasionally cooks for audiences who attend his talks at Bigakkō, and is still an executive director of the Alternative Puppet Theatre GEKIDAN★SHIKI run by Okada Yūko (his wife).

multiple terms are used to define the word “art” in Japan (i.e. アート、芸術、現代美術, ART). Factors like this succinctly reveal that historical issues still imply a notion of art which can be interpreted differently according to context. Interestingly enough, they also stress that having such an unsophisticated cultural heritage has affected their status as contemporary artists in the global era (Aida, M. 2013b; Murakami, T. 2006a/2009a/2012c; Aida & Murakami, 2013; Murakami, T. 2010a; Murakami & Andō, 2015). They are indeed fully aware of the *uchi* and *soto* of their art world predicament.

Clearly, awareness of this historical background would be the critical reason why Murakami’s prime intent seems to be to identify himself as a contemporary artist actively exhibiting work internationally. Aida, on the other hand, prefers to refer to himself as a “*geijutsuka*,” imagining himself to be an individual who is neither an academic nor an entertainer, but is able to create works reflecting the reality of contemporary Japanese society (Aida, 2011, p.46). Aida’s specific use here of a Japanese reference --- the kyara name *geijutsuka* --- confirms that he considers himself primarily as a “local first” artist (Munro, 2016; Holmberg, 2016).

The sociologist Adrian Favell (2013a) points out that commercial interests in contemporary art culture are driven by the regulatory norm of the contemporary international art market, with its tendency to value stereotypical national characteristics articulated through an artist’s work as well as by the artist’s presence. With the themes and sensibility of this thesis in mind, we can perhaps interpret this as implementing a set of strategies that parallel a form of “institutionalized” normative kyara-play. In its crudest sense we might say this about playing the part and making the art.

Many artists involved in the art market have to make pros and cons choices about their predicament in this regard. Indeed, we can see throughout the history of art, there are mixed reviews from art critics placing support or not, and endeavouring to anticipate the value of artwork from nation type (Greenberg, 1961), ethnicity (McEvelley, 2003) and gender issues (Nochlin, 1971).

Dealing with an international art market’s expectations, and the possible needs to “exoticize” where it can, to foster a marketable product (Onol, 2015; Quemin, 2015; Tikhonova, 2010), an artist can feel the pressure to self-orientalise or express stereotypical national traits in his or her work. We can

cite the recent influx of Chinese art into the Western art market as an example, involving the conceptualizing of work either through using publicly known iconic images or via offering an accessible artistic concept to the viewer, contextualising the image to make it more palatable to Western appetites. Both have their dangers.

Winnie Wong's statement of "staging Chinese-ness" (Wong, 2007) is confirmed by Hou Hanru, who argues that catering to the Western desire to see Chinese artists critiquing Chinese Communism by simply using iconic images well-known in the West --- Mao portraits, Communist memorabilia, Chinese landmarks, etc. --- would create a stereotypical national character, leading consequently to a misunderstanding both of Chinese artists and their art (Gaskell, 2012; Marsden, 2015).

Favell (2013a) offers as an example artists like Ai Weiwei, who personally struggles relentlessly to undermine Chinese state control; or Sudoch Gupta's sculptures formed out of cheap cookery pots emblematic of the poor living conditions of much of India. They produce, Favell points out, those "very nationally specific icons and images of their home countries that could be easily packaged into simple sociological lessons about exotic (...) locations to curious Western viewers and buyers," and tells us that this is how "the cosmopolitan of the new global art" is carefully chosen, curated, and promoted by a handful of people with the power to operate the entire art market system (Favell, 2013a, p.84).

A reputation abroad can help artists gain credibility in their domestic art scene, corroborating the insidious hierarchical system that values foreign culture and products over domestic ones. Favell elicits particular concerns on this matter, tracing how a good reputation abroad would qualify a Japanese artist as a successful contemporary artist in the domestic scene,¹⁵⁰ and expresses his frustrations for someone like Aida, who is a rare expression of the

¹⁵⁰ Indeed, almost all known Japanese artists --- Morimura Yasumasa, Kusama Yayoi, Mori Mariko, Yanagi Miwa are examples --- were originally *discovered* by Western art curators, and this clearly encouraged appreciation in their domestic art market. Morimura Yasumasa for example, the first Japanese artist to be invited by the prestigious Venice Biennale in 1988, recalls that he was virtually unknown in Japan until the Japanese art people heard that his work was well received in the West. He tells us "they were perplexed, but felt obliged to accept my reputation in the West as a stamp of approval for me to be considered a proper contemporary artist" (Murakami & Morimura, 1990, p.98).

reverse: considered to be one of the most influential artists in Japan today, but little known internationally (Favell, 2015).¹⁵¹

These are extremely complex issues, but we need to register the fact that Murakami and Aida respond to the idea of playing the expected stereotypical Japanese role differently, although, in recognising their nationality as the core creative inspiration, they share a similar artistic endeavour.

To anticipate their ambivalence towards the global art market, we can look at the kinds of experiences that have shaped them as artists, and their consequent understanding of art. We will therefore look into how the Western concept of contemporary art was promoted as a part of Japan's drive towards modernization, and, more specifically, via consumerism and Americanisation.

6.2.2 Consuming contemporary art at a department-store museum

Japan's deep-seated but readily acknowledged Western complex probably has its historical roots in the Meiji Restoration, when modernization was equated with the superiority of Western values. The consequent necessity of a stamp of approval granted by the West over any Japanese recognition is an issue still registered today. Although there are some artists rebelling against this, the distinction between high art as Western art, standing in contrast to "mere" Japanese art, highlights this dichotomy (Sawaragi, 1998/2006).

Both Aida and Murakami verify that their inspiration comes from what were considered at the time the subcultures of manga and anime. Indeed at the time they started their artistic careers, it took a courageous vision to incorporate manga and anime into artwork because they were certainly considered to have less cultural significance (Koide, 2016; Sawaragi & Itō, 2006), being typecast as meaningless (Yamashita, 2000), mass-produced trash entertainment.¹⁵² Before

¹⁵¹ In 2013, when the Mori Museum was preparing for Aida's exhibition, they could not raise enough funding from corporate businesses which were skeptical about supporting Aida's work. Aida and the museum eventually raised public donations of ¥34,550,000 (approx. £238,270 @ 145), given by 1,689 individuals, indicating that his work is certainly well-received amongst some (significant numbers of) Japanese.

¹⁵² Murakami recalls that some of his artist friends were so dismissive when they found him presenting the anime-style "kyaracter" DOB in a gallery (Murakami, T. 2012f), that they ended their friendship. Similarly, when Aida presented work featuring manga-esque characters, his supervisor completely disowned him as his pupil, called him a loser, and said there was no point him studying art at the university (Aida, M. 2016).

2000, at the time Murakami and Aida were studying art at university, there were virtually no schools or even courses treating manga or anime as a subject for study (Koide, 2016; Sakai, C. 2006). Moreover, up until a decade ago, there were only a handful of academic works and of course no libraries or museums dedicated to them.¹⁵³

This condemnation stands in serious contradiction to present-day Japanese government policies promoting anime and manga with pride as a Japanese soft power. As Murakami and Aida discovered when they started to question what Japanese contemporary art had made of itself, and what exactly its origins were, it has taken time for the establishment to accept that the nation's subcultures, and manga and anime in particular, have roots sown in the traditional arts of *kibyōshi*, *ukiyo-e*, etc. created during the Edo period.

Interestingly, despite the truth of these multiple factors, manga and anime have always been popular. The industry has steadily increased its profit over several decades, and has now reached a 20 billion dollar profit margin (Nakase, 2018). Their cultural value was simply denied and delegated to the realms of non-academic, disposable leisure, in comparison to the elevated status given blindly to imported Western arts.

Indeed Murakami and Aida's formative experiences of how art was actually presented to the Japanese public is revelatory. The history of the department-store museum becomes extremely important in helping us understand why the Japanese concept of art is often considered to have a certain bias towards commercialism and Americanization. Komori Masaki (2011) notes that due to the complex socio-cultural and historical conditions that were the backdrop for such a lack of institutional art exhibition space, Japanese department stores took the initiative to provide their own version, and since the early twentieth century, supported the Japanese government's national cultural programmes.

This so-called department-store museum emerged in Japan during the 1970's, and began to popularise the arts, functioning as a leader and inspiration in the contemporary Japanese art world. It is interesting to note that these museums typically did not possess any permanent collection themselves, and functioned as a rental space for a project-based exhibition brought in from

¹⁵³ The first Japanese general comics museum is the Kyoto International Manga Museum, opened in 2006.

outside sources. These exhibitions were usually organized by the cultural department of major media outlets such as the Nikkei, Asahi, Mainichi or Yomiuri newspapers, or the national broadcaster NHK. Their main incentive was clear: to achieve commercial success above any educational ambitions, and this was the precise reason why they tended to focus their programmes on blockbusters of classical European art along with Japanese old masters, that would guarantee crowd success and generate profit, especially if touring the country via the store's national chain. Loud and clear, those exhibition organizers took full advantage of being high in the mass media, setting up various promotional campaigns to achieve their target (Keehan, 2017; Murata, 1999; Kanno, Y. 2007; Shiga, K. 2018).

It is also important to observe that the leader of the department-store museums, Sezon,¹⁵⁴ playing such a strong role in introducing contemporary art, in fact had a strong incentive to promote contemporary American art in the 1980's and early 1990's (Komori, M. 2011). The reason Murakami created his Mickey Mouse self-portrait *Mr. DOB* (1993), an acronym of "*doboshite doboshite oshyamanbe*" (which is a gobbledygook way of simply saying "why"), offers an acute insight into such a situation. He tells us that *Mr. DOB* was his response to what he called the "embarrassing" situation of the Japanese art public's sycophantic admiration for the "message art" of American artist Barbara Kruger, "appreciated" simply because she was popular in the USA (Murakami, T. 2002).

We can of course speculate about how the Western concept of art is often associated with commercialism linked to the mass media, having then a value justified by its marketability. This would be precisely why even anti-authoritarian, anti-art market "pop-art" propaganda, originally proposed by the U.K. artist Richard Hamilton (1982),¹⁵⁵ and Barbara Kruger's anti-media indoctrination messages became inverted ironically into sales talk by the Japanese media as scripts for promoting Americanisation.

¹⁵⁴ Seibu department store opened its "Sezon museum" in 1975.

¹⁵⁵ In a letter written in 1957, Hamilton states how a general Western understanding of art is driven by a denial of popular culture which is seen as expendable, aimed at youth, mass-produced, gimmicky, etc.

6.3.1 Playing the kyara of an artist

We will make the case for viewing both the processes of making a work of art and the negotiations needed to show the finished product itself, as well, of course, as the artist, who makes most of the choices involved in both. The artist, we will see, is inextricably bound up in the complex interactivity between subject and circumstance that defines kyara-play and circumselves. In this arena, circumstance becomes a defining factor in choices to be made, and choices made inevitably determine circumstance. We are talking about intentions, subjects chosen for the work itself, materials used, galleries and countries chosen, meetings arranged etc.; a vast complex of affordances into which Japanese specificities are thrust.

Both Aida and Murakami, for example, recognize the impact of the global art market on their work and indeed on their stand positions. Different artistic motives as well as personal preferences however, lead to the detection of different kinds of affordance even in subject matter which can embody Japanese cultural identities. Inevitably both artists acknowledge, but approach the idea of kyara-play differently.

6.3.2 Murakami: *DOB*, cultural ambassador

Murakami is a maestro of kyara-player. He is very adroit at choosing which kyara to play according to his needs, finding effective ways of dealing with the demands of his various trades --- the artwork, commercial design, animation --- skillfully skimming off the cream of accessible Japanese cute and pop culture.

Claiming that all images are empty, because they are mediated, Murakami's interest is not only to contextualize images presented in his work as a means thereby of giving substance and instruction towards an interpretation from the viewer, but also to focus on contextualizing his self-portraiture images according to the specifics of the art scene. We can trace how his vision of the self is influenced by the environment of Americanisation he grew up in. Murakami proclaims that the series of images he created of his self-portrait character, *Mr. DOB* (1996-97) (Figure 5), are empty because, "there is nothing that I could think of that is originally made in Japan and that I could use to represent myself" (Murakami, T. 2002, p.72).

This self-portrait series essentially bears a resemblance to Disney's Mickey

Mouse. It can be perceived as signifying a great admiration for Western animation, but can also be taken as a statement of self-mockery, when the viewer becomes aware that Murakami's focus was to reveal that he actually has "no identity" or that he can --- ironically enough --- only identify himself with foreign culture, and perhaps with one of its most iconic clichés. Yet most importantly, one may also choose to see that the core factor of DOB is not one of a fixed appearance, but a flexible ability to morph into multi-dimensional forms in the context of a painting or a sculpture, as an inflatable self-portrait balloon, or even in the form of novelty goods --- what in fact Marc Steinberg describes as a "new seriality" manifested as a "quintessential commodity" (Steinberg, 2003).

It should come as no surprise that Murakami plays up the kyara-play of his Japaneseness to flatter the global art market's expectations. For him, kyara-play is a versatile medium enabling him to not only perform multiple roles, but more importantly, achieve whatever outcome he wishes. Through recognizing the vagaries of the international art market, and then confront the creative possibilities of the works themselves, Murakami is able to use kyara-play as a vehicle for both production and marketing. The axis of subject and circumstance here, that underpins kyara-play, is very much in evidence.

