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An exploration of otherworldliness and death in avant-garde Japanese poster design

by

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I declare that this Master's dissertation, *An exploration of otherworldliness and death in avant-garde Japanese poster design*, is my own work. All sources that have been used or quoted have been acknowledged by means of complete references. I did not use another student's previous work as my own. I did not and will not allow anyone to copy my work with the intention of presenting it as his or her own.

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SUMMARY AND KEYWORDS

This study examines the multi-faceted visual and metaphoric representations of otherworldliness and death in avant-garde Japanese posters from the post-World War II era. Following Japan's surrender in World War II, the country experienced significant socio-political turmoil and transformation. It is in this context that the subversive Japanese avant-garde ethos was born. Focusing primarily on posters designed for *angura* (underground) theatre and film productions, this study analyses the socio-political, ideological, historical, religious and cultural reasons for the prevalence of otherworldliness and death as themes in the posters (from 1953 to 1989).

To this end, a literature review presents Japanese perspectives on death, aesthetics, beauty, suicide and religion, which are intrinsically linked to the central themes of this study. Several definitions of otherworldliness are provided to facilitate a deeper understanding of the term. Philosophical and thanatological theories inform the theoretical framework, which is situated at the intersection of otherworldliness and death. The framework is subsequently applied for purposes of a comprehensive case study analysis of selected avant-garde posters.

The significance of this study lies in its in-depth exploration of the underlying causes and visual expressions of the prevalent themes of death and otherworldliness in avant-garde posters, which, at the same time, reflect the socio-political and cultural *milieu* of post-war Japan.

Keywords: Aesthetics, *angura*, avant-garde, death, double suicide, Japanese aesthetics, Japanese graphic design, *mono no aware*, *mujō*, otherworldliness, posters, post-war Japan, *seppuku*, suicide, thanatology, World War II, *yugen*

Notes:

- Throughout this study, Japanese names are written with the surname first, per Japanese governmental requirements from September 6, 2019.
- Historical periods, such as the Edo (1603–1868) and Shōwa (1926–1989) eras, are not italicised, following the Japanese Tourism Agency's *Writing and style manual* (2024).

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I acknowledge that it is only through Christ, who renews my strength daily, that I reached the point of submitting this work. In my weakness, He is strong. Despite immense grief, loss and illness that I experienced in the past two years, I thank God for granting me perseverance and peace beyond understanding.

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Pop, thank you for encouraging me to pursue my linguistic and design passions, no matter how unconventional they seem. Who would have guessed that your diplomatic post to Japan in 2013 would have had such a ripple effect? Thank you for being my sounding board, listening to my (often confusing) theories, reminding me of 'Pop's famous 20-minute rule' and for your eagle eye in assisting with edits.

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my late mother, Lynne, who instilled in me a deep appreciation and curiosity for art, design, languages and culture. Much to her excitement, our fourteenth-floor apartment in Tokyo had a direct view of Mt. Fuji. The mountain became a symbol of my mother's love for the Japanese people. Like a mirror to the window, a print of Katsushika Hokusai's *Red Fuji* (1913, appendix Figure 9) – her favourite work – hung in our kitchen. The print is now in my kitchen, and every day I am reminded of her love. Her creative influences on me profoundly shaped my career decisions and inspired me to pursue further study in Japanese design. I hope I made you proud, Mamma. またすぐ天国で会おうね.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
Angura アングラ	*Angura*, which is a short form of the English 'underground' is an avant-garde movement from the 1960s in Tokyo comprising subversive theatre, cinema and graphic design (Goodman 1999).
Anoyo 彼の世 / Konoyo この世	Meaning 'that world', *anoyo* refers to the otherworld, the afterlife, and the world of the dead (Nihongo Master [sa]:[sp]). The opposite, referring to 'this world', is *konoyo*.
Anpo 安保	The shortened form of the Japanese word for the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security; signed between the United States and Japan in 1960.
Butoh ブト or *ankoku butoh* 暗黒ブト	"The dance of utter darkness" is a form of expressive dance created by Hijikata Tatsumi. *Butoh* is known for performances with cross-dressing, references to death and even once, the killing of a live chicken onstage (Adriasola 2015:110; Andrews 2016:258).
Furusato 故郷	The nostalgic myth of the rural Japanese landscape; of particular value in a rapidly modernising Japan (Hayashi 2014:285). It refers to one's traditional, old-style hometown.
Gutai 具体	An avant-garde art collective characterised by an engagement with contemporary global art discourse, and experimentation with the body as performance, installation and conceptual art (McArtor 2022:67)
Noh 能	*Noh* is a traditional form of mask theatre and one of the world's oldest performing arts. It is characterised by slow movements and employs a more symbolic and abstract approach than Western narrative drama.
Obon お盆	An annual Buddhist festival for dancing and welcoming the spirits of the dead as they visit *konoyo* (Dower 2000:79).
Samurai 侍	Aristocratic Japanese warriors who were in power from the twelfth century and ruled in government until 1868 (Britannica 2023:[sp]).
Seppuku 切腹	Ritual suicide via disembowelment, often by *samurai* as a form of loyalty or apology (Britannica 2022:[sp]).
Shinigami 死神	Translated as 'death god(s)', *shinigami* are monsters, helpers, or creatures of darkness that invite humans to death (Nanakai 2009).
Shingeki 新劇	A form of Japanese realism theatre that was inspired by Western theatre practices and was funded by the Japanese government (Eckersall 2009).
Shinjū 心中	Double suicide or lovers' suicide is a joint suicide pact in which lovers end their lives together in the hope of their love continuing in the afterlife.
Ukiyo-e 浮世絵	Japanese woodblock prints from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, often depicting landscapes, erotica, and scenes from folk tales. They emphasise pleasure and the evanescence of life (The Art Story [sa]:[sp]).

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background, context and aim of the study

Following the explosion of the first atomic bomb over Hiroshima on 9 August 1945, a second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki on 6 August. A month later, on 2 September, World War II ended as Japan formally surrendered to the Allied forces, signalling a transition to the post-war era (*sengo jidai* 戦後時代). Soon after the signing of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and the U.S.,[1] Japan entered a period of Allied occupation under the leadership of American General Douglas MacArthur, lasting until 1952 (Mackie 2006:96; McArtor 2022:11). During this time, Emperor Hirohito was ordered to renounce his deified status of a 'living god' and assume the role of a mortal leader (Andrews 2009:9; Chong 2012:27).

The atomic bomb as an embodiment of death and mass destruction, is a significant marker in the timeline of Japanese and world history. After witnessing the Trinity atomic bomb test in 1945, J. Robert Oppenheimer, the creator of the bomb, declared, "Now I am become Death, the Destroyer of Worlds", citing Hindu scripture from the *Bhagavad Gita* (Comotti in de Antoni & Raveri 2017:256-257).[2] His words make it clear that he understood how the atomic bomb is a harbinger of death, not only physically, but with the ability to destroy the essence of a nation and its identity. The visual impact of the atomic bomb's destruction and resulting deaths brought a heightened awareness of mortality and the afterlife to the collective Japanese psyche. As evidence of this, and in addition to widespread post-war national anxiety and unease, expressions of otherworldliness and death inevitably found expression in post-war theatre, film and poster design.

The post-war era of Japanese design is often referred to as the 'age of posters' (*Bessatsu Taiyo* 2024) owing to the widespread dissemination of posters for communication, protest, advertising and artistic expression. This study traces the origin of the Japanese avant-garde within the socio-political context of the post-war years and examines subversive poster designs in this *milieu*. By exploring avant-garde posters, the study aims to examine how otherworldliness and death are prominent themes in avant-garde poster design during the turmoil of the post-war

[1] The treaty is commonly known as the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty or as *Anpo* (安保) for short in Japanese. For purposes of this dissertation, the term *Anpo* is used throughout.
[2] "I am become", quoted *verbatim*, is an archaic literary form of the present perfect tense (O'Conner & Kellerman 2020:[sp]).

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years. Regarding timelines, although the start of the post-war era is clear, there are debates about its end. Murakami Takashi (2005:206) suggests that some consider 1989 to mark the end of the post-war era as it coincides with the death of Emperor Hirohito, signifying the end of the Shōwa period (1926–1989). John Dower (2000:20) suggests that for the Japanese, World War II did not truly end until six years later, in 1952, when the occupation ended (Dower 2000:20). Doryun Chong (2015 & 2009), who has written widely about Japanese avant-garde art, design and photography, positions the Japanese avant-garde[3] within the post-war years of 1955 and the late 1970s. Within the context of these views, this study focuses on posters produced from 1953, with the first notable poster that references death, until 1989, when avant-garde poster design began to give way to commercial advertising.

This study's primary research question concerns how and why Japanese avant-garde posters portray themes of otherworldliness and death. To this end, literature studies on the avant-garde ethos in Europe and Japan and post-war Japan's socio-political *milieu* serve to contextualise the posters. This study not only aims to elucidate the ways in which otherworldliness and death are shared features in the selected posters but also to underscore the role of posters in relation to the broader ethos of the Japanese avant-garde (which includes film, theatre and dance).

As a secondary aim, a robust review of the literature prior to commencing the study revealed the opportunity to investigate the role of Japanese aesthetics in poster design. Japanese aesthetics are generally positioned in the context of the 'pathway arts', namely calligraphy, Zen gardens, flower arranging and the tea ceremony (Maraldo & Maraldo 2022). Though much has been written on Japanese aesthetics (Keene 1969; Odin 2016; Pilgrim 1986; Prusinski 2012; Richie 2007; Saito 2022), there is a gap in applying aesthetic theories to graphic design, barring Hung Ky Nguyen's (2010) investigation into the role of *ma* in Japanese design. There is, therefore, an opportunity for the wealth of literature on Japanese aesthetics to be used as a lens through which to analyse otherworldliness and death in the posters. Aesthetics that embody death, impermanence, tragic beauty and mystery are of particular interest. From here, his study seeks to identify whether and how aesthetics influence expressions of otherworldliness and death in the poster samples.

[3] The 'avant-garde' here refers to the period in which Japanese post war avant-garde art, dance, design, film and theatre was most active.

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The above aims necessitate defining otherworldliness and Japanese views on death and categorising them in a framework for analysing the poster samples. Ideas and theories related to otherworldliness and death include suicide and ritual suicide (Andersen 1987; Fuse 1980), nostalgia (Dower 2000; Robertson 1988), aura (Benjamin 2011), nihilism (Nietzsche 1968; Nishitani 1990; Olivier 2007; Stellino 2013), the sublime (Kant 1987; Murphy 2015) and the uncanny (Freud 1919). These topics, examined in a literature review in Chapter Three, underscore the multi-faceted ways in which otherworldliness and death appear in the posters. The framework also seeks to reveal the intertextualities between death and otherworldliness and Japanese culture, religion, philosophy, thanatology and metaphysics.

Having outlined the primary and secondary research aims, it is necessary to examine how the themes of otherworldliness and death are expressed in posters. To this end, an examination of the socio-political and temporal context of post-war Japan follows, and why posters are a suitable medium for commentary on post-war issues. An overview of key events that contributed to the growth of Japanese poster design is followed by an investigation of posters as a medium of visual communication. Thereafter, the objectives of the study are positioned in the outline of chapters.

1.1.1 Positioning post-war Japanese design in its temporal context

The post-war era profoundly impacted those who lived through it and left a lasting impression on collective memory. Food shortages,[4] widespread illness and economic instability marked the early post-surrender years. The years after the capitulation became a crucial time for reflecting on national identity and values (Chong 2012:27; Dower 2000:60). Japan's evolving socio-political situation during the post-war era was characterised by confusion, violent protests against the renewal of the *Anpo* treaty, and growing Western influences on Japanese culture.[5] Tokyoites also faced post-war confusion owing to rapid changes in the city landscape and a sudden influx of American culture (predominantly through packaging and advertising).

[4] Food shortages owing to the collapsed rationing system worsened in 1947, with daily rice rations at 297 grams per person. The daily vegetable ration was only 75 grams, equivalent to half a carrot (*Centre Pompidou* 1996:39).
[5] Other social, economic and political changes include rampant inflation and economic stagnation in the early years, the introduction of democracy and women being granted the right to vote in 1946 and an increased disdain for militarism and eventual renunciation of it by Prime Minister Yoshida (Dower 2000:25, 67, 87, 282, 305).

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Amid these stresses and tensions, Japanese citizens were unsure of where to turn to address their fears for the country's future (Tanabe 1986:1). Many artists and designers would thus turn to their craft to express their struggles, reflections on the war, and future anxieties. Theorist and artist Murakami Takashi (2005:206) asserts that Japan's distinct visual culture is a result of creative shifts following World War II: art, design, dance, theatre, literature and film providing outlets for grappling with the devastation of nuclear war, the impact of the atomic bombs, a collective uncertainty and the search for a new national identity (Chong 2012:27; Miller 2022:20). Various poster designers simultaneously expressed and repressed the loss and death that arose from World War II (Igarashi 200:12). This resulted in a body of posters that contain narratives of war, death, otherworldliness, and the anti-nuclear weapon movement (Rosenbaum & Claremont 2023:6).

Socio-political and environmental changes often influenced the processes, methods, and subject matter of Japanese designers (Thornton 1989:6). Wartime design was often expressed in the form of propaganda (such as *FRONT* magazine; Figure 8 in Chapter Two) or war posters. During the post-war era, the role of mainstream graphic design shifted towards the aim of promoting recovery, peace, and prosperity (Naoi & Schoneveld in Williams 2023:[sp]). However, this is not the case for all post-war design, especially in the late post-war years. It is generally accepted in the literature that the most subversive creative activities of the Japanese post-war avant-garde occurred between 1955 and the late 1970s (Bartal 2020; Chong 2012; Goodman 1999; Lupton in Goodman 1999:i).