Defining himself as "a cultural ambassador" or "a marketer like the German artist Gerhard Richter" (Murakami, T. 2001b/2007), he appears to consider his "self" as a showcase to demonstrate how well he can perform an expected role in a specific circumstance, and so puts his efforts into perfecting a site-specific kyara performance. Considering that playing this pre-meditated and consciously Japanese kyara is absolutely vital for his success in the international art scene, Murakami openly admits that his role on the international art stage is "to perform as a monkey roped to a monkey trainer," somewhat cynically addressing his view that Japanese artists are not treated the same as Western or European artists (Murakami, T. 2010a/2012f).

We can see that one of the principal themes running throughout his work --- traceable in the DOB self-portraits --- is that a fictional code or a played-kyara affects how we come to see a person. Identity perception is clearly a key component to his investigations. He recognizes that a non-Japanese mass media will actively configure a concept of otherness upon non-Western world cultures, and Murakami himself reveals a personal willingness to perform an

expected role in that market place, commenting that he does not mind being seen as a modern samurai by certain of the Western art public, if it helps him achieve his goal (Murakami & Sawaragi, 2006).

On the domestic front, Murakami's work organizing the art studio, Chamba,¹⁵⁶ provides an actual kyara-playing blueprint by which young Japanese artists can practise how to manage, and hopefully succeed, in the international art scene. Defining himself simply as acting as a father figure for these young artists might not, however, be enough to deflect the judgement that Murakami might just be moulding other people's identities, instead of just his own.

These kinds of factors are reasons why some may see him as too artificial or calculative" (Mizuma, S. 2013), a person who has forsaken the real flexibility of adapting to circumstances, and instead has become simply a flexible product of ambition. Nevertheless, one must note that Aida --- who refuses to play any role expected by the global art market --- sees Murakami's passion to support young Japanese artists as contradicting the image he portrays of himself in the international art scene, describing him hilariously as "having his hair pulled from behind by Japan"(Aida & Murakami, 2013, p.65).

In fact, Murakami may not be so shrewd or egocentric, but might simply want to create a foundation for a new creative movement. In an effort to dislodge what he considered to be the staleness inherent in the insular Japanese art world, he, for example, opened a studio, "kaikai kiki," where young artists can create their own work.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Set up in the "kaikai kiki" studio, Chamba offers a multi-complex artist education, teaching a Western-style of self-presentation both business-wise and artistically. If you want to be recognized as an artist in the global art market, this is what you have to do, says Murakami (Murakami, 2011a). Like the manuals and self-help books on kyara-play bought by so many of the 9 to 5 Japanese urbanites, Murakami's training programme focuses in detail on what needs to be done to succeed, and how the prospective artist needs to behave in the global art market --- that is to say, which kyara should be played in which circumstances. Seeing himself as a kind of benevolent commander-in-chief to these budding artists, Murakami grooms their progress and performance to include the correct use of the Japanese language, professional presentation techniques, efficient communication skills and attitudes to art etc. (Murakami, T. 2011a/2011b).

¹⁵⁷ The Hiropon Factory was set up in 1996. In the beginning, Murakami only had a few volunteers helping him to create work, but he gradually gained art market recognition. In 2001, when he had his first solo exhibition at Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, the Hiropon Factory was transformed into the legal corporation, "kaikai kiki," and started to manage young artists.

In 2001, Murakami also decided to fund GEISAI,¹⁵⁸ a “Japanese-style art festival” inspired by the world’s biggest anime-figure festival of Tokyo, called the Wonder Festival.¹⁵⁹ Murakami’s event is open to amateur anime-figurine creators, whilst also offering them the possibility of professionalism. In essence we could say that his aim is to create a new contemporary art scene in Japan, without mimicking the Western style of --- for example --- biennale, with their naturally enough Western-biased aesthetics and values.

6.3.3 Aida: *ONIGIRI KAMEN*, keep on performing

With Aida, on the other hand, kyara-play seems less like the definable, almost role-play of Murakami, and serves to demonstrate instead the gap or slippage that emerges between the image and its context. Never seeming to cultivate a fixed identity, his output denounces any focus on content or stylistic confinement, and we realize that the multiple ways an image can be contextualized clearly integrates with transformations of multiple kyara-play to become a key part of his artistic experimentation, and indeed a barometer of Japanese cultural affairs.

We can think that for Aida, playing kyara is an astute way of expressing the difficulties and discomforts others can register living in contemporary Japanese society. We can also recognize that it may perhaps be a way to confront the role that the global art market might expect him to play. We might say then that his played kyara consequently affirms a kind of rawness or controversy that he tries to offset by making self-deprecating comments, leaving his public perplexed by an artist whose true-self remains clandestine. We can comfortably suggest that kyara-play offers Aida the perfect mask to wear.

As equally known as Murakami inside Japan --- indeed perhaps with more Japanese followers --- Aida makes little attempt to seduce the global scene (Aida & Murakami, 2013). On one hand, his constant refusal to communicate in English --- we can think of him purposefully playing a non-English speaking

¹⁵⁸ Murakami has organized GEISAI more than twenty times since 2002. The event is open to the public, and anyone can show their work for a participation fee. Unlike other affordable art shows where artwork is only available for purchase on the site, this event appoints winners whose artistic careers are then supported further by publicity from the event’s sponsors.

¹⁵⁹ The Wonder Festival is a semi-annual event held in the Makuhari Messe, Japan since 1984. The number of participants was around 53,000 in February 2019.

kyara --- reveals somewhat provocatively the fact that the global art market is organized by people who are only able to communicate in English. Despite what he may say to the contrary, Aida remains ethical. If an artist cannot or does not want to communicate in the English language, it might prove extremely difficult for his or her work to be recognized in the international art market on a par with those who do. The filtering of accepted international art through the American "culture" machine acts as a language and culture preservation power as much as it stands as an emblem of financial power, and the positions both Aida and Murakami take offer evidence of the polarities implicit in this factor.

We will see later in this chapter that Aida's work especially opens up the functions of the Japanese language as a way to explore the idea of shifting the viewer's perception of both his work and himself. Indeed one of his main concerns seems to be to monitor precisely how the use of the language is ingrained with the individual's thinking and perception, a speculation that might indicate that Aida is perfectly aware that he cannot in fact help but be skeptical about dealing with English speakers, simply because a communication gap and misinterpretations would inevitably emerge.

As an acknowledged skilful writer, both of fiction and non-fiction, Aida will often comment on how careful he is in his choice of words, and in relating real life situations, indicates an immediate familiarity with the complexities of --- for example --- business kyara-play that can be integral to first person pronoun etiquettes. He goes into details on this, telling us that although he normally addresses himself as *boku*, when he has to act as "a civilized being" in a formal situation --- presenting an exhibition proposal, maybe, to an authority figure --- he feels the need to refer to himself as "*watashi*" (the non-gender or non-generation specific first person pronoun, used in more formal circumstances), even though he feels "an enormous reality gap" (Aida, M. 2015a, p.187) because he sees himself as a fool for pandering to the art market.

To establish a self-portrait character, Aida enacts a *performance* as *ONIGIRI KAMEN* [rice-ball mask man] (2005/2011), wearing a mask shaped like a humanized rice ball, which, he declares, is "my alter ego and my ultimate ideal existence. I want to express the meaningless, idleness" (Aida, M. 2013, pp.54-55). One may be fooled by *ONIGIRI KAMEN*'s vacant look, or its facial expression of feigned ignorance, but I would suggest that the character of a rice-ball as cultural cliché can be taken as an acute social antidote, there to

subvert rat race career ambitions and all accompanying, relentless pressures.

This counterpart pops up in various performances and also in a *sculptural work*, and the thematic trope of *ONIGIRI KAMEN* (2012) (Figure 6), hi-lighting idleness, is extended in *The Non-Thinker* (2005), a parody of Rodin's (1840-1917) *The Thinker* (1902), in Aida's work of course, a weary looking man sitting on a gigantic mass of his own excrement. Telling us that this *ONIGIRI KAMEN* signifies the idleness of "not doing" (Aida, M. 2013d/2015a), Aida is not, however, being cynical. We can be sure that whilst he might be referencing amongst other things an East-West dichotomy --- and enjoying the joke --- Aida is also very aware that his work may also be equally capable of evoking an opposite side of man's responsibility for his own condition: the state of spiritual awakening, the enlightenment of Buddhahood, or indeed even a state of scatological ecstasy.

With a total stylistic and methodological contrariness, *The Video of a Man Calling Himself Bin Laden Staying in Japan* (2005), sees Aida performing as Osama Bin Laden admiring the artist's work: *A Picture of an Air Raid on New York City (War Picture Returns)* (1996), a painting in which buildings resembling the twin towers are being encircled by numerous Japanese fighter planes. We might choose to argue that it directly advocates political rebellion of some kind, or at least conveys references that may be considered in poor taste. But Aida typically sidesteps any judgements by telling us that he decided to do the Bin Laden performance simply because some friends spotted that he actually resembled Bin Laden.

However, presenting the painting in this way, with its image reminiscent of videos of the September 11th attack, throws us the tantalizing question of what exactly Aida wants to tell us. For Andrew Lee, it is a joke because he sees that Aida "really does not like people to take art too seriously" (A. Lee, 2011). However, the New York Times columnist Frank Rich thinks that it is a kind of "cultural war" (Rich, 2013), whilst Edan Corkill refers to it as "an earnest exploration of the Japanese psyche, wherein contemporary frustrations surround a perceived inability to compete with the world's solo superpower" (Corkill, 2012).

The work demonstrates Aida's tactics clearly. It intends to suspend the viewer in an ambivalence of meaning and intention provoking research, debate and contemplation, but nevertheless will knowingly remain as a riddle, a gap in

the quest for certainties which the artist himself very skilfully avoids solving.

In a work entitled *A Video of a Man Calling Himself Japan's Prime Minister, Making a Speech at an International Assembly* (2014), Aida continues to put people and events under the microscope. He performs as a Japanese prime minister (the implication was as the current Japanese prime minister, Abe), making a speech in stumbling, broken English at an international assembly, apologizing for Japan's imperial expansion in the 20th century.

Aware, no doubt, of the delicate balance between globally acknowledged skill and the legacy of irredeemable stigma throughout the English-speaking business world, Aida reminds us that his performance reflects "the existence of an international communication platform (that) triggers conflict amongst the world's nations, so let's destroy internet satellite systems and initiate national isolation" (Aida, M. 2015, p.94).

Some media critics of course found this work to be deeply offensive, portraying a shambolic, somewhat humiliating image of the Japanese prime minister (primarily because of his inability to speak English fluently), and denounced it as "politically incorrect" (Hayashi, K. 2015).¹⁶⁰ What is more surprising for us to know is that the museum's chief curator, who is supposed to protect artistic expression from other authority attacks, requested Aida to remove or alter the work (Maruyama, H. 2015; Sawaragi, 2015).

Whilst these reactions invariably raise various questions regarding issues about art, Aida's work makes us realize how profoundly and severely issues of "self-censorship" permeate even the Japanese art environment, demanding an artist to read air and follow the unspoken protocols of *seken* --- as we have looked at in chapter two --- and consequently not upset the public consensus (Ichihara, Y. 2014). This is a stricture Aida is clearly unwilling to endure, and it is equally clear his whole persona --- the *kyara* he chooses to play in the public's eye and through his artwork --- stands as a rebuttal to this constriction on his personal and artistic freedom.¹⁶¹ And of course, being Aida, these

¹⁶⁰ Aida's speech as the prime minister includes: "we began imitating other powerful countries, we colonised those weaker nations surrounding us, and we began wars of aggression (...) there were a great many people whom we insulted, and we wounded - and we killed... I am sorry!!!!."

¹⁶¹ Despite the fact that the 2019 Aichi triennale theme deals with "Disabled Expression," it was ironically forced to shut down three day after opening due to the number of people complaining about Kim Seo kyung's *Statue of Peace* (2011). They thought the work was about

conflagrations of dispute become the source of jokes and performance, as we can witness when his personification of KY (“*kūki ga yomenai*,” one who is unable to read the air of *seken*), reprimands the Japanese for their lame adherence to social norms. He reminds his public how issues of self-censorship can suffocate an artist, circumscribing the freedoms implicit in creativity, and perhaps most importantly, imposing upon the individual the necessity to play a certain kind of subservient *kyara*. Very precisely, Aida comments that

I fiercely resist those arguments about whether art can function as a tool for expressing one’s political ideology, and claim such an application deteriorates the value or meaning of art. However, I also know that there is no point in creating a beautiful drawing as a hobby. By all means, I want to say that thinking through such dilemmas that artists face is important (Aida & Sawaragi, 2015, p.33).

Once again he deflects solutions, yet seemingly wants to empower one’s ability to think for oneself.

6.4.1 Affordances: Murakami’s Superflat theory, and Aida’s Monument for nothing

We can assert that both Murakami and Aida primarily consider their Japanese nationality as the motivating energy underpinning their output as artists. This is made evident throughout their work as they attempt to identify “what it is to be Japanese, as a people and as a nation” (Murakami, T. 2016; Aida, M. 2011). Valuing necessarily the cultural significance of traditional Japanese arts, they also identify affordance in contemporary manga and anime as hugely influential activators in Japanese cultural life.