The 1960s, in particular, witnessed another transformation in Japanese design (Brewińska 2021:[sp]) that gave rise to a distinct post-war avant-garde ethos. The subversive nature of the post-war avant-garde is particularly evident in the visual culture of the underground *angura* movement.[6] The *angura* subculture is characterised by politically charged and often provocative content in posters, performance art, theatre and film, which all contributed to the development of the Japanese avant-garde ethos. Moreover, design theorist Ory Bartal (2020:31) states that Japan stands out as a remarkable case as it cultivated an intense consumer culture from the late 1960s while simultaneously fostering an avant-garde art and design ethos through the work of artists and designers. This phenomenon is marked by an aesthetic shift in poster design and

[6] *Angura* is the shortened Japanese transliteration of the English 'underground' referring to the movement as a subversive subculture that explored new theatrical and artistic methods (Goodman 1999).

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avant-garde theatre, coinciding with social and economic changes as Japan moved towards a more stable economy and democracy.

- **Notable post-war events that introduced Japanese design to the West**

A few notable events in Japanese post-war history contributed to the nation's rapid economic growth, re-emergence from military defeat, and international recognition of Japanese design. These include the 1960 Tokyo World Design Conference, the hosting of the 1964 Olympics, the Osaka World Expo (Expo '70) and the 1970 Tokyo Biennale. These events helped secure Japan's place in the international art and design world and were crucial to establishing the nation's new identity as a modernising country with world-class design standards (*Bijutsu Shuppan-sha* 1961; Dawood 2021; Pollock 2020:269).

In the early 1960s, extensive infrastructure improvements were carried out in urban areas, especially in preparation for the Olympics and Expo '70.[7] During this time, designers took note of the rapid modernisation of the city (Hayashi 2012). These economic changes also affected the work of designers. For instance, according to Ashley Rawlings (1974:102), designer Yokoo Tadanori's own artistic development reflected Japan's national struggle to redefine itself during its rapid post-war economic growth, rather than his personal anxieties. Many post-war designers incorporated symbols of modernity into their posters (such as the *shinkansen* high-speed train, often repeated in Yokoo's posters, for instance). Others shifted their energy towards establishing committees to design posters, pictograms and brand identities for the Olympics and Expo '70 (Sand 2013:3).

The Tokyo World Design Conference in 1960 was the first design conference held in Japan. Moreover, it was the first time that international design professionals collaborated with Japanese designers (Thornton 1991:92). Among those in attendance were Saul Bass, Herbert Bayer, Otl Aicher and Max Huber, some for whom the conference was their first exposure to Japanese design (*Bijutsu Shuppan-Sha* 1961). The World Design Conference was the impetus for the cross-sharing of ideas and collaborations between designers in the U.S., Europe and Japan and

[7] This included the expansion of highways, construction of new roads, establishment of high-speed railways and the addition of new subway stops, ports and airports (Bartal 2020:34).

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subsequently influenced the direction of Japanese graphic design.[8] The conference signalled Japan's intent to rise from the ashes of World War II and emerge as a world-class example of modernist design (*Bijutsu Shuppan-sha* 1961).

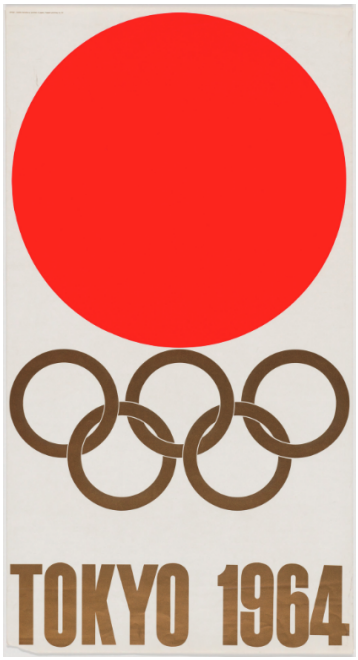

Figure 1: Kamekura Yusaku, *Tokyo Olympics poster,* 1964.
Lithograph, 102 x 55 cm.
Museum of Modern Art, New York. (MoMA).

Four years later, the Tokyo Olympic Games played a seminal role in disseminating Japan's burgeoning modern post-war visual identity. For the Olympics in particular, a design committee was established to guide the branding and creative direction of the event – the first time in Olympic history that such a committee was formed (Dawood 2021). Facilitated by designer Yusaku Kamekura, the curated design of pictograms that reduced linguistic barriers to wayfinding and event posters (Figure 1) was pivotal in paving the way for the rapid growth of Japanese design (Dawood 2021). During the Olympics and Expo '70, design exhibitions such as the Olympics' *Colour in Japan* exhibition were held to showcase the branding design of the respective events, allowing international visitors to experience Japanese design in the context of the event (Kanamaru 1964) as well as showcase Japanese technological capabilities.[9] The

[8] For example, after hearing Herbert Bayer advocate for design's role in social change at the World Design Conference in Tokyo, Awazu became committed to using design for social activism (21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art Kanazawa 2017:4).
[9] From 1955 to the early 1960s, when Japan concentrated on increasing the quality and production of consumer goods and production machinery, printing processes were improved (Hirano 1991:61; Thornton 1989:14). This age of

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1970 Tokyo Biennale brought several influential American and European artists associated with (post-)Minimalism, Arte Povera, Conceptual art, and Process art together with pioneering Japanese artists. This event positioned Tokyo as a significant hub within the international art network (Chong 2012:86).

By way of the above-mentioned design exhibitions, conferences and cross-cultural events, Western influences had a significant impact on Japanese art and design, resulting in parallels of style and similarities in thinking (Yoshimoto 2008:25). For example, movements such as Constructivism began to have stylistic influences on early post-war Japanese graphic design (Jubert 2006:293; Pollock 2020:269; Thornton 1991:53). This encouraged Japanese designers to rethink their artistic directions and activities, promoting the launch of various design magazines, schools and events (Sugiura in Trivedi 2019:18–22; Yoshimoto 2008:38). European stylistic influences are evident in the work of designers such as Kamekura, who studied Constructivist principles in Tokyo, and the early work of Sugiura Kohei, who studied and lectured at the Ulm School in Germany (Sugiura in Trivedi 2015:7). To rebuild itself after the war, Japan sought to reposition itself as a recovering country, which was part of the reason for the proliferation of Western design influences. Kamekura (in *Centre Pompidou* 1996:39) suggests a reason for this, stating:

> At the time, we Japanese were convinced that the only way to emerge from disaster and rebuild our country was to adopt the modern social structures of the West. We believed that if we did not follow the path of modern democracy and capitalism, we would remain a backward, feudal country, a rearguard nation relegated to the far reaches of the Far East. That's why we pushed ahead with Western-style modernisation. (Translation by author).

- **Post-war Japanese poster design influences**

According to design curator Erin Schoneveld (in Petit 2023), amid the political upheaval of the post-war period and as American products and trends flooded Japan, many Japanese designers re-examined the distinctions between fine art and commercial design and merged the two. Schoneveld (in Petit 2023) posits that this led to the formation of avant-garde groups.

mass-production refers to the transition from the early 1950s when Japan had a lack of resources (including paper for printing posters), to a time of sufficient materials (Hirano 1991:61). From the 1960s onwards, the dissemination of mass media in Japan was made easier through new technological capabilities and printing processes, such as lithography and the ability to print large-scale photography (Cotton 2015).

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Faced with the influx and wide acceptance of Western styles in Japanese design,[10] designers either rejected, accepted or reworked examples of these influences. Still others, such as Awazu and Sugiura rejected Western Modernism and ideas of Japanese imperial nostalgia, producing posters inspired by Japanese and pan-Asian folklore and religions (Rajguru & Suga 2017; Moreno 2021).

Japanese design had already become an integral part of the international art world by the late 1960s (Yoshimoto 2008:25). The phrase 'international contemporaneity' (*kokusai-teki dōjisei* 国際的同時性), coined by art critic Haryū Ichiro in the 1960s, began to gain popularity among Japanese designers such as Awazu Kiyoshi, Fukuda Shigeo and Yokoo Tadanori. The term denotes the convergence of global and local art and design tendencies rather than a one-way influence of Western modernism on Japanese art and design (Yoshimoto 2008:25).

Perhaps the most notable designer of post-war Japan, Yokoo stands out not only for the volume of his body of work, but also for his pioneering impact on style in the design world. Born in 1936 near Kobe, Yokoo was eight years old when he witnessed the traumatic American bombing raids during World War II, an experience that unconsciously influenced the prolific use of red in his artwork (Rawlings 1974:102). As a young designer in 1958, Yokoo received an honourable mention at a Tokyo exhibition, which facilitated his move to the capital city to become part of its influential cultural scene (Rawlings 1974:102).

His earliest posters reveal a Constructivist approach rooted not in rigid geometry but in a "warmer, more accessible Modernism", according to design historian Akira Tatehata (2010:453). In 1967, however, as underground movements began emerging, his 'inner Modernist' disappeared, and in its place, he began fusing his 'innate Japanese aesthetic' with American Pop Art styles (Yokoo in Gavin 2016:[sp]; Tatehata 2010:453). With this shift, he fully embraced 'international contemporaneity' and 'semiotic scrambles' with experiments in imagery and style. His encounter with Pop Art catalysed a shift in his aesthetic, yet through his interpretation, was 'distinctly Japanese' (Tatehata 2010:453). Yokoo incorporated elements of kitsch and cliché that referenced both Edo Period aesthetics and contemporary visual language. He thus drew inspiration from a variety of sources, including Japanese woodblock prints, *sumo* wrestling

[10] This is, for instance, because of the influence of Western styles coming into Japan by means of the above-mentioned conferences.

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handbills, motifs from Japanese *hanafuda*[11] playing cards, everyday objects and elements of design from European and Asian countries (Mackie 2006:97). His technique of words and shapes arranged with images in a scattered collage-like style began emerging (Tatehata 2010:543). Japanese design and theatre critic David Goodman (1999) is therefore correct in his position that *angura* designers such as Yokoo resisted international Modernism as a style, seeking instead to 'rejuvenate' traditional Japanese arts and symbols.

During the post-war years, Yokoo (Figure 2) and Tanaami Keiichi (Figure 32 in Chapter Four), among others, drew from a wide range of artistic movements, combining ideas from Dada, Surrealism, European Modernism, American Pop Art, and Japanese *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints. Their approaches involved combining analogue methods such as collages, drawing, and photo-montages with newer printing methods of lithography and screen printing (Pollock 2020:269; Williams 2023:[sp]). By merging traditional Japanese motifs and styles with Western influences and English typography, designers created a new, 'hybrid' visual style (Moriyasu 2003:45; Thornton 1989:13). Art critic Hayashi Michio (2012b:25) labels this blending of styles as a 'semiotic scramble'.

On a similar note, Japanese art scholar Vera Mackie (2006:97) highlights that cultural intertextuality is a notable feature of avant-garde Japanese design. Posters designed for theatre productions were often based on adaptations of Japanese history and European dramatic traditions. Avant-garde posters are part of an intertextual web of references, rejecting the clean and geometric lines of the mainstream international style of graphic design (Mackie 2006:97). Some designers thus combined Japanese and Western styles and imagery: *angura* posters hence not only served to advertise theatre and film productions but also created a new visual art form that epitomised Japanese design from the 1960s to the 1980s (Lupton in Goodman 1999:vii; Sasame 2010:[sp]). Awazu, Tanaka Ikko and Yokoo, for example, referenced traditional *noh*[12] theatre masks in their work or explored themes of Japanese landscapes, myths, folk tales and costumes. Tanaka and Yokoo's posters particularly took inspiration from the style of *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints and put a new spin on them by introducing modern subject matter and juxtaposing visual styles (Eberhardinger 2012:4; Goodman 1999).

[11] *Hanafuda* cards, used in gambling, often depict traditional and historic imagery such as the national flower and emblem of the Japanese imperial family.
[12] *Noh* is a classical Japanese theatrical form that combines music, dance, and dramatic narrative. Originating in the fourteenth-century, it is renowned for its slow and deliberate movements, moments of silence and extravagant costumes. *Noh* often explores the liminal realms of dreams, the supernatural, and history. Protagonists are often ghosts or spirits of people from the past (Bowers 1974).

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Figure 2: Yokoo Tadanori, *Koshimaki Osen (Petticoat Osen: A Tale of Forgetfulness)*, 1966.
Silkscreen, 105,4 x 74,6 cm.
Museum of Modern Art, New York. (MoMA).

Schoneveld (in Petit 2023) points to how Yokoo's posters blend Western imagery, experimental styles and Japanese motifs, exemplified in one of his earliest psychedelic pop posters, *Koshimaki Osen* (1966) (Figure 2). The work was made for the inaugural performance of playwright Kara Jurō's troupe *Jokyo Gekijo* (Situation Theatre).[13] One of the first major counter-culture, non-state funded theatre groups in Japan, *Jokyo Gekijo* challenged established traditions of theatre by performing anti-authorotarian and sexual plays outside of the limits of a traditional theatre building (Yoshimoto 2006a:102). The poster features photos of the actors and of the director Kara in the lower-right.

Koshimaki Osen (1966) (Figure 2) was the impetus for Yokoo to further develop his iconic psychedelic style. Curator Erin Schoneveld (in Petit 2023) summarises Yokoo's technique and

[13] The production *Koshimaki Osen* drew inspiration from Osen, an eighteenth-century courtesan who subsequently became the subject of *ukiyo-e* prints and literary works. The plot centres on her exceptional beauty and tragic destiny as a tea-house attendant in Edo (contemporary Tokyo), where she was idealised as an embodiment of ephemeral beauty and tragedy.

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inspiration: “He is not afraid to cross a variety of different boundaries. The bright hues, the dynamic composition, this powerful energy and emotion… taking experimental styles and combining them with Western imagery and Japanese motifs”.