Whilst attempting to incorporate both elements --- the traditional and the contemporary --- in their work, Murakami’s and Aida’s approaches to this mix nevertheless carry marked differences, although both are concerned in technique, treatment of subject matter, and viewers’ responses with flexible shifts of perception and a *mitate*-activated awareness. Murakami’s theory of

“comfort women” (Bijutsu Techō Henshūbu, 2019; Okamoto, 2019), and Aida tweeted his skepticism of Japanese censorship dictating artistic freedom of expression.

Superflat places an emphasis on visual perception as a transformative medium which enables him to use his work as a multi-dimensional platform to explore kyara-play; whilst Aida's work, expressed most clearly in the series of ongoing works titled *Monument for Nothing* (2008-), demonstrates that both the artist himself and his actual art-making can be understood as performative and elaborated versions of multiple kyara-play.

6.4.2 Murakami's theory of Superflat: "The progressive picture"

One thing becomes clear when we read Murakami's writing on his Superflat theory: he is using this as a way to consolidate his position as a Japanese artist whose visual work stands in a comparative line with traditional Japanese visual values, and in so doing also provides a platform to market himself and his wares internationally. The "Japanisation" of himself through his Superflat writings is therefore a very convenient instruction for viewers of his work as well as a strong marketing strategy.

Writing about his work, Murakami tells us his Superflat theory hinges on two aspects of the two-dimensional perspective. On one hand, being inspired by traditional Japanese painting, including *nihonga* and manga/anime, he claims that "Japanese reality is fundamentally two-dimensional" (Murakami, T. 1999c), an inherited thread which he considers traceable throughout the history of Japanese visual culture. And on the other hand, he claims that the superflat perspective has become apparent in the present time due to changes in socio-cultural conditions. Following the bursting of Japan's economic bubble in the 1990's, Murakami insists that the ensuing collapse of the traditional hierarchical system scrapped many traditional values and meanings, leaving a psycho-social landscape that further reinforces the flat perspective of two-dimensionality.

These two views, however, can appear somewhat contradictory. Whilst he claims that a two-dimensional perspective is an inherent element given to the Japanese, he also allows that the living environment and living experience necessarily change society, in other words, influence the ways the subject perceives and thinks.

In his self-supportive Superflat writings then, Murakami offers conflicting claims of basically a nihonjinron and essentialist position which stand alongside

those that very much allow ecological change to be reflected.

Examining his actual visual work however, as opposed to relying on the views conveyed in his written output, I would suggest that what Murakami's work and his Superflat theory really seem to be concerned with lies within the following two issues. Firstly, how a two-dimensional image can achieve the illusion that enables the viewer to see a flow of movement --- to create what Gibson calls "the progressive picture" (Gibson, 1986); and secondly, how the reception of a subject matter/image fluctuates according to circumstances (i.e. *ba*).

As we shall discover, following the lines of an ecological art critique will enable us to appreciate that the core of his work is about a flexible perspective switching between the two-dimensional and three-dimensional perspectives, and less about being static or being two-dimensionally flat.

We can start by examining how Gibson's idea of "the progressive picture" helps us to understand what kind of affordance Murakami identifies in the actual image making of his work. Gibson states that the progressive picture --- "progressive" here conveying movement not ideology --- is furnished by two interrelated factors: a *visual kinesthetic*, describing the path of the eyeline travelling restlessly across the two-dimensional surface of a painting; and *visual event perceptions* which are governed by the viewer's body movement in relation to the painting in a space (Gibson, 1986, pp.293-294). These are the two pivotal activators that make a picture continuously progressive, and ultimately conjure up the impression of a moving image. As we will see, they become the material expression Murakami repeatedly experiments with in his work.

Rejecting the principal three-dimensional perspective technique of historical Western painting, Murakami's Superflat paintings are known for using "only the vertical and horizontal axes to render something completely flat, moving the eye of the viewer within the composition by emphasising surface to rouse a feeling that something is stepping out of the painting" (Vartanian & Wada, 2011, p.50).

This impression, that "something is stepping out of the painting," is achieved by Murakami replicating a two-dimensional image typically depicted in traditional Japanese art or manga/anime, which is able to create an effect of movement by tricking the eye. We can find, for example, that certain traditional

Japanese paintings create an optical illusion, a visual kinesthetic. Scroll paintings (*ijidōzu*),¹⁶² or the Edo period's painting masters, Itō Jakuchū and Soga Shyōhaku's work for example, carry the subliminal effect of seeing movement in a static image as a result of the viewer's eyeline travelling across the surface of the flat painting, thereby enabling the illusion of multiple-perspectives (motoki8787, 2012; NHK Special, 2016).

Murakami is clearly interested in creating the effect of *visual kinesthetic*, and as a matter of fact tells us that his *Tan Tan Bo Puking – a.k.a. Gero Tan* (2002) (Figure 7) makes an extensive use of Ito Jakuchū's *Colourful Realm of Living Being* (1961-1965) (Murakami, T. 2012f, p.61). Jakuchū's work is known precisely for capturing a magical effect by making the viewer's restless eye-movement see movement in a static image. In a *Colourful Realm of Living Being* (1761-65) (Figure 8), Jakuchū depicts thirteen chickens in a garden in an extraordinary superflat tableau --- no depiction of a shadow, depth or distance. Yet because the birds' heads are depicted with the same size and exactly matching vivid red colour, the work activates a restless eye movement because the viewer continuously fails to achieve a conventional three-point perspective.¹⁶³ Consequently the image's effect is of constant movement. We can have similar experiences in which "a sense of visual space is constructed only through movements in the viewer's gaze" (Miki, 2015, p.41) when we look at Murakami's *Flower series* (2002-2010) or *Mushroom series* (2000).

Extending the theme of movement, Murakami's work also deals with Gibson's "visual event perception" --- another feature of making the progressive picture (Gibson, 1986, pp.293-294) --- which is concerned with how the reception of a work can change according to the viewer's body movement in the exhibition space. As an example, we can think of traditional paintings applied to a certain frame form such as a *byōbu* (a folding screen) or a *fusuma-e* (a paper-door). These works are theatrically set up to encourage surprise and discovery: when the viewer changes position it can be as though an unveiled vision suddenly appears in the room. Murakami's *Jellyfish Eyes* (2001) (Figure 9) experiments with this idea and demonstrates how multiple perspectives can be

¹⁶² In "*ijidōzu*," events happening in the past, the present and the future are all depicted on a flat surface, so that the viewer is encouraged to figure out the chronological order of events shown in the picture, and so can form a narrative for him or herself.

¹⁶³ See Jakuchū's work *Renchi Yogyōzu* [*Lotus Pond and Fish*] (1765).

realized according to the subject's body movement in the exhibition space.¹⁶⁴

We should note here that a two-dimensional perspective applied in traditional paintings and the ways manga/anime depicts a flow of movement can be understood similarly, as both of them seek to convey a apparent shift between a two and three-dimension in the viewer's perception

To help us understand this perceptual two and three-dimension transition, work created by another Edo period painting master, Soga Shyōhaku (1730-1781)¹⁶⁵ --- who is indeed another inspirational figure for Murakami --- is useful (Murakami, T. 2016; Murakami & Tsuji, 2014). Soga applied a deformation technique extensively, depicting subject matter unnaturally disproportioned in order to give the illusion of a flow of movement. In his *Gunsenzu byōbu* [Immortals] (1764) (Figure 10), we are encouraged to gauge how strongly the wind is blowing a man by Soga's unnaturally warped depiction of the man's body and clothes. Realistically speaking, we certainly know that even when blown by a very strong wind, a man's body will not be elongated as extremely as Soga shows it. Nevertheless, through everyday life, we became aware that images depicted in certain ways function as a code --- emoji, *manpu*, are examples --- and signify certain meanings. We have learnt to recognise a wind's strength by the degree to which a man's body is elongated.

What we are witnessing in fact throughout all these examples is the technical application of *mitate* to encourage the subject to see a static image as a flow of movement. Indeed it is still extensively used by manga/anime today.

However, Murakami takes this *mitate* expression of movement and perception another step further when he articulates an aspiration to "show how the same image can be evaluated so drastically differently by manipulating market systems" (Miki, 2015; Murakami & Sawaragi, 2012). It's another core aspect of Murakami's Superflat practice that evaluates the shifts, conversions or inventions even of new ways of seeing an image, by making sense of the existing market value system according to the awareness of *ba*.

We can acknowledge how precisely a three-dimensionally sculpted splash transforms into the two-dimensional flat-image of the splash painting, when Murakami exhibits his splash painting entitled *pl.37* (1998). It is a work painted

¹⁶⁴ However, if the viewer persists in applying the standardized law of perspective, Murakami's work would simply be seen as "a wallpaper" (B. Lewis, 2011).

¹⁶⁵ See Soga Shyōhaku's *Fūsenzu byōbu* [Transcendent Attacking a Whirlwind] (1764).

directly onto the gallery wall exhibited alongside two life size three-dimensional fiberglass sculptures --- *Hiropon* (1997), of an anime girl with gigantic breasts spouting milk, and *My Lonesome Cowboy* (1998), a macho anime man spurting semen-spreading out above his head.

Exhibiting these two otaku-inspired sculptures in a gallery where the visitor sees them obviously as artwork, Murakami's challenge is to provocatively strip away "moe" --- the strong affection towards manga/anime characters ---- as an illusion, by placing their image in an inappropriate context --- an art gallery for example (L. Davies, 2010; Takekuma, 2014).

Placing his work in different kinds of *ba* clearly shifts its reception, but Murakami uses context to alter perceptions of its value as well. The series called *Miss Ko²* clearly shows his skill in marketing, but it carries a far more complex attitude to that side of the art world than might first be thought. In the high end of the art market, *Miss Ko²* is sold as artwork at Sotheby's,¹⁶⁶ but it is also presented as an anime figure in the Wonder Festival, and its "garage kit" is also sold at a reasonable market price. Contrasting with that, in the lower commercial sector where products are mass-produced, he creates a miniature version of *Miss Ko²* as an add-on goods object --- in fact as cheap sweets sold at local shops --- summoning our *mitate*-awareness to enjoy the transformation between one and the other.

This series of projects plays with how a subject matter's value, as well as its reception, fluctuates according to a set of circumstantial factors. It also reflects on Murakami's attitude to art market forces. He at once applauds the high-end, but is he purposefully undermining its reputation by selling the product with a sweet? Or perhaps he is simply democratizing art, keeping his products on the move.

6.4.3.1 Aida making "the arrested picture": *Tonda reihō*

Aida is known for willfully not working with any artistic signature style. His kaleidoscopic vision of work is often neither packageable nor marketable, failing to appeal --- one might say --- to accepted art market standards.

¹⁶⁶ The six-foot fibreglass original of *Miss ko²* was sold at Christie's New York for \$567,500 in 2003.

In general, a so-called signature style can allow a viewer to identify who an artist is, what is his or her artistic endeavour, and there is even a sense that finding a signature style is a barometer of an artist's maturity and worth (Chiba, 2013; Rochette & Saunders, 2010). We may also consider that the art market in general may tend to appreciate an artist who maintains a certain iconic style more than an artist who might totally reject the idea of having a signature style at all, even if that artist's goal is to never be repetitive or predictable.

Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) took up such a challenge, acutely aware of how the art market dictated the nature of the creative spirit, favouring some kind of consistency or conformity of taste (Goodyear, 2009).¹⁶⁷ Exploring the idea of the self as reflective of circumstance --- we can certainly see him exploring the idea of circumselves here --- Duchamp created aliases and alter egos to allow himself room to explore and deflect fixities of identity.¹⁶⁸

Summoning up relations to the art market, Michael Taylor thinks that Duchamp's fabrication of aliases clearly undermined what he considered to be the outmoded idea of the modern painter as having a fixed authorial identity --- namely the tortured, misunderstood genius, denied fame and fortune during his or her lifetime, whose painted signatures nonetheless ensure the financial security of galleries and collectors who now own the work after the artist's death" (Taylor, 2009, p.116).

Our reality is endlessly complex and fraught with inestimable controversies, and we may conclude that Aida's response to all this is to produce work of reflected and comparable chaos both in its breadth of subject matter and with the techniques he uses. General art goers, art dealers, and even certain critics may see Aida as being inconsistent and making "bad art" (Sawaragi, 2013). However, one could also argue that Aida's work can be understood as a way of critically documenting the current state of affairs in Japan.

This might perhaps be the very reason why he ultimately wants the viewer to actually see his work in Japan (Aida, 2007), because a direct engagement with Japanese ecological conditions can open up the viewer's perception of his

¹⁶⁷ Duchamp told Sidney and Harriet Janis that "I have forced myself to contradict myself in order to avoid conforming to my own taste" (Goodyear, 2009, p.84)

¹⁶⁸ Duchamp multiplied his name through aliases like Rrose Sélavy, Richard Mutt, Marsélavy, and Morice in part to subvert art market classification (Goodyear & McManus, 2009)

work, enabling the viewer to see his work as “a trace of his performative ways of engaging with the surrounding environment” (Motoe & Aida, 2010, p.92).