Exemplified by Kara and Yokoo’s work together, more of which is in the case study, it is crucial to acknowledge the interconnectedness and collaborative nature of art movements and collectives in Japan, which contributed to a vibrant avant-garde environment where designers, filmmakers, authors, and actors worked together (Brewińska 2021:[sp]). To this end, the literature review in Chapter Two unpacks the sociopolitical context in post-war Japan and the characteristics of avant-garde collectives and their collaborative activities. Furthermore, it examines the avant-garde philosophy and its specific manifestations in Japanese design before and after World War II.

1.1.2 Posters as visual communication

Since its inception, the poster has consistently maintained its importance and role as a medium for advertising and conveying information (Lane 2014:26). It is widely acknowledged that posters also aid in disseminating social, political and individual ideas via their nature to be reproduced *en masse* (Goodman 1999; Guffey 2015; Moriyasu 2003). Moreover, posters are recognised as a medium that encapsulates the spirit and aesthetics of a particular era, reflecting the socio-political status quo (Hirano 1991:61; Sontag 1999:197). In the early post-World War II years, poster design became a medium for dissent against the post-war government and a way for designers to comment on socio-political issues and express their ideologies visually. Designers like Yokoo, Awazu and Hirano Koga often juxtaposed Japanese imagery (such as landscapes, *ukiyo-e* woodblock print styles, flags and mountains) with shocking themes of death, nudity, blood, the afterlife and the grotesque as a reflection of their political views and the tumultuous socio-economic state of post-war Japan (Goodman 1999; Wong 2018:134). These expressions include, but are not limited to, dissent regarding the renewal of *Anpo*; opposition to nuclear war and the Vietnam War; a drive to create a new post-war national identity via the dissemination of images; the role of the body and sexuality in a world marked by the despair of war; and the American occupation.

Designer Paul Davis (in Martin 1991:i) and Susan Sontag (1995:198) agree that posters have quickly achieved the status of art. Whereas Sontag (1995:198) refers to posters only as ‘applied

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arts', Davis suggests (1991) that posters can be considered art. An early example of posters as art is the monthly journal, *The Poster* (founded in 1898) (Hollis 1994:15). The journal marked the point at which posters became valuable collectable items. *The poster*'s objective was to fulfil the public's interest in the poster as an emerging form of art (Hollis 1994:15).

Contrary to Western posters, Japanese posters were revered as works of art long before the term 'graphic design' was introduced in the Japanese language. For this reason, early post-war Japanese designers did not initially identify themselves as designers, but as artists. For example, when he entered the design field in the late 1950s, Awazu described it as a 'wilderness', pointing to the fact that the 'graphic' as a term did not exist yet Japanese (Awazu in 21st Century Museum of Modern Art Kanazawa 2008:2). Only when posters gained significance as a marketing medium were the terms design (*dezain)* and graphic design (*gurafikku dezain)* adopted into the Japanese language (Gossot 1993:90). *Gurafikku dezain* was not a widely used term until the late 1960s and early 1970s. If Japanese designers initially considered their posters to be artworks, then art theories can be applied to them. Therefore, posters form part of how post-war Japanese avant-garde collectives expressed themselves. It is thus crucial to analyse the posters in the case study not just as advertisements but also as avant-garde art that reflects Japanese aesthetics, politics, culture and philosophy.

Improvements in printing technology from the 1920s onwards resulted in the proliferation of visual media and commercial posters across Japan (Furuhata 2014:182). The trend of poster design for advertising and individual expression continued after World War II. Sontag (1996:196) posits that posters are not simply public notices. Public notices distribute information, but posters can 'seduce, exhort, sell, educate and convince'. Posters play this role using various devices, one of which is the rhetorical device of metaphor. Hollis (1994) proposes that Italian and German artists were the first to use metaphors in their posters, introducing a fresh conceptual feature to the medium. Although metaphor is a common feature of wartime propaganda posters and materials (*FRONT* magazine in Chapter Two is an example), Japanese posters after World War II use metaphors to reference traditional myths, death, otherworldliness and subtle messaging about their dissent towards the establishment, but not as direct propaganda.

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1.2 Research methodology

1.2.1 Research methods

The research conducted in this dissertation is qualitative. Qualitative research helps to draw a comprehensive picture of a multi-layered situation (Muratovski 2016:113). In this dissertation's context, the multi-layered situation refers to the influence of culture, religion, the changing political climate and Western influence on Japanese graphic design from the late 1950s to the 1980s. Moreover, qualitative research draws on a wide range of sources to gain a holistic perspective on the topic—in this case, Japanese graphic design, aesthetics, post-World War II socio-politics, otherworldliness and death (Muratovski 2016:113). Hence, an overview of key literature in Japanese aesthetics, cultural studies and religious studies is used to inform the theoretical framework which is situated at the intersection between Japanese aesthetics and notions of beauty, otherworldliness and death.

This study employs two approaches: interpretivism and activity theory. Interpretivism is a qualitative research paradigm used to interpret the realities and meanings of avant-garde Japanese posters. Interpretivism promotes an understanding of cultural and historical contexts (Crouch & Pearce 2012:150). Gyoko Muratovski (2016:269) maintains that an interpretive approach is apt for analysing symbolism and cultural representations in graphic design, which is what this study sets out to do.

However, it must be noted that in using an interpretive approach, the conclusions drawn in the case study may differ from what the designers intended. Therefore, this study attempts to provide a critical, unbiased perspective on otherworldliness and death by using relevant and seminal theories to inform the resulting theoretical framework used for poster analysis. Furthermore, extensive research on the philosophies and motivations of the poster designers seeks to support this aim.

On the other hand, Judy D'Ammasso Tarbox (in Bennett 2006:73) argues that in a society complicated by the merging of cultures (such as in the case of Japan under Allied occupation), traditional theories such as interpretation, intuition or basic empirical studies may not be adequate in analysing a visual text. D'Ammasso Tarbox (in Bennett 2006:73) argues for activity theory as a relevant model for design research. Whereas cognitive theories (such as Gestalt)

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are based on the premise that *internal* elements in the brain cause behaviour, activity theory considers *external* environments and cultural contexts. Activity theory is not used as a research method in this study but is used as a principle for considering broader environmental and contextual influences that impact human behaviour and activity (in this case, the activity is poster design). This study therefore takes a contextual approach to examine the post-war cultural and environmental contexts that shaped why certain posters point to otherworldliness or death.

Despite the case study being predominantly interpretive, it is also informed by the perspective of activity theory, as it relies on contextual analyses to underscore the historical, cultural and environmental contexts of the designers (D'Ammasso Tarbox in Bennett 2006:73). While D'Ammasso, Tarbox, Bennett and Storkerson (2006) do not explicitly mention the use of interpretivism in conjunction with activity theory, their work implies that activity theory's inclusive and expansive nature may accommodate interpretive principles in its framework. The interpretive approach of the study is informed by the perspective of activity theory, namely that art and design are mediated by particular tools, artefacts and social contexts (for example, the interaction of designers with the world around them). A contextual analysis therefore allows for a nuanced historical examination, with specific reference to Japan's post-war social, cultural, artistic and political *milieu*s. To this end, the study employs two qualitative research methods: a literature review which informs the theoretical framework, and a case study in which the framework is applied.