With this paramount concern to mirror his environment, we can say that Aida’s work can be understood as what Gibson calls an “arrested picture,” conveying “formless object invariants,” documenting the specificity of an event or subject matter (Gibson, 1986, pp.294-295). Steering juxtaposed and contradictory elements, the complexities of Aida’s work resides in the fact that almost all of it is encrypted with multiple meanings and interpretations. At the same time, however, it very often carries a sensationalist veneer that offsets comfortable interpretations.

Known perhaps as an artist who requires handling with care, Aida is described as “the enfant terrible of the Japanese art world” (Metropolis, 2013), whose work is often seen as “controversial” (Battersby, 2015) and “shocking” (Corkill, 2012). We may recoil from the shockwaves and be entertained by the deadpan humour, either way Aida’s work offers an intriguing conundrum. We can perhaps unravel some of this by making a parallel between his work and that of the Edo period “*tonda reihō*” genre, which evoked the “most unthinkable presentations of a precious treasure.”

With its impact firmly residing in the domain of the *mitate*-awareness, *tonda reihō* (Figure 11) was a parodic *misemono* (show, pageantry, spectacle) which attracted laughter by making a drastic shift in the perception of “*reihō*” (a sacred subject matter, such as a Buddha) by portraying it with “*tonda*” objects (non-holy objects such as dried fish, vegetables or insects). Commentators like Christophe Marquet (2010) and Choi Kyeong-kun (1995), point out that *tonda reihō* was a parodic version of *kaichō* (the public unveiling of a treasured Buddhist statue for a specific period of time), and was one of the most popular *misemono* (pageantry shows) during the Edo period.

To gauge its full cultural significance, it is useful to know that *tonda reihō* were always exhibited at the same time and near to a place *kaichō* were held. In other words, they were specifically presented in order to invite people to scrutinize how both their setting, and the original Buddhist image shown in the ceremony of *kaichō*, were mimicked and satirized by this form molded with “unthinkably nonsensical” non-holy objects (Hirano, Katsuya, 2014; Hiruma, 1980; Kawazoe, 2000).

The significance of *tonda reihō* is that it indicates that historically in Japan there has been no sense of moral or hierarchical value judgement dictating or vindicating creative activities. On the contrary, the creative spirit was rather welcomed in any of its forms. Via the application of *mitate*, this playful act of anticipating seeing an ugly fish or shellfish as a Buddha statue with its shape resembling that of the statue's, was somehow hilarious, but most importantly it was embraced for its agile imagination and praised as "artistic creativity" (Choi, 1995/2012; Marquet, 2010).

Interestingly, the popularity of *tonda reihō* suggests that there are no definitive aesthetic, nor value judgment criteria, for distinguishing a subject matter as culturally high or low, sacred or common, as our perception about it changes according to circumstances. This is indicated by Hirano Katsuya (2014) when he points out that *tonda* can also be read either as "unthinkably nonsensical" or as "unthinkably illuminating." The two paradoxical renderings of the term --- nonsense and illuminating --- quite typical of Japanese equivocality, can be accommodated in this phrase for "there is no word following the term *tonda*, which makes it impossible to determine its precise meaning (...) its meaning appears to be left to the readers, for the simultaneous presence of negation and affirmation within the statement simply forbids a fixed interpretation (Hirano, Katsuya, 2014, p.119).

Combining the two words --- the sacred subject matter of *reihō* is altered to become *tonda* --- guarantees that its appearance will be shocking. Indeed, shock wave responses to such purposeful juxtapositions act as a barometer for the success of such *mitate*-inducing attempts, *mitate* being so well qualified as a shifting perception device (Kawazoe, 2000/2003; Miura H. 1996).

However, not entirely willing to sidestep the argument that moral issues need to be taken into account in the creation of a work of art, our aim is also to indicate how the *mitate*-awareness can allow us to recognize that the dark sides of human natures are also part of who we are.

We can ascertain that this core element of *tonda reihō*'s parodic spirit is captured by Aida's gallery show featuring the *Lunchbox Paintings* (2016). He exhibited more than fifty disposable, cheap and cheerful plastic and Styrofoam-packaged lunchbox containers filled with hand-painted, colourful urethane-foam squirts, and dribbles that look like a kind of abstract expressionism.

Aida tells us that his intention was to create something similar in appearance to a national treasure grade tea bowl using plastic materials (Maruyama, H. 2016). His comments clearly indicate that via the application of *mitate*, he was attempting to shift our perception of a disposable object as an iconic and precious work of art by placing it in the context of an art gallery.

But this exhibition was presented with an additional twist. Knowing the viewer would expect his new exhibition to be politically engaged,¹⁶⁹ Aida deliberately used an indistinct press photo of Prime Minister Abe Shinzō overlaid with the exhibition's title, "Let us dream of evanescence, and linger in the beautiful foolishness of things," taken from Okakura Kakuzō's *Book of Tea* (1906) in the exhibition's preview mail. He knew, in doing this, that no one would dream of him exhibiting dozens of lunchboxes, and took the risk of critics like Ryan Holmberg commenting that "the actual work looks flimsy and feels flippant. If it were not for the artist's reputation, you would mentally discard the work in that bottomless waste bin of uncooked ideas" (Holmberg, 2016). However, taking a literal belief in what the artwork was, Holmberg is totally missing the point. Aida's aim was clearly to push for that kind of sensation that a drastic shift of perception of a subject matter can create, not stay comfortably within pre-ordained definitions.

Another feature Aida is known for, is his fascination with beautiful young girls. Whilst he has created several works (*Taki no e* [Picture of Waterfall] (2007-2010) or *Jumble of 100 Flowers* (2012-)) depicting them in a beautiful and straightforward manner, some works like *Harakiri School Girls* (2002) mix the contradictory elements of "childlike charm and gratuitous violence" (Lee, 2005). This painting depicts eight *kogyaru* --- the name given to high-school girls who participate in certain sex orientated activities. They all have charming smiles on their faces, and are in various stages of committing *harakiri* --- the ritual suicide by self-disembowelment.

Notions of Aida as brutal fantasist are offset, however, when we remember that many *kogyaru* sell their worn underwear or participate in *enjoyo kōsai* ("compensated" dating with older men) to pay for their obsession with fashion lifestyles. Layers of complexity are added to Aida's work when *mitate* allows the

¹⁶⁹ In the previous exhibition, Aida presented *A Video of a Man Calling Himself Japan's Prime Minister, Making a Speech at an International Assembly* (2014), performed as a Japanese prime minister, apologized for Japan's imperial expansion in the 20th century.

perception of a seemingly corrupted innocence blithely going nowhere.

6.4.3.2 Monument for nothing

Via the extraordinary statement “art only deals with the surface of things, and it does not concern itself with the fundamental value of things”(Aida, M. 2013b, p.32), Aida tells us that making art is like playing a “zero-sum game” as he sees his work “settle down into something that is neither positive nor negative,” perhaps directing him to create “a true monument for nothing” (Aida, M. 2013b).

This indeed became an ongoing project, primarily aimed --- he tells us --- at creating a work just to fill up a huge space (Aida, M. 2015, p.143), pointing out that his choice of material reflected his “skepticism for the permanence of art” (Aida, M. 2013a, p.179).

We can also argue that Aida was simply finding an excuse to use various disposable materials like cardboard boxes, copies of advertising flyers, thousands of printed twitter messages, with the intention of making any form desired by cut and paste --- indeed, a true and proper monument for nothing.

Monument for Nothing 2 (2008-) became a large-scale collaborative project, allowing volunteers to help make sculptures from these found materials in part to subvert aspects of Western-centric art history (Kataoka, M. 2013). *Monument for Nothing 3* (2009) (Figure 12), on the other hand, is a wall-work which assembles “the images found on the gaudy, frivolous advertising signage and billboards found in front of pachinko parlors all over districts like Akihabara” (Aida, 2013a, p.182). Such a kaleidoscopic view reflects the ways we live our lives, and how consumerism has reflected the sensibility that gives it value, invariably shaping a perception of the self (Iwasaki, T. 2012; Marrewijk & Broos, 2012; Shields, 2003; Sugioka, 2015; Suzuki M. 2009). In many ways, Aida’s work captures the dazzling array of juxtaposed images one engages with in everyday life in Tokyo city (Demetrious, 2016).

Speculation on the ambivalence we might feel when encountering his work can be perhaps be sanctioned by the impression one gains strolling through the vast shops of the Don Quijote¹⁷⁰ chain,¹⁷¹ where a huge variety of dazzlingly

¹⁷⁰ Don Quijote is written in *katakana* and pronounced “donki hôte.”

colourful goods are piled up alongside frenzied hand-drawn POP (point-of-purchase) advertising displays. Recognized as “a cult phenomenon in Japan” (Du, 2019), this hugely popular “unclassifiable seller of everything” is a franchise chain of four hundred “convenient entertainment discount” stores across Japan affectionately known for offering a “jarring experience” (Du, 2019).¹⁷²

Overturning standard retail practices, Don Quijote sells more than 40,000 goods which are displayed chaotically, jam-packed in the manner of “a hoarder’s paradise,” (Ishiyama, 2015; Shin, 2015) following the owner’s motto --- “to make goods difficult to find, see, and physically reach” (Yasuda, T. 2004). One can see both high and low end goods --- Louis Vuitton next to toilet paper, for example --- and this “pell-mell approach,” we are reminded, feels reminiscent of a topsy-turvy world.¹⁷³

It is especially interesting to note that Aida’s work is often described by the same terminology used to explain why Don Quijote is so attractive. Don Quijote, for example, is the “enfant terrible” of shops, “bewildering” because of its “pell-mell approach” to marketing (Nussey, 2018), where it offers a “chaotic” (Okutsu, 2019), “bizarre” (Honolulu magazine, 2014), and “messy” experience (Du, 2019) to its shoppers.

These features certainly parallel how his artistic portfolio --- containing anything from oil painting, *nihonga*, sculpture, scribbles, performance, etc. --- gives a “bizarre” (Bold, 2012), “jumbled” (DeHart, 2013; Sawaragi, 2013) or “chaotic” (Dickie & Shaw, 2015; Kataoka, M. 2013) impression. Viewing work like the *DOG series*, for example, may “bewilder” (Dezeuze, 2012) some viewers, or the *Harakiri School Girls* might make one dismiss Aida as simply an “enfant terrible” (Economist, 2012).

One may certainly consider that the popularity and cultural significance of Don Quijote can certainly be credited to its unique business tactics fitting a

¹⁷¹ Aida’s first solo exhibition in London titled “Donki-Hôte, Man in the Holocene,” was shown at IBID Projects in 2005 (Lee, A. 2005).

¹⁷² Don Quijote is Japan’s fifth-largest retailer, and its revenue reached 1.1 trillion yen (\$12.5 billion) which is a remarkable feat for a chain that barely sells online and does almost no conventional marketing (Lu, 2019).

¹⁷³ The founder of Don Quijote, Yasuda Takao, thinks the reason why people are attracted to Don Quijote is because it converts shopping into an entertainment, best described as offering the experience of “exploring an urban jungle”(Yasuda, T. 2004).

niche market (Yasuda, 2004). Nevertheless, its continuous success can also be taken as a living-proof that the type of experience Don Quijote offers gels with the milieu, reflecting the individual's interest and awareness of life in the reality of Japan.

Perhaps Aida's work also successfully captures the milieu of Japan, and its attractions pull the viewer to keep on coming back to see what he has to offer.

6.5.1 History influencing art

The art historian, Hirayama Mikiko, has pointed out that amongst Asian artists' work, the idea of "*honkadori*" --- recreating historically important work in a contemporaneous way --- has become noticeable (DeHart, 2013). Ivan Vartanian and Wada Kyōko share this point of view and tell us that not only Murakami and Aida but also artists like Yamaguchi Akira (1969-), Yanobe Kenji (1965-), and Tenmyōya Hisashi (1966-) have taken up the theme of *honkadori*. "Via the application of *mitate*," their work is said to conjure up images "enriched by layers of cultural and historical duality" (Vartanian & Wada, 2011, p.21).

Engaging especially with issues concerning the impact of World War Two, Murakami and Aida, born in the 1960s, express their views on how a series of historically significant events can affect a milieu. They exhibit complex response to the prolonged economic stagnation following the economic bubble collapse; to the al-Qaeda attacks of 9/11 and the Aum cult attack of 3/11, all of which build a level of anxiety and uncertainty about the future. In the following section, we will look into how our two artists have digested and responded to these kinds of issues.

6.5.2 Murakami's "Tokyo Pop" and Superflat trilogy

Murakami has made two declarations that seem to crystallize his attitude to Japanese history in relation to his artistic endeavours. Firstly, he drew up some very striking conclusions in a manifesto --- Tokyo Pop --- that he published in an advertising magazine called *Kōkoku Hihyō*, proposing that Japanese culture, and indeed the Japanese mentality, had three weaknesses --- childishness, denial of an essentially hierarchical system, and amateurism --- and that these can actually be turned into a vital new creativity resource (Murakami, T. 1999b).

Secondly, in order to demonstrate how the ideas in Tokyo Pop encapsulate the reality of contemporary Japan, Murakami --- as we will see --- decided to curate various exhibitions of young Japanese artists in an attempt to reflect how those three main issues are made evident in Japan's cultural production --- we are thinking here of manga, anime, fashion design, music, etc. --- and how creative work can rise out of seemingly negative positions.