A semiotic perspective proves useful in visual art analysis when examining '"context"', as in '"art in context"' (Bal & Bryson 1991:176). This perspective focuses on the interplay between 'text' (the poster) and "context" to examine the dynamics of signs in society. There are multiple potential readings of signs outside the visual medium, but their interpretations are particularised via their combination with other signs and denoted messages (Tyler 2006:23). A semiotic analysis involves combining and juxtaposing contextual material with the work to reveal the factors that shape why the work is as it is (Bal & Bryson 1991:176–172). Employing a case study, a semiotic analysis is used to examine the context of the work to determine how and why otherworldliness and death are made visible in the posters. Symbols in the posters are analysed in terms of their implicit meaning resulting from the context and the designer's layout, typographic and graphic choices (Erlhoff & Marshall 2007:351).

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Then, regarding the roles of the viewer and the posters, Roland Barthes's *Rhetoric of the image* (1999) distinguishes the literal and symbolic meanings in visual communication as denotation and connotation, respectively. The viewer reads the literal message and interprets the signs expressing its 'iconic' message, which is the symbolic message and connotation (Barthes in Tyler 2006:37). The viewer, with his or her cultural beliefs and understanding thus becomes an active reader involved in specifying the work's symbolic message (Tyler 2006:37).

However, the aim of the case study is not to conduct a semiotic analysis in itself. Instead, a semiotic analysis is used to investigate the defining visual elements or characteristics of avant-garde posters that express otherworldliness and death; signs, symbols, typography, religious elements, colour usage and the cultural contexts that reflect these themes are considered.

1.2.2 Poster selection methods

Posters are found in and selected from books and online archives specialising in Japanese design. Books that have aided in sourcing the posters include *Angura, posters of the Japanese avant-garde* (Goodman 1999); *100 years of Japanese graphic design* (Yamagata 2018); *Awazu Kiyoshi makuri hirogeru,* (a book launched with an exhibition of Awazu's work at the 21st Century Museum of Modern Art in Kanazawa), *Japanese graphics now!* (Kozak & Wiedemann 2006), *Japanese design since 1945: a complete sourcebook* (Pollock 2020) and *Japanese graphic design* (Thornton 1991). Posters are also selected from the Ginza Graphic Gallery's design series *Sekai no gurafikku dezain 100* (2011) featuring prolific designers (such as Awazu, Kamekura, Sugiura and Yokoo). Lastly, the April 2024 issue of the design magazine *Bessatsu Taiyo*, showcasing 150 years of Japanese graphic design, is a robust source for sourcing seminal avant-garde posters. Poster samples are selected according to their subject matter, symbolism and uses (as advertisements, artworks or both).

Posters that contain subject matter that suggest religious and cultural views of otherworldliness and death in Japan are selected. Nachbar and Lause's (1992:6) popular culture formula maintains that the popularity of a cultural artefact correlates with the degree to which it reflects an audience's values and beliefs. According to Goodman (1999:2), the aftermath of the war in Japan during the 1960s created a distinctive environment of unprecedented freedom that encouraged anarchic creativity. Coupled with the avant-garde movement's focus on cross-disciplinary collaboration and the influence of Western philosophies and art movements, a

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particular avant-garde, 'underground' visual culture began taking root and was largely expressed through posters. Therefore, if popular culture reflects national values and beliefs (Nachbar & Lause 1992:9), it is proposed that avant-garde posters also reflect underlying Japanese cultural beliefs regarding otherworldliness and death (Harootunian 2012:18).
The criteria for selecting posters thus include the work being of the right temporal and socio-political context, and that death or otherworldliness are broadly visible either in the subject matter or by metaphor. This includes posters with signifiers of death and otherworldliness in a Japanese context, such as demons, hell, war, cosmology, specific aesthetic principles, religious iconography and various forms of suicide. Finally, the posters are not limited in terms of what they were designed for. For instance, some posters are for commercial advertising, others for personal expression, and still others for political commentary. Most posters are associated with the *angura* movement, in which designers rebelled against what they saw as the internationalism of dominant Japanese design culture (Lupton in Goodman 1999:vii). In the years following 1960, when *angura* was most active, various plays, films and their posters were produced about war and death-related topics (Goodman 1999), which is particularly relevant to the scope of the study.

Regarding visual styles, several posters selected for the case study sample rejected Western design trends. They sought to create a new graphic language for Japanese design, characterised by themes of death and the 'other' world. However, to provide a broader sample of posters for a less biased view, there may be samples that make use of more Modernist styles but still reflect the overarching themes of otherworldliness and death.

1.3 Outline of chapters

The dissertation's introductory chapter provides a concise overview of the post-World War II era and Japan's socio-political context. It delineates the specific time frame with which the study is concerned. The overall objective of this literature review is to situate avant-garde Japanese poster design in its local and global contexts. This chapter is a prelude to exploring the intersection between post-war Japanese history, post-war transformations, and Japanese avant-garde expressions through poster design.

Furthermore, the chapter highlights the research question, objectives, methodology, and analytical methods employed for the case study. Lastly, it emphasises the need to address a

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gap in academic research by examining the overlaps between Japanese aesthetics, avant-garde poster design, Japanese war and post-war history, and otherworldliness and death. This chapter's contextualisation lays the groundwork for the literature review in Chapter Two, which aims to investigate the origins and nature of the Japanese avant-garde ethos in light of its European counterparts.

Following the overview of Japanese design in the post-war era, the first section of Chapter Two is a literature review with the objective of examining the origin of the Japanese avant-garde ethos considering its similarities and differences with a few European avant-garde movements. This objective is informed by the avant-garde cultural studies of Doryun Chong (2012), David Goodman (1999), Michio Hayashi (2012) and Inaga Shigemi (2010). Examples include the influence that Russian Constructivism had on the pre-war Japanese avant-garde, as well as the subversive post-war *angura* movement. This section also intends to underscore the socio-political factors in post-war Japan that influenced the work of the designers, revealing the underlying avant-garde ideologies that inform their practices. The conclusion to this section proposes three tenets of the avant-garde ethos that demonstrate how avant-garde creatives have a propensity for challenging the status quo, collaborate across disciplines and share ideologies, and challenge entrenched ideas about art, politics and social issues in a spirit of protest and change.

The second section of Chapter Two presents four Japanese aesthetics that reveal Japanese philosophies on beauty, nature, transience, otherworldliness and death. Literature on Japanese aesthetics by Donald Keene (1969; 1989), Lauren Prusinski (2012), Steve Odin (2016) and Yuriko Saito (1997) are of particular interest to the study. Before introducing four specific aesthetic principles, it is necessary to contextualise the philosophical, cultural and religious origins of Japanese aesthetics. Thereafter, the aesthetic principles of *ma* (間 formless beauty, emptiness, space and time), *yugen* (幽玄 darkness, obscurity, mystery), *mono no aware* (物の哀れ fleeting, tragic beauty) and *mujō* (無常 nothingness, impermanence) are unpacked in light of how they contribute to an appreciation of perishability, otherworldly mystery and 'tragic beauty' (Odin 2016). Particular emphasis is on *mono no aware*, which pertains to the pathos and fleeting transience of life (Chambers 2012; Odin 2016), serving as a reminder of the imminence of death. This section traces how Japanese aesthetics underpin notions of otherworldliness and death.

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To conduct an accurate and comprehensive case study, it is essential to thoroughly explore the cultural and religious foundations of Japanese views concerning death, as well as to establish what is meant by 'otherworldliness. To this end, Chapter Three involves a literature review that presents Japanese religious and cultural perspectives on death. Thereafter, four definitions of otherworldliness are examined in the second section. This chapter aims to present a comprehensive framework that illustrates the correlations among otherworldliness, aesthetics, and death. The first section of the literature review compares Western and Japanese views on death, highlighting its complex associations across cultures. Then, an analysis of Japanese viewpoints on death within society, thanatology[14] and media (theatre, death prints and death poems) focuses on how long-standing Buddhist and Shinto beliefs have informed how death is positioned as part of life (Fuse 1980:62).[15] This is to examine the multi-faceted nature of Japanese views on death and suicide, encompassing types of suicide, the romanticisation of death, funeral rites and beliefs surrounding the other world, spirits and ancestor worship. This section also critically examines ideas of death as an end, such as the end of imperial Japan (owing to the American occupation), the loss of national identity and the death of aura (Benjamin 2011; Furuhata 2014). In addition, the relationship between beauty and death, and the romanticisation of suicide is examined in light of the life and work of controversial writer Mishima Yukio.

The second section of Chapter Three presents four definitions of otherworldliness, drawing from an extensive review of relevant literature. The themes surrounding otherworldliness are delineated into the categories of nostalgia and *furusato* (Hayashi 2014; Robertson 1988), aura (Benjamin 2011), the uncanny (Freud 1919; Högman 2015; Kaufinger 2021) and fantasy and fiction (Eväsoja 2007:434). Ultimately, this chapter intends to synthesise the overlaps of otherworldliness and death as a theoretical framework that will inform the poster analyses in the case study.

Chapter Five provides a summary of the study by highlighting the key points of each chapter. Then, the contribution of the study, its limitations, and possibilities for further research are presented by critically analysing the relevance of the study and the academic fields wherein it is situated. This chapter also underscores the need for continued discourse surrounding the

[14] Thanatology is the interdisciplinary study of death and death-related practices (Fonesca & Testoni 2011).
[15] For purposes of this dissertation, the terms 'Japanese culture' or 'Japanese society' are used throughout, but do not necessarily represent the views of all Japanese people. They are rather informed by general and widely accepted beliefs rooted in Japanese religion and philosophy.

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'avant-garde', by decentring Japan in relation to Europe as the 'centre' of avant-garde visual cultural production (Inaga 2010; Sell 2010). Notable findings from the case study, including themes that did not arise from the literature review but were only noted in the analyses are presented in light of their relationships to otherworldliness and death.

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CHAPTER TWO: THE AVANT-GARDE ETHOS AND JAPANESE AESTHETICS

2.1 Positioning the nature and context of the avant-garde ethos

Avant-garde, as a term, refers to an ethos that embraces new and experimental ideas and techniques, particularly in art, music and literature (Tate 2017:[sp]). *Avant-garde* is originally a French military term. Art historian David Cottington (2013:2) suggests that it became a signifier for all forms of experimental art[1] that challenge the long-held paradigms of art. Before the 1880s in Europe, art was primarily produced for religious or ceremonial purposes (Tate 2017:[sp]). In short, art served the interests of the elite and the establishment,[2] primarily depicting historical and mythological scenes and portraits of aristocracy and royalty. This traditional approach was characterised by adherence to classical forms and techniques, such as history painting (Tate 2017:[sp]).[3]

An established tradition is the prerequisite for an avant-garde philosophy to exist. Without a previously established tradition, such as the widely-adopted classical styles popular in Europe before the 1830s, there can be no deviation from or rebellion against it (Chin 1985:59-62).

Artistic authority was rooted in historical canons, with history painting holding the highest regard owing to its intellectual and noble nature (Adams 2013:19). The power of the bourgeoisie, many of whom funded and commissioned art, was not questioned until the 1830s (a possible consequence of the French Revolution). Artists like Gustave Courbet protested against this elitism by adopting new techniques like radical realism,[4] and changing the subject matter, such as depicting unromanticised daily life scenes (Egbert 1967:345; Jubert 2006:164). From the mid-1800s in Europe, avant-garde artists took the lead in creating ‘art for art’s sake’ and not solely for social, functional or utilitarian goals (Egbert 1967:344). This led to the avant-garde developing into a form of socialistic anarchism (Egbert 1967:345).

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[1] Cottington (2013:2) refers to the following examples as art: architecture, painting, literature, photography and theatre. For the sake of simplicity, the field of graphic design is also categorised under ‘art’ in this chapter.
[2] The ‘establishment’, in this case, refers to traditional and institutional forces that controlled the art world in Europe before the emergence of avant-garde movements. These included art academies that promoted classical techniques and the aristocracy that patronised and commissioned art (mainly of royalty and their own portraits) (Tate [sa]:[sp]).
[3] History painting, established by the French Royal Academy in the seventeenth-century, was the most significant genre of painting at the time. It included depictions of classical, historical, martial and Biblical events and prioritised these over portraits, landscapes and still lifes (Tate 2017:[sp]).
[4] Courbet’s realism refers to his art reflecting how it is simply to be in the world, challenging the established norms of culture, society and style (Vardouli 2022:18, 42).

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Midway through the 1800s, socialist-inspired artwork by artists like Courbet, Paul Cézanne and Édouard Manet, which rejected bourgeois society, gave rise to avant-garde ideas with roots in socialism and anarchy (Egbert 1967; Eisenman 2011).[5] Courbet, in particular, was strongly influenced by socialist ideas. His work depicts realistic scenes that the everyday viewer, no longer just the elite, could understand and appreciate (Eisenman 2011:260).[6] A controversial work is his *Stonebreakers* (1849) (appendix Figure 1) in which two peasants are shown breaking stones. This lowly, realistic and life-size painting presents rare subject matter for its time owing to the rawness and disconnection from religious or Romantic concepts.[7] Such works questioned the importance of the establishment in appreciating and commissioning art, thus revolutionising the relationship between artist, viewer and society (Vardouli 2022:4, 18).