This kind of self-made support structure can feel like Murakami has entered into the realms of public education. He in fact considers himself as a kind of "cultural ambassador," and we can appreciate in this that he is very clearly seating himself in a social --- in fact an ecological --- context. Murakami has evidently found a clear affordance in substantiating and centering himself in an art world he can in some sense govern, indeed maintaining a reciprocal strengthening of positions. We can find him providing a substantial amount of information to help the individual navigate the cultural significance of certain historical and social issues and events like World War Two and the ambivalence of subcultures like the otaku, and so on. And within such an ecological benevolence, we can see Murakami exhibiting certain of his own work that stand in some sense as expressions of the impact of those historical and social factors, and around which he has chosen to explain both who he was influenced by, and who indeed he influences. Through such a master minded curatorial technique, he has consequently managed to position himself as an indispensable figure in both the international and Japanese art worlds.

It is generally agreed in the west that the concept of Pop Art was originally made evident by Richard Hamilton in 1957. Murakami's Tokyo Pop manifesto reflects an intention to explain how and why Japanese contemporary art does not fit into such a Western context. In order to argue how his three apparently negative factors --- the childish, the denial of the system, and amateurism --- can be pivotal creative apparatuses, Murakami applied *mitate* to show that seemingly childish tropes like *kawaii* (cuteness), or those of a perhaps sensationalist monster manga/anime culture can function as mediators for shifting perception when included in his work, just as the two other elements --- the denial of the hierarchical system and amateurism --- can induce an operational ethic to his work that scores appreciation.

The element of "childishness" refers to a value system based on an infantile sensibility, which is especially explicit in a subculture evasive of realities

as explored via manga and anime. The concept of *kawaii*, as Yomota Inuhiko analyzes in his book titled *Kawaiiron* [The theory of cuteness] (2006), is extensively used as an effective way of shifting perception of a subject matter from the negative to the positive, from, for example, a literal cuteness to the grotesque.¹⁷⁴

In this way, Murakami's *Time Bokan - Pink* (2001) (Figure 13) can be appreciated as a useful example demonstrating how the application of *mitate* --- in this case the addition of a cute smiley face to a nuclear mushroom shaped cloud --- is able to re-instate a created memory, in a sense an extremely painful negative memento, into a manageable, even illuminating image. Whilst Murakami comments that the work is about self-mockery, portraying "the confounding tendency of Japanese culture to find cuteness in an icon of war" (Murakami, T. 2005, p.14), and extreme destruction, it can also be agreed that characterizing a fear of America as a *kawaii* icon is a redemptive way of dealing with the threat.

Another hugely popular recurrent theme of manga/anime in Japan is the monster culture. Murakami's references to some monster figures are often imbued with multiple meanings, and we should not see them consequently as simply gargantuan, gruesome beings created for childish entertainment (Murakami, T. 2005; Sawaragi, 2005).

David Gilmore shares a similar view when arguing that monsters reflect our ethos and who we are (Gilmore, 2003). Indeed, we can find that there are commentators like Sawaragi (2009), Michael Foster (2017), Marina Levina and Diem-My Bul (2013) claim that monster figures appearing in manga/anime reflect their contemporary milieu. Nevertheless, looking at or reading monster culture work, one's affordance as interpretation of an image of course changes according to one's circumstances --- one's expectations, experiences, and so on. Indeed we find that what one of the most popular monster figures, Godzilla, signifies over the past decades has been extensively discussed. Even the creators of *Godzilla* (1954) do not share the same view. The director of special effects, Tsuburaya Eiji, sees it as a god who gets furiously angry (Kawaide Yumemukku, 2001), whilst the sound producer, Ifukube Akira believes it

¹⁷⁴ Murakami tells us that the sculpture *Oval Buddha Silver* (2008-11) experiments with the idea of how the strangeness and sloppiness of the character, *Oval*, can be "*mitateru*" (redefined) as a true form of cuteness (Murakami, T. 2015, p.176).

signifies “the Japanese soldiers who lost their lives in the Pacific” (Kibashiri, 2006; Kondō, M. 2016). We may go along with Aran Gerow’s view of Godzilla offering “an example of the historical struggles over what movies mean and who determines that” (Gerow, 2006, p.63), but perhaps, “the monster is not the trauma itself, but a manifestation that already has a certain distancing effect” (Gygi, 2015, p.6) because its commercial success and associated cultural hype can be taken as proof that a traumatic history can be objectified or caricatured via the application of *mitate*, to become manifested instead as popular culture.

With his second key element in Tokyo Pop, Murakami focuses on Japan’s social structure, making clear his belief that a lack of social hierarchy with its concomitant factor of no super-rich, in fact democratizes the entire art market, increasing the capacity for all to be included whilst obstructing any dictatorial art policy judgements. To support his ideas with action, Murakami has set up a programme whereby he can collaborate extensively with creators working in various fields, and show how a non-hierarchical value system can generate an appetite for such eclectic collaborations, without the dogma that circulates around differentiated market structures.

Indeed, Murakami has been working with various creative individuals from the fashion industry --- Louis Vuitton¹⁷⁵ and Issei Miyake, for example --- and toy-making industry, like the otaku figure-making specialists, Kaiyōdō and Lucky Wide.

As of his own art making, Murakami also freely ventures out to create hybridized forms of the old and the new, high art and low, borrowing composite elements from Japanese old master paintings, demonstrating how those figures --- sacred Buddhist priests, flowers, plants, etc. --- depicted in the works can be transformed via a manga style into contemporaneous versions. Interestingly, the fact that Murakami openly admits to us which works he borrows his composite elements from (Murakami & Tsuji, 2015, p.57), suggests that via the application of *mitate*, his aim is to create “wow moments” stimulated by shifting one’s perceptions, rather than telegraphing a significant message.

¹⁷⁵ Murakami designed Vuitton bags as if the commercial product was his canvas. We may view this as challenging the “Western visual tradition of Renaissance perspective” (Jinying, 2012) as well as “a relentlessly expanding, multi-audience franchise” (Allsop & Ferris, 2009, p.96).

Murakami considers that the third element of “amateurism” contains the key for youth to open up new creative movements. With aspirations to improve the Japanese art scene and support a new creativity vitality, Murakami has been spurred-on to run various organizations like GEISAI, managing and training young artists at “kaikai-kiki,” as well as establishing and running art galleries,⁵ which offer opportunities to exhibit work, and manage global promotion.

Those three elements contained in Tokyo Pop stand as pivotal factors in Murakami’s personal artistic endeavor, but also stretch into his curatorial work with art exhibitions.

Claiming himself, as we have already noted, as the cultural ambassador, one of his prime aims has been to show how well his work captures the milieu of contemporary Japan. To fulfill this goal, he has curated exhibitions that have featured dozens of key proponents of cross-over genres, creative people from contemporary artists, manga/anime creators, commercial photographers, graphic designers and fashion designers, all exhibited in fine art spaces (Fujitsu, 2001).

Indisputably, one of his most recognized and influential curatorial works is the Superflat trilogy: *Superflat* (2000), *Coloriage* (2002), and *Little Boy* (2005). Each exhibition offered a showcase for artists from similar generations (born between the 1960’s and 1980’s), who had gained inspiration and ideas from subcultures as a basis for their work.

His endeavours have met with mixed responses, being described as “observational” (Darling, 2001) but also criticized for being a kind of historicist revival, “curating Japaneseness” (Weisenfeld, 2007, p.183) in hybrid national and global forms.

Murakami, we might think, delivers his message in an especially visceral way, rather than through social commentary, and those exhibitions may appear to be an eclectic selection of works from cross-over genres, perceptibly exploring a “heritage of eccentricity” (Matsui, M. 2009, p.226).

We should however, no doubt applaud the energy with which he propels his ideas into the milieu of creative life. Murakami certainly puts his money where his mouth is, and we cannot blame him for making it work on his behalf.

6.5.3 Aida: War Picture Return Series

Unlike Murakami, one of whose main concerns has been to curate complex subject matter as attractive and accessible art market packages reflecting a “Japanese art position,” Aida has been creating an assemblage of eclectic work of primarily social satire, taking the form of parody mixed with black humour, reflecting various socio-cultural and political issues in contemporary Japanese society.

Aida did not experience World War Two, but its psychological impact is clearly in evidence throughout his autobiographical books, paintings, and interviews.

With the series *War Picture Returns* (1995-2003), he ignites a collision of images full of multiple meanings referencing historical facts, and with this approach is consequently able to initiate a range of subject matter depicted in one painting thereby influencing the kind of affordances the subject identifies in the image, in other words, how that painting can be interpreted. Via the application of *mitate*, we are also able to see here that his work can reveal --- sometimes with a true poignancy --- the complex nature of an image, which can be contextualized in numerous ways.

Typically again, Aida tells us that his large and initially somewhat messy work, *Ohkimi no henikoso shine ---Let's Die at the Emperor's Feet* (1996) which is part of the *War Picture Returns* series --- is associated with “frivolous Japanese things” (Aida, T. 2013a). The basis of the work is a collage composed of dozens of holiday making pamphlets featuring the small Pacific Islands, which were once battlegrounds during the Pacific War, but are now popular resort destinations for Japanese tourists.

To add more fuel to this already embroiled message of contradictions, he also added a few further elements. Aida strengthened the multi-dimensionality of the work with visual inspiration from Leonard Foujita's war painting, *Attu-jima gyokusai* [Battle of Attu](1943), depicting a scene from a banzai battle. He also integrated dozens of dolphins to drop a hint reminding us how the fact of Japanese fishermen eating mass-stranded dolphins on the islands' beaches became an international scandal. And then finally, as a frame round the whole work, he scribbled a Japanese martial song, *Umi Yukaba* [If I go away to the sea] in the old manyō kana script. (Aida, M. 2013a, pp.72-73).

So we have to think: is this work about postwar Japanese frivolity and lack of concern? Or does it metaphorically indicate the self-righteousness of the

Western animal-protection lobby which made the accusation against Japanese fishermen for eating the dolphins? Or is it a reference to how life simply changes and moves on? Or is it just an interesting visual experience for the viewer? By assembling several key elements into a single work, Aida clearly allows that interpretations of the piece can change according to whichever elements the eyes of the beholder detect as affordance.

A Picture of an Air Raid on New York City (War Picture Returns) (1996) (Figure 14) is another example showing how Aida applies *mitate*. In this work, he uses compositional frameworks and styles from well-known traditional paintings, but replaces their composite elements with images of zero fighters (the Japanese military planes) flying over Manhattan skyscrapers.

The use of depth lines rendered in parallel to emphasise the perspective in this painting is indicative of the fact it was modeled on Kanō Eitoku's the *Rakuchū Rakugai-zu byōbu* [Folding screens of scenes in and around Kyoto] (late 16th century) (Figure 15). We can see how the exhilarating landscape of Kyoto, at that time the centre of Japan, is mirrored in Aida's Manhattan skyscrapers, seen so starkly as emblems of the U.S.A. The depiction of the flames, on the other hand, is quoted from picture scrolls such as the *Jigoku Zōshi* [Hell Scrolls] (12th century) and Buddhist images like the statues of Fudō Myōou, whilst the formation of the zero fighters themselves parodies Kayama Matazō's *A Thousand Cranes* (1970) (Figure 16).

Aida clearly has no intention of dictating the viewer's responses to his work. Unlike Murakami, who can perhaps be accused of providing an intellectual filter for assessing his work, Aida allows affordance of interpretation to run freely. Indeed, he prefers to offset any grandiloquence by retreating behind one of his masks.

Aida often expresses his intention to respond to Japan's contemporary social issues through his work, and this has naturally enough led him to focus on one of the society's dominant workforce issues --- that of salary-men and the ethical quandaries surrounding their social status quo (Dasgupta, 2013). Commentators such as Satō Naoki (2004/2011/2017) observes that it is absolutely vital for salary-men to keep their good *seken-tei* (having a good

reputation in the eyes of *seken*) and so obey *seken*'s protocols (BBC, 2016; NHK News Web, 2019).¹⁷⁶

Although the Japanese demographic changes of the past two decades might make their presence slightly less prominent, the ethos of salary-men as the over-worked, family endowed, grey-suited Mr. Average is still prevailing.¹⁷⁷

Aida's large cartoon drawing, *People in Business Suits Eradication Strategy* (2003/2012), can clearly be interpreted as an hilarious but somewhat cynical view on how desperately salary-men try to maintain *sekentei*.

The work --- even from just the title --- can be taken as a hilarious spoof on the poor salary-man work ethic and lifestyle. Aida's writes in the work itself that his intention is to eradicate Japanese salary-men by poisoning the infamous energy drinks that sustain them through their long working hours. Yet it is too constricting just to assume that Aida despairs of the existence of salary-men. No doubt he has chosen to depict them because they are one of the most iconic figures representing Japanese society, but they are rarely fully considered as living examples of a deeper socio-cultural malaise.

We can see in Aida's work a concern with this more fundamental issue, and one that traces a major trope in Japanese urban ecological culture: how *seken* indoctrinates the salary-man mentality, imposing the need to play a socially proper *kyara*, and dissolve "the self" by submitting to almost identical expectations and daily regimes throughout their lives, factors evidenced in films like *Tokyo Sonata* (2008)¹⁷⁸ and *Nanatsu no kaigi* [Seven meetings] (2019).¹⁷⁹

Aida's *Shinjuku Castle* (1995) also directly concerns one of the more wretched outcomes of this issue, the idea behind it being to make a castle out of cardboard boxes and place it in Shinjuku park, an area known for homeless people living in cardboard shelters. It offers another of Aida's complex insights. One can appreciate that the majority of the homeless may have been rendered

¹⁷⁶ The bestseller series, entitled *Salary-man senriū* (1987-), captures the gist of how, through the past 30 years, salary-men are generally concerned with keeping their good *sekentei* (having a good reputation in the eyes of *seken*) (NHK News Web, 2019).

¹⁷⁷ Salary-men depicted in the million-seller manga series such as Shyōji Sadao's *Salary-man senka* (1969-), which has run for more than 40 years, and Motomiya Hiroshi's *Salary-man Kintarō* (1994-), typically depict such character traits.

¹⁷⁸ Kurosawa, Kiyoshi. (2008). *Tokyo Sonata*. Amsterdam: Entertainment Farm & Fortissimo.

¹⁷⁹ Fukuzawa, Katsuo. (2019). *Nanatsu no kaigi*. Tokyo: Tōhō.

so as a result of the bubble economy collapsing, but also that some --- mainly salary-men --- actually quit their homes because of the enormous pressure they get from *seken* to maintain a socially proper “front face,” providing for the home --- the protective castle --- and for the family. Clearly the work is loaded with ironies, reflecting the speed with which misfortune can strike. Aida’s choice of material in this instance was originally and specifically made for a limited and easily disposable functionality, which echoes the disposable and vulnerable status of one’s individual life and aspirations.

We cannot deny --- even if Aida might --- that the message seems to revolve around the disintegration of the contemporary mediated environment as the dream provider. This theme receives its final rebuke and more layered ironies by the black humour of his *Attempted Suicide Machine 3rd Version* (2001), a kind of suspended and self-defeating hangman’s knot, where the repeated failure to even commit suicide levels a complex mix of reflections on Japan’s honour bound codes. *Seken*, the environment’s affordances, identity, *kyara-play* --- all are being ransacked by Aida.

6.6.1 Language: The translation epidemic vs. a transformative medium

We can detect multiple affordances in language-use when we recognize that its meanings or values fluctuate in relation to circumstance. As we have seen in previous chapters, language is an integral element of Japanese --- of all --- ecological conditions, and we have studied how deeply ingrained it is with the Japanese psyche, encouraging a multi-interpretational sensibility that flexibly changes one’s perceptions, in order to interact effectively with circumstances.

Both Murakami and Aida recognize the inexorable power of language, and we can assess their crucial experiments relating a certain use of the language to the viewer’s visual perception, and how the language can then signify not only meaning but also how it affords to be a visual image itself. These are indeed the two vital issues which relate the Japanese language to visual perception.

It is also important to recognize the fact that the global art market is predominantly operated by English speakers, and engaging with it definitely requires the use of English. However, we can recognize the ambivalence of certain situations in which the two artists may perceive positive or negative affordance in the use of English.

It may be considered that much of Murakami's and Aida's work, plus the way they deal with the language itself, indicate a clear intention to reflect a so-called "Japanese aesthetic." Yet we choose to argue that they are simply dealing with ingredients that embody and reflect the mediated Japanese environment. Reminding ourselves of Gibson's testament that "language is more than a code because it permits *predications* as well as labelings. (...) perception is biased by the (individual's) needs that motivate practical action" (Gibson, 1966, pp.281-282), we can understand the depth at which the two artists' work stands as actual evidence .

6.6.2 Murakami and Language: The translation epidemic

Murakami made a compelling statement when he declared that the real charm of being a conceptual artist was to be able to manipulate the viewer's perception by using language (Murakami, Asada, Okazaki, & Sawaragi, 2001).

We acknowledge how much this kind of dictatorial edge can constantly seem to motivate his *modus operandi*, defining artistic concepts by eye-openers or sound bites to catch people's attention. But Murakami has indicated that his experience of living in the USA made him fully aware that it is absolutely essential to provide an artist's concept, and offer comprehensive information to explain both his position and intentions (Fujitsu, 2001; Murakami, T. 2005). This realization clearly led him to be involved in extensive catalogue making, as well as actively attending numerous interviews, talk shows, and events. Most of what he writes --- certainly all of his Superflat theorizing, and most of his art catalogues and books --- are translated into English. The bilingual approach to expressing and marketing is very much Murakami's thing: he wants to be the authority that controls not just what he says, but most emphatically, how you understand what he is telling you, constantly explaining almost every detail of his work --- the what, why, when, and how his work is created.

It is noteworthy that in the beginning of his career, Murakami actually attempted to play with how the Japanese language can be used to embrace ambivalences. He soon realized however that what he called a "linguistic trick" (Murakami, 2002) does not work so well, because his prime focus has been to conceptualize his artistic visions for universal appreciation. His realization

happened in 1999, when Murakami offered up the exhibition title, *The Meaning of the Nonsense of the Meaning* which is based on "sansei no hantai na no da," which can loosely be translated as "it is that I am against acceptance of it." This is an extremely well-known Japanese anime character's catchphrase (role language), and Murakami is using it here as a means of parodying Japanese people's presumptions and ignorance.

The point behind this was that through its reference to a popular TV anime programme, Murakami intended to belittle what he considered to be Japanese lameness in accepting whatever was on offer from the West. But the ironies of the language itself, registering Murakami's disapproval, in a sense stabbed him in the back when he finally came to realize that non-Japanese speakers (in his case, the English speaking Western art market) lived with a language that not only functioned differently from his own, but that its speakers would then consequently interpret experience and emotion differently.

Taking language out of its acknowledged context, yet still within its own culture, is a specific component of the Japanese *mitate*-awareness we have met throughout this thesis. But for Murakami to use catchphrases that typify a character well-known in his specific culture, and then witness the confused impact of this in the different culture of the West, suggests a naive artistic approach that did not, at that time, fully comprehend Japanese cultural mechanics. As previously stated, Murakami's focus was to establish universal appeal, or to put it more acutely, appeal to the English-speaking, thinking sensibility.

It was through these experiences with his own work and its public reception in the West, that Murakami came to accept the full reality of non-Japanese speakers' responses. Linguistic tricks used in such works as *DOB*, *Bakabon Project* (1991) and *Dobozite Dobozite Oshamanbe* (1993), were jokes that were meant to be understood, and as a consequence the language --- and the culture too --- were rendered, we could say, into a double nonsense. From this point on, Murakami seemed to realise that language out of its cultural context is a kind of redundant currency, and stopped using it as a conceptual trigger in his art.

6.6.3.1 Aida: Language as a medium for adjustment and kyara-play

Aida's work appears fully engaged with the all-encompassing complexities of the Japanese language, and one senses a supportive awareness of its deep integration with the individual's thinking, seeing, and behaviour.

Aida's work involves a shift of perception triggered by extensive language-use. However, unlike Murakami, who attempts to manipulate the reception of his work by "explaining" his artistic concept, Aida's fundamental position seems to be to suspend any conceptual reading of his work. Indeed, his work demonstrates how language can either fix or de-stabilize meaning according to the context it is exhibited in. The viewer then, in some sense stranded between wishing to make sense and feeling a nonsense, tends to see his work as "ambiguous," yet prodigious, lucid on one hand, elusive on the other (Kataoka, M. 2013; Maerkle, 2008/2018)

Nevertheless, certain individuals, such as the art historian Yamashita Yuji or the best selling novelist, Hirano Keichiro, are huge admirers of Aida, and see him as a risk taker able to let his work to speak for itself. However, Yamashita highlights the core issue underpinning Aida's work involving language, the same issue Murakami of course faced: can others (from the West) ever "understand the complicated references comprehensible only to Japanese people or people able to comprehend the Japanese language"(Yamashita, 2013, p.191).

Aida's newly created traditional Japanese scroll, *Japanese Language* (2008) (Figure 17), features Japanese calligraphy. It draws our attention to the fact that the written system of the Japanese language can be viewed --- affords to be viewed --- as an iconic image in itself. In this sense it directs interpretation --- if not actually telling us a meaning --- without our literal understanding of it. The words written on the scroll are in *sōshotai*, the old Japanese writing system commonly used in the Edo period, and because of the way the words are written and the fact that they are written on *washi* (the traditional Japanese paper) with traditional colours commonly used for clothes or pottery making, the cognizant viewer instantly assumes that the work has something to do with the traditional in Japanese culture, and most obviously, an old poem. But in a true *mitate*-method joke however, we can come to realize that what is actually being said is a quotation from some nasty and aggressive argument exchanged via a communication site on the web. Aida is giving us a provocative lesson about how certain written forms of the Japanese language are simply looked at as an image, implying certain concerns, meanings or values.

In another work, entitled *Manifesto* (2015) (Figure 18), which is a six meters long calligraphy scroll of white fabric suspended from the ceiling, Aida states his criticisms of the education ministry, advocating --- amongst other things --- an increase in the number of teachers. Yet the work itself brings to a head this issue of Japanese individuals having not only a propensity to assume meanings from the ways a text is written, but that they can also maintain this first impression at the expense of what the text actually may mean. It further brings into account that complex web of concepts that the observation of language as image can fuel, aided by the ease with which the Japanese can in fact register it, and indeed recognize its affordances.

It is necessary to note, by way of further explanation, that the exhibition curator of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, where the work was first exhibited, requested Aida to alter the work because its presentation reflected a style reminiscent of Mishima Yukio's *Manifesto* at the time he committed *seppuku* (samurai ritual suicide) in 1970. In fact, nailing the legacy of language as image, the curator actually told Aida that if he typed the manifesto and stuck the printed paper onto the exhibition wall, the museum would withdraw its complaint (Nagata, 2015).

Aida is particularly interested in this matter of how the individual is encouraged to perceive written forms of the Japanese language as image (which we noted in chapter four). He pursues this interest further in his work, *Calligraphy School* (2007), simply depicting the title itself in calligraphy, and reminds us of the fact that in Japan, children practice calligraphy as a compulsory subject at elementary school.

It is interesting to recognize that practising calligraphy helps the individual to be aware of the fact that writing a Japanese word requires particular attention to its "relational" proportions, because there are many Japanese words that could easily be misperceived when their components are depicted proportionally unbalanced (Satō, E. 2011/2013). The subject can often be required to verify which word is actually being used, by looking at how it is depicted *in context*.

6.6.3.2 Playing the kyara of a non-English speaker

We should note here that Aida's interest is not limited solely to Japanese

language-use but also interestingly references English language-use. He shows how a language has itself a status quo that is defined by its socio-political relationships with other languages. In other words, Aida clearly seems to appreciate that the impact of language-use needs to be understood not only by the ways it defines meanings or values, but also through its involvement with a multiplicity of other issues. Amongst the most prominent of these would be addressing questions of one's native language and then language fluency itself, which in turn can be a status indicator, or --- especially in Japan --- can lend a facility to kyara-play.

Facing the paradoxical situation where speaking English would clearly be to his advantage in the art world, Aida detects a negative affordance in English-use, claiming its domination of the art market as being "unfair" (Aida, M. 2012b).

In *Translator* (2005), a bilingual statement work on canvas and paper, we read his claim as quoted here: "I believe that 'in once-time-only life, if it is possible, man should not speak more than one language.' In need to speak of such belief is only in a situation where other person does not speak Japanese. For that reason, in order to correctly convey this belief I consequently lapse in a paradox of despising or denying the existence of translator itself who are working for me" (Aida, 2013a, p.147).

This is a fundamental premise that Aida finds enormously frustrating. We can assume that it goes against his grain both from the "purely" art side of his cultural life as well as from its ethical and political side. Facing the double act of "interpreting the self" via Japanese and then "translating it" to English is one step too much. We can observe his early, angry expression of this ("my pent-up frustration" he tells us) when he organized a street demonstration during his nine-month stay in New York, called *Your Pronunciation is Wrong!* (2000). He and some of his foreign associates and friends attended this demonstration performance, waving placards shouting that Americans should speak "as simply and sharply as foreigners --- the Japanese --- do." It is both ludicrously funny and sadly unfortunate that Aida, being Japanese, would forever be in a minority attempting to confront the English-speaking majority. But the "performance" helps us realize that whatever Aida claims as the "correct" pronunciation, he, as a Japanese/minority/follower, will never be able to compete with the American/majority/originator/leader. To work towards

reversing the dichotomy of Japan as a minority (=wrong) versus America as the majority (=right), in 2001 he provided a "Aida-speak" dictionary as an aid for foreigners visiting the Yokohama Triennale.

When he exhibited the sexually explicit, large-scale war manga, *Mutant Hanako* (1997) in San Francisco, Aida was at the height of his creative powers. He created a spoof, chaotic yet hilarious collision with his mixed-use of the Japanese and English language,

Showing the work with an accompanying film dubbed with a specifically jokey English spoken soundtrack, the idea seemed to be either to distract and confuse American art-goers, who might take his work as a serious accusation about American interference with Japan, or simply to be taken as a joke (Favell, 2013b). Setting up a political manga in an art space where the viewer is perhaps trapped into an obligation to consider its meaning or apparent ambivalence, one may conclude that this work demonstrated that language can indeed be powerful enough to manipulate the viewer's interpretation of an image, a viewpoint Kruger would no doubt agree with.

Aida used ambivalence as a tool to subvert the viewer's expectations and disturb any preconceptions, but only used the language soundtrack for this work in the U.S.A. and not in Japan, where he deemed it superfluous. His acknowledgement of subterfuge and nonsense becomes not only more apparent to us, but also sharper, and Aida has really used this to his artistic advantage, exhibiting the work as a conceptual expression, but at the same time adding contradictive information to shift the viewer away from it. Whatever his reasons, this transposing *mitate* and deflective technique of the use of the English language here, runs parallel to the ways so many Japanese people reside in the world of ambivalence, or leave themselves seemingly free and fluid, not being tied down --- one might surmise --- to the static in thinking, form or identity.

One can also note that Aida originally made *Mutant Hanako* (1997) in the format of a minor manga creator's self-published book --- black and white photocopies on coarse paper, stapled together --- but then re-created it as a much larger version with eight-panels of folding screens, during which time he had also produced an English-dubbed film version of the work (2003) in order to exhibit all as a packaged and complete work of art. In so doing, Aida had managed to shift the identities of both the work and the medium, an action that

mirrors the shifting of kyara with circumstance. With his somewhat perverse refusal to grant meaning or value to it, we can nevertheless understand *Mutant Hanako* as a performative way of acknowledging how circumstance can affect presentation of self as artwork. And in this way the transformation of the work from book to standing screen to anime parallels kyara-play's adaptations to circumstance.

6.7.1 Technologies

Both Murakami and Aida detect affordance in the use of technologies, but whilst Murakami sees technology as a vital/useful medium allowing him to make his vision more real, Aida shows us the pros and cons of its use, reminding us of the question of how technologies can indeed change the way we think of art.

6.7.2.1 Murakami: Transformations in Superflat and kyara

It is clear that Murakami regards technology as an absolutely essential device to help his creative ideas find expression. He appears to use it in two fundamental ways, the first of which greatly enhances his theory of Superflat, by which he presents his idea that the Japanese sense of reality resides in a two-dimensional world. His second use of technologies takes full advantage of their transformative processes, enabling him to spin versions of one subject matter and thereby exhibit according to situation, taking a work as a kyara-indicator, transforming its dimensionality.

Though perhaps most clearly represented in his Superflat work, the majority of Murakami's work is designed, processed and created via the use of 3DCG. He has even instructed us in his digital drawing techniques using, for example, the Bézier curve tool in Adobe Illustrator to "enhance the smoothness of the outline" (Murakami, T. 2001d). Together with "laborious layering and a high finish of output" (Darling, 2017, p.30), Murakami's aim has been to create a super smooth surface which leaves no physical trace of human touch --- what he calls a superflat appearance.

To accentuate this Superflat style, Murakami's focus has opposed the trends of Western two-dimensional work. Not only does he eliminate all shadows to help epitomize the total superflat look, but more importantly --- and

to follow the technique of past Japanese masters --- he has been able to create a specifically two-dimensional style that obstructs the eye from settling on a three-point perspective. His work functions therefore with two-dimensional flatness, but with multiple viewing vantage points.¹⁸⁰ These techniques enable his work to activate a *visual kinaesthetic*, since the eyeliner travels restlessly across the surface of a painting, due to the lack of the three-point perspective, creating the dazzling impression of a painted image “progressively” moving rather than being static.

Murakami once declared: “I honestly think that each of my artworks is a ‘kyaracter.’ I want to see the ways my kyara grows via the media, and spreads everywhere in the world” (Murakami, T. 1999c, p.137). We can say that his self-portrait, DOB, most obviously explores this notion of artwork as kyara because it operates as a multi-form series that itself has been transformed from its original two-dimensional image to a three-dimensional object, changing its proportions according to the choice of material, its size, etc. and where it is exhibited. We can say that DOB in fact represents Murakami’s circumselves, serving as a flexible icon of its creator, and reflecting the specific circumstance of its chosen exhibition situation.

Murakami, indeed, appears to be excited by the full wonder of the transformative processes offered by the use of technologies.¹⁸¹ In creating the anime character figure *Miss ko²* (1996), he can reveal how a two-dimensional image of an anime character, originally drawn with unrealistic physical proportions, can be converted into a three-dimensional physical object (i.e. a figure) by using 3DCG (Saegusa, 2001).

We can measure Murakami’s intention to exploit circumselves transformations in a technological world, when we respond to the multiple-entity *Second Mission Project ko²* (*SMPko²*) (1999) --- *SMPko²* (*human type*), *SMPko²* (*ga-walk type*) and *SMPko²* (*jet airplane type*) --- a three works of one subject group signifying that *Miss Ko²* is in the processes of transformation (Figure 19). We can observe, for example, that the anime figure, *Miss Ko²*, has had body parts reassembled and transformed into a fighting aeroplane, and also makes an

¹⁸⁰ There are many examples: see *A Picture of Lies Wriggling in the Forest at the Deep End of the Universe* (2015).

¹⁸¹ However, there are some exceptions, for example, *Dragon in Clouds* --- *Indigo Blue* (2010) is a hand-painted work.

appearance as a three-dimensional computer graphic animated figure in his anime film *Jellyfish Eyes* (2013).

Clearly technology and *kyara-play* have a fruitful relationship central to both Murakami's creative processes and to how he thinks about positioning his work, but their value in his work does not stop there.

6.7.2.2 Digitalized *mitate* applications

We have seen how the *mitate*-awareness flows through the Japanese milieu, underscoring a willingness to perceive and appreciate the equivocal. As an application, we have acknowledged *mitate* as a central technique used in traditional Japanese creativity to vitalize significances struck between seeming opposites. *Mitate* is about transformations, and we can appreciate that Murakami's creative transformations are made more achievable by his use of technology, making his need to re-work the traditional and sustain the crucial lineage between the past masters and his own (contemporaneous) work more viable.

Curator Miki Akiko sees that "Murakami uses as a point of departure the Japanese artistic tradition of *mitate* (repurposing of existing objects), [and] creates something new by adding a touch of originality. By pursuing an approach that consists of 'translating and causing a chemical reaction to occur, transcending the original by continually imitating,' Murakami intensifies the alchemical act of transforming these models into his own singular artistic universe" (Miki, 2015, p.37).

The critic Miki's praises are focusing here on Murakami's series entitled "Nippon e'awase" [Japan picture contest],¹⁸² a project he created in collaboration with the art historian Tsuji Nobuo, the process of which was initially featured in the art magazine, *Geijutsu Shinchō*, between 2009 and 2010 (Murakami & Tsuji, 2014).

Via the extensive use of advanced technologies and materials, these works are contemporaneous, full scale versions of traditional paintings, grouped as a large series, and feature Murakami's digitally processed *mitate* applications.

¹⁸² "E'awase" was one of the refined amusements practiced amongst the aristocratic classes during the Heian era. It consisted of two teams who would each take turns displaying paintings they had brought with them to the other, competing on the basis of their merits.

These works seem to be specifically aimed at the viewer, asking him or her to compare the traditional with his own version, and consciously probe whether the creation of such a pastiche, infused with flashy manga/anime aesthetics, can hold any appeal.¹⁸³

Murakami puts digitalized *mitate* applications through complex and laborious practices. To make *Daruma the Great* (2007) (Figure 20), he scanned the original of Soga Shōhaku's *Daruma paintings* (1751)(Figure 21)¹⁸⁴ into a computer, divided the image into not only different parts but actual individual brush strokes, and then added some specifics of his own using a brush stroke pen. He then combined all that digitally processed data, printed it out on a large scale, arranged his silk screens, applied acrylic paint, and began the process of printing out the final silk-screen versions (Murakami, 2015, p.171).

In his series, *Ensō* (2015), Murakami extends the transformative in a very direct way, which nonetheless throws up complex layers of interpretation. He has chosen to digitally draw *ensō*, traditionally a hand-drawn circle signifying in the instant of its creation the profound moment of enlightenment. We can understand this as a digital era response to a symbolic spiritual image,¹⁸⁵ and allow Murakami his beliefs in the redemptive powers of art, no matter how they are arrived at (Hashimoto, M. 2015).

As a response to the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami of 2011, Murakami created two works: a 328-foot-long painting, *The 500 Arhats* (2012), taking full advantage of the computer graphics system; and the animation film *Jellyfish Eyes* (2013). The writer, Nakao Kyōko, argues that some individuals may criticize Murakami's approach as being simply superficial, thinking that computer systems can never express the soul of the creative individual. But she does point out that without technologies, Murakami would not have been able

¹⁸³ As an example demonstrating traditional aesthetic values visually blending in with the new, Murakami's work, *727* (1996), borrowed elements from the 12th century scroll painting *Shingisan Engi Emaki*, to integrate with his self-portrait, *DOB*, which is depicted in a manga style. Murakami is also inspired by the old nihonga master, Ogata Kōrin, who is well known for his delicate flower and plant paintings. He was able to develop his signature style of cute flowers with smiley faces, typified in *Kawaii Vacances* (2002), and his *Tan Tan Bo Puking a.k.a. Gero Tan* (2002), both experimenting with the two dimensional "flat perspective," also explored by another *nihonga* master, Itō Jakuchū.

¹⁸⁴ The year of its production is unknown.

¹⁸⁵ Sarah Thornton states: "designed in Adobe Illustrator, the painting's carefully considered virtuosity draws attention to its surface while simultaneously evoking the infinite depth of outer space" (Thornton, 2015, p.224).

to complete *The 500 Arhats* as it required 4,000 silk-screen prints, and needed to be completed within a few months (Nakao, K. 2015, p.236).

The animation film, *Jellyfish Eyes* (2013), on the other hand, tells the story of some children who were given devices to control their F.R.I.E.N.D.s --- individualised monster-like companions that they are forced to do battle with.

The folklorist Michael Foster suggests that Murakami's "invocation of monstrous themes and imagery deploys *mitate*-like and *honkadori* sensibilities" (Foster, 2017, p.149), which is a decidedly interesting interpretive approach. One can appreciate that Murakami's monstrous figures convey something not only to children, but also reveal how he deals with his own complex reactions to the Tohoku Earthquake, turning frustrations and anger into cute modified kyaracters as an effective coping mechanism, shifting distressing perceptions of a traumatic event.¹⁸⁶ Murakami's creation has its precedent in daily life where, for example, the Monjukun kyaracter representing the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in the catastrophic disaster of 2011, has been cultivated socially as a means to ease the horror of the situation and enable people to open up enough to talk about their condition (Blogos, 2012; Tokyo Shinbun, 2011).

6.7.3 Aida: Being an analogue artist

Aida does not seem to use technology in the ways that Murakami does. There are no transformations from three-dimension to two-dimension, no 3DCG, no digital scanning and no Adobe illustrator. Aida's use of technology rests very much in a kind of hands on application of artifacts and ideas --- the use of telephones, setting up connective Internet systems etc. He gives technology a physical dimension rather than using it as a technical tool.

We can think that as a response to the unavoidable in the 21st century's technologically-mediated environment, Aida detects affordance in the use of technology more as an issue for dispute and due consideration than as an immediately positive aid to creativity. Indeed, his overriding concern seems to be whether or not its use can ever do justice to the values and meanings he requires of a work of art. We find consequently that his work will occasionally

¹⁸⁶ Murakami is a long-term nuclear protestor, and is actively involved in demonstrations. He also organized an art auction to raise funds to support victims of these disasters.

place technology in situations where it fails, or does not have much sense of a purpose or meaningful use.

Claiming himself as an “analogue person,” in the performance project *Lonely Planet* (1998), Aida randomly made silent international phone calls in order to express his “antipathy against the round the clock Internet system” (Aida, M. 2013a, p.145).

The Land of Games (2008-) references the frequent changing of Japanese prime ministers. By showing flickered images of ex-prime ministers’ faces on the monitor of a popular game machine, it reveals just how easily a politician goes out of fashion, just as game software does. Thinking of his suicide machine installation, we see even in the most desperate of situations, humankind is let down by machinery.

To make the ambiguity of his position more explicit, he seems intent on creating two types of work: we see Aida using technology as a central presence in installations, and then we see the larger portion of his work which is executed by hand with meticulous detail, an attention to detail in fact, which we could think signals its own attack on the prevalence of computer driven precisions in art. Generally we are able to say that his use of technology rests on installations, and in this way is a demonstration of the physical rendering the equivocal, rather than applications of --- for example --- computer technologies making a work possible, even if that should indicate a narrative linking the historical with the present day.

Indeed there might be certain other criteria used to decide the application of advanced technology in art: whether it enables an artist to create an image or whether it can actually reduce one’s manual effort, for example.

But the existence of some of these user-friendly tech gadgets points to an ethical dilemma. With the seductive offer of an immediate and easy access to professional skills, anyone can potentially be an artist. The corollary to this however, is that some of us may become more appreciative of labour intensive methods --- drawing by hand, studied craftsmanship are examples --- fulfilling a sense of applied time and skill, which may enrich appreciation.

We are also aware of the fact that advanced technology can deceive our senses,¹⁸⁷ and this reality can play havoc with our art related ethics. It is as though Aida is asking, "When we are looking at art, do we really want to be looking at the digitally made, or should we want instead to ask questions about technology?" When we are unsure and need to find a way to make sense of the work in front of us, we increasingly need the comfort and security information can offer; and so we find ourselves appreciating the ways that Aida's work can register both the need, and, in certain senses, point to the solution to the problems of assessment and pronouncement in art.

True to form, however, Aida of course offers contradictions. *Minna to Issho* (2002-) is an ongoing project of his that comes with scribbles, doodles and rough sketches which all appear to be drawn quickly and easily. This project seems to deliberately put under the microscope issues of skill implicit in assessments of quality in works of creativity. Perhaps Aida is indeed challenging notions of perfection and the cold detachment of technological production he witnesses in the art world around him.

Posters (1994), for example, is a series of 18 posters which show how a Japanese elementary or high school student might typically be encouraged to make posters with moralizing slogans --- "Save nature," "Stop bullying me," "Who will be the winner in the long run?." Looking at the ways Aida imitates a young student's unformed drawing style by using typical school drawing kits, rather than --- one must note --- computer graphics, we can observe here another Aida ambiguity that poses the profound in the mouth of the unwitting, and throws up the possible dilemma facing creativity in the future.

But we can also think that this work questions the nature of skill itself in creativity. Does skill equate with marketability? Does it equate with "artistry"? And how do we make our judgments? As with the sloganeering approach to perception and opinion he confronts us with in *Posters*, are we making superficial appraisals anyway?¹⁸⁸ The work stands in real contrast to others like

¹⁸⁷ Making a replica which is extremely difficult to distinguish from its original, puts some critical issues on the nature of authenticity, the use of technologies, human's optical capacities, etc. under a microscope. For example, there are various concerns and opinions about the fact that Kenninji, a high definition copy of Tawaraya Soutatsu's, *Kenninji's Fuujin raijinzu byōbu* (17th century) is displayed at Kenninji temple (Korokoro, 2017).

¹⁸⁸ David Maclagan elaborates on this idea extensively in his *Outsider art: from the margins to the marketplace* (2009). He points out that the story of the four year old Marla Olmstead, whose

Ash Color Mountains (2009-2011) (Figure 22) or *Blender* (2001), which are executed in meticulous and skillful detail, almost always done by Aida himself.

These are particularly interesting examples because they show how the application of *mitate* can create different effects according to what the viewer's attention is drawn to. Whilst his work, *The Giant Member Fuji versus King Gidora* (1993), is a direct quotation (*mitate, honkadori*) from Katsushika Hokusai's *Kinoe no Komatsu* (Young Pines) (1820), *Ash Color Mountains* and *Blender* can be looked at as contemporaneous versions of Utagawa Kuniyoshi's "yose-e" (Figure 23), established as another type of *mitate* application manipulating shock values. Creating imaginative portrait figures made entirely of "objects" like human bodies, cats, fish, etc., *yose-e* applies *mitate* to invite the viewer to see those assembled objects as a unified whole, arousing a kind of wonder in the viewer.¹⁸⁹

At a distance, Aida's *Ash Colour Mountains* appears to depict large mountains in a light foggy background, whilst his large scale *Blender* appears to be mixing a strawberry colour juice. However, on paying close attention we realize that those objects' contours are formed by hundreds of human bodies --- salary-men piled up to make the shape of the mountains, whilst young girls are jammed into and stirred by the blender. Technology rears its head with Aida in the form of a kitchen blender. Hardly the most challenging of new technological developments, but he makes it work, offering an image that throws up numerous questions about contemporary Japanese society.

It's the *kyara* that Aida wants to play, always seeming to downplay and obscure, whilst offering very incisive critiques of the society --- and indeed the art world--- around him. We can wonder what Aida really wants us to see and think --- and also what we think of him. So he tells us: "To be honest with you," he once said, " my 'true self' probably exists within some kind of amorphous substance melted like a jelly --- so it is not actually meant to be shown to others. Expressing a view of myself like this is very difficult --- I always end up making

paintings were promoted as being on a par with the work of adult Abstract Expressionist artists, raises complex questions about who and what qualifies as an artist and work of art, and whether or not the art market dictates accepted standards and creative values.

¹⁸⁹ One of the masters of *mitate-e* artists, Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798-1861), is known for making a series of playful *yose-e*. See for example, *Mikake wa kowaiga tonda iihito da* (1847). From the west, the Italian mannerist, Giuseppe Archimboldo (1527-1593), set a precedent, creating a series of portraits using inanimate objects from daily life.

my work like an add-on" (Aida, M. 2013b, p.34). Yet once we have cracked the various codes, we can find some very pertinent questions and possible answers to life in contemporary Japan, and its relationship to technologies that seem to shine directly into the eyes of the western world.

Aida's work seems to transform his viewers into go-betweens: looking at his work, we often find ourselves perplexed as to what exactly it's about, and so we seek the information tucked away in his comments somewhere. But in a way, this makes us more puzzled. He has the knack of evaporating all finalities and judgments. Is he constantly offering a critique of contemporary technology by the introduction of often quite banal objects, and is he, through his own amazing technical abilities, telling us that "human" is very much the best way to go? Being suspended between his work and his personal comments, we are still in indecision, a state of mind that can easily be Aida's stratagem. He may disguise himself by befuddling us, showing such an eclectic series of work, yet he nevertheless makes us realize that what we think we see in his work reflects what kind of affordance we choose to identify in a work of art.

6.8 Conclusion

Using the criteria that an ecological art critique enables, we can get inside art in a different way and perhaps understand it more fully. Indeed it becomes a versatile medium which allows us to see how an artist engages with the ecological conditions.

Whether the artist admits of it or not, we can recognize him or her as a reflective symptom of time and place. The application of such a critique can also afford the viewer the chance to identify and open up possibilities for transforming the ways one perceives allowing us, in fact, to identify how and why a certain type/kind of affordance is detected according to an artist's intention. Focusing on Murakami and Aida, two artists from Japan, we have been able to trace how the idea of kyara-play acts as a tool that helps them to express their improvisations with circumstances.

In many ways, the idea of kyara-play is a springboard for their imagination because their work can play multiple kyara on behalf of them, spreading their message to the world without physical or materialistic constraint. Both their work and their kyara can flexibly transform the two-dimensional to the

three-dimensional, whether it's a painting, a sculpture, a balloon, etc. via the detection of numerous art-affordances identified in the 21st century technologically-mediated environment.

Whilst the two artists might be considered to deal with a relatively similar environment, we have seen that their approaches to making and marketing their work are clearly very different. In fact we have to acknowledge that their environments --- the impact of the ecological conditions on them as individual artists --- have been self-determined and widely different also: Murakami's choice has been fundamentally towards being an international artist, whilst Aida's has been Japan based. The observation of conscious decision making here has enabled us to understand why an artist comes to detect particular affordances, and this will possibly open up new ways for us to perceive and re-learn or re-educate our vision and grasp of their work.

Murakami seems to be absorbed in a rhetoric of logic and formalities, inviting the West to see a so-called Japanese-ness through his work. It is clearly apparent that he is heavily involved in discourse analysis on Japanese cultural identities --- what he imagines to be the Japanese way --- especially through his curatorial work and his resolve to make contemporaneous versions of traditional Japanese paintings, via digitalized *mitate* applications.

Murakami uses the intermediaries of language, history, and technology as versatile tools for establishing his status quo in the global art market. Indeed we can assume that his intention to educate both the Western and Japanese viewer masks a controlling need to dictate how his viewers should perceive his work.

By placing this emphasis on disciplined, and indeed controlled, visual perception, he seems to be less concerned about the historical impact of language as a governing influence, and rules out therefore the allowance that ecological conditions in fact shape subjective perception. Yet his decision to control the viewers' responses to his work, telling them what they should see and feel, might nevertheless be considered as part of the ecological circumstance that moves life on.

On the other hand, the seemingly jumbled impression arrived at via the eclectic variety of Aida's work can be understood as a way of documenting the current affairs of Japan, offering criticism and social satire as a means of drawing the viewers' attention to the issues at hand. His focus is clearly set firmly on the domestic art scene, and yet he never seems to aim at establishing

or maintaining a signature style despite choosing complex references comprehensive primarily to Japanese people or those able to comprehend the Japanese language. His provocative explanations of the concepts behind his work, would most probably go over the heads of many of his viewers, especially non-Japanese viewers. We can credit the perspicacity of Yamashita's observation that "Aida's assumption of the role of pretend villain in order to ridicule the hypocritical face of facile globalism" (Yamashita, 2013, p.191).

But perhaps, Aida's true mission is to keep his artistic motto as "*tekitō*," which he translates as "appropriate," but has another meaning of "to leave things to work out naturally," which he points out, "are bipolarized meanings in just one word" (Aida, T. 2013e). It is a clear indication of what he is aiming for, and the word itself encapsulates how his work and his comments on it generate multiple interpretations which reflect a need, when we attempt to define what his work is about, to be able to spin our flexibilities and allow our circumselves to be capable of tracing the movement between art created identities that Aida is asking from us, his viewers.

We argue that every artwork is created via a detection of affordance which is realized as a possibility by an artist's action, not merely controlled or dictated by what might be called the artist's mastermind. Artwork, in this respect, needs to be understood as an outcome of the ways an artist improvises with the surrounding environment which constitutes various spatio-temporal circumstantial factors.

Exploring this line of thinking further, we can think of artwork is a trans-medium which opens up a possibility for us to recognize the fact that we are capable of learning an alternative way of seeing.

In every culture, there are certain conventional ways of looking at or thinking about a subject matter. However, affordance theory and an ecological art critique help us to stay away from stereotypical ways of seeing things and judging work accordingly. Gibson tells us that

[T]he use of perspective in paintings is merely a convention [...and] the varieties of painting at different times in history, and among different peoples, prove the existence of different ways of seeing, in some sense of the term. But there are no differences among people in the basic way of seeing [...and] the artist transcribes what he sees upon a two-dimensional surface, he uses perspective geometry, of

necessity. Human visual perception is learned, but not in the same way that we learn a language. [...] What the artist can do is [...] to educate our attention (Gibson, 1960, p.227).

As we see, the two artists Murakami and Aida have attempted to “re-educate” both their own and our attention, perhaps inviting new ways of seeing.

Conclusion: The journey through the mitate-awareness: How kyara-play opened up

Throughout the thesis we have observed that the subject's constant negotiations with the technologically-mediated environment opened perceptions that awaken the flexibility of circumselves. We saw how the idea of flexibly adaptable, multiple role-play was granted historically as a Japanese sensibility, which was fostered through the nihonjinron propaganda regime as an emblem of Japanese uniqueness. However, our investigation into the changes to Japanese ecological conditions that have influenced the subject since the 1990's, indicates that the old-establishment of multiple role-play has been transformed into kyara-play, a development encouraged by recent technologies but equally substantially by the use of Japanese language.

Gibson's ecological psychology and his affordance theory open up a fresh approach to understanding hitherto fixed notions of cultural identity and subjectivity, constantly reminding us that all meaning and value is mediated. His theories help us to explain that so-called Japaneseness is simply an outcome of the ways the subject negotiates with the environment. What is, what exists, can evolve through interactivities where functions, values or meanings are challenged and negotiated.

The currency for these fluidly shifting identities and daily transformations in Japan is the mitate-awareness. Like *seken* and *ba*, it infuses the perceptions of the Japanese individual, indicating --- as Gibson tells us --- that engaging with the same intermediaries, the subject is invariably guided to share similar propensities.

With Gibson's central idea of "perception leading action," visual perception becomes the crucial medium that enables us to trace how we negotiate with the ecological conditions, attempting to influence it as well as being influenced by it. It is indeed a way of acknowledging that we are all constantly in a transient state as fluid selves, without any fixed way of seeing or any inherent ability to perceive in a certain way.

How we perceive and make sense of an image allows us to trace how the ecological conditions have shaped our perceptions as well as the ways we think

and act, and we are consequently able to identify a potentiality --- an affordance --- to enact a new way of seeing, or a new transient way of being, which the Japanese term *kyara-play*.

By reading *air*, the paramount impact of *ba* often dictates the ways the subject perceives the self and acts upon circumstances: the subject plays *kyara*. With the subject aspiring to “directing” or “producing” an appropriate *kyara-performance* to attune with the temporary specificity of a space, we have acknowledged how the repeated image of the theatre has been used to unlock an understanding of the enactment of *kyara-play*. From Murakami and Aida’s art production to the experimentation of robot theatre, we can appreciate how life as theatre has repeatedly served to help our understanding of the self in the world we live in.

Perhaps this image of the performative self will point to a future where self-identity need not be sought after as a fixed entity.

Let us remember what Gibson confirmed:

Men often disagree but they are not fated to do so by their language or their culture. Disagreement is not caused by inherent differences in their habits of interpreting sensory experience --- habits permanently fixed by the words they use. A man can always re-educate his attention. For that matter, a man can invent new words for something he has seen for himself. He can even get others to see what he has newly seen by describing it carefully, and this is a fortunate man (Gibson, 1966, p.321).

We have all learnt how to see, and can be aware of our perceptions and judgments hitherto, but we can also undo and relearn how to see the world with new ecological optics.

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Figure20: Murakami Takashi(2007) *Daruma the Great* Figure21:Soga Shōhaku (1751) *Daruma paintings*

Figure 22: Aida Makoto (2009-2011) *Ash Color Mountains*

(Figure22's close-up)

Figure 23 Utagawa Kuniyoshi's "yose-e"
Mikake wa kowai ga tonda ii hito da [He looks fierce but he is really a nice person] (1847)

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