This social reorientation of art continued to evolve across Europe. Russian Constructivism emerged in the mid-1910s as artists sought to reposition themselves in post-revolutionary Soviet society. Building on earlier avant-garde challenges to artistic conventions, Constructivists further rejected painting as an individualistic art form and advocated for a new artistic language of 'product' or 'machine' art to serve greater social and utilitarian purposes. They embraced new production techniques following technology and engineering principles (Vardouli 2022:120; Heller 2006:23). Lee Manovich (2002:1) emphasises the transformation in Russia and greater Europe[8] by introducing the works of Constructivists Aleksandr Rodchenko (Figure 3), El Lissitzky and László Moholy-Nagy.[9] These artists and designers played a key role in revolutionising their respective creative fields through innovative layouts, typographic work and photography (Mihailova & MacKay, 2014:148). For instance, when typefaces were not available, they crafted them out of wood and metal (Heller, 2006:23). Rodchenko in particular used technical materials such as a compass, ruler and plywood in his work (Nouril 2016:[sp]). Furthermore, Constructivist works displayed a more deliberate visual arrangement of type,

[5] Some of their works were considered so ‘scandalous’ in taste, style and subject matter that they were refused from exhibiting at the prestigious *Salon de Paris* and instead were shown at the 1863 *Salon de Refusés*, an exhibition of works that were rejected from the *Salon* (Wilson-Bareau 2007).
[6] As a self-proclaimed controversial artist, Courbet defied the traditional principles of Classical and Rococo art by depicting everyday scenes of the working class and creating “art for art’s sake”. He rejected the bourgeoisie and showed what “the people’s art” might look like (Eisenmann 2011:274).
[7] Moreover, *Stonebreakers’* size brings the figures to a life-size scale, placing unprecedented visual importance on a mundane subject, which allows the everyday spectator to feel as if they are playing a part in the work simply by relating to the subjects (Eisenman 2011:271; 274).
[8] This is illustrated by Malevich and Mondrian’s use of line, shape and colour to reflect order and harmony (Meggs & Purvis 2016:844).
[9] After leaving painting, Rodchenko focused on the overlap between art and life. He co-founded the Constructivist Working Group in 1921, which saw art as a profession and not a spiritual calling (Nouril 2016:[sp]).

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image and the manipulation of forms in space, as opposed to a haphazard approach (Heller 2006:93).

Figure 3: Aleksander Rodchenko, *Daesh'!, no. 14*, 1929.
Magazine, 30,3 × 23 cm.
Museum of Modern Art, New York. (MoMa).

Constructivism as a style subsequently became a visual prototype for a 'new world order', emphasising the movement's socialist and political underpinnings (Meggs & Purvis 2016:844). The Japanese collective MAVO (active from 1923 to 1925) is an apt example that illustrates the impact of Russian Constructivism's ideologies and style on avant-garde collectives in other locations (Weisenfeld 2022). MAVO's founder, Murayama Tomoyoshi, a self-described 'interpreter of European Modernism' studied in Germany and brought influences from European avant-garde movements like Dadaism, Expressionism, Surrealism and Constructivism to Japan. Murayama joined efforts with the already-established Japanese Futurist art movement (Monoskop 2023). The group included a diverse range of artists, many originally Futurists, who participated in art criticism, avant-garde magazine publication (Figure 4), theatre and architecture (Monoskop 2023; Weisenfeld 2002:2).

MAVO's magazine (Figure 4) critiqued the elitism of art institutions and the accessibility of art (Monoskop 2023), reflecting the socialist tendencies of earlier European avant-garde movements such as those of Courbet and his contemporaries. Like Russian Constructivists,

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MAVO artists challenged traditional art practices. They critiqued the establishment, integrating industrial materials into their paintings and prints, often as collages (Chong 2012:15). MAVO is well-known for provocative public performances. Often improvised on the spot, their dance and theatre projects sought to blur the boundaries between 'high' art and daily life, opposing social inequalities and ridiculing moral standards[10] (Weisenfeld 2002:2, 5, 228).

Figure 4: MAVO, *magazine cover for Issue 2*, 1924.
Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo.
(Monoskop).

Following the success of the Russian Revolution and influenced by communist and Marxist ideals, MAVO advocated for collectivism (*shūdanshugi* 共産主義; Communism) over individualism (*kojinshugi* 個人主義). Imbued with political messages that critiqued the government, social inequalities and capitalism, MAVO's activities reflected the ideals of Marxism and their efforts at radicalism through collective advocacy (Goodman 2006:254).[11]

While radical and socialist ideologies were explored by Japanese modernist designers, new printing technologies – influenced by European design styles – offered opportunities for

[10] For instance, in 1923, Murayama performed a series of expressive gestures in the nude, surrounded by works in his studio. In other performances, artists wearing only briefs did handstands and acrobatics as a form of 'living art' (Weisenfeld 2002:236).
[11] Murayama was eventually forced to commit *tenkou* (political apostasy) in 1933 and proclaim Marxism's inappropriateness to the Imperial Japanese system (Goodman 2006:255).

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Japanese poster design to explore new layouts and typography. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the invention of mass media, photography, colour lithography and improvements in printing and photography quality exponentially increased visual cultural documentation and creation (Bennett 2006:74). From the 1920s onwards, Japanese poster design began seeing the use of type-as-image on posters (Bartal 2013:34). This shift led to typography becoming a prominent graphic feature, especially since a characteristic of Japanese writing systems is their ability to be read horizontally as well as vertically. For instance, as seen in Figure 5, bi-directional typography takes up the majority of the layout in an advertisement for students to register at a Nagasaki art college. This poster, too, is influenced by the emerging political forces of Communism and Fascism in Europe and the Soviet Union. The bold slogans and visual style reflect that of Russian Constructivism (Gerteis 2013:[sp]).

Figure 5: Proletarian Art Institute Nagasaki, *poster for new intakes*, 1930.
Size and medium unknown.
Ohara Collection. (MIT).

Moreover, horizontal, vertical and diagonal type layout is used to create visual interest and emphasise the socialist message of the poster. The text in red urges students to join the proletarian (プロレタリア) 'Art Academy!!' (in white on blue). Admissions and directions are in the slanted type on the left. Linguistically, the grammar used reflects that of a senior talking to a

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subordinate, suggesting a strong tone similar to that of Soviet Russian propaganda (translations by author).

Figure 6: Il'ia Pavlovich Makarychev, *Long live woman of the USSR, the builder of socialism*, 1927.
Lithograph and offset print, 42 x 29cm.
Mossovet. (Poster Plakat).

Figure 7: FRONT, *magazine spread in English edition 14, Philippines special*, 1944.
Magazine spread, 37 x 26cm. (Asahi Shinbun).

With the onset of World War II, the artistic activities of Japan's maturing modernism ceased as Japan became more imperialistic and militaristic. As a result, near the end of the war, numerous artists were forced to participate in producing wartime propaganda, such as the *FRONT* magazine (Figure 8) (Chong 2012:15).[12] As artistic efforts shifted near the end of World War II, the philosophical underpinnings of Russian Constructivism and Socialism (Figure 6) shaped Japanese propaganda in the early 1940s (Germer 2015:238). *FRONT* magazine, published in 15 languages, used photomontages and collages to document and promote an idealised vision of Japanese progress during the war (Germer 2015:236). This is similar to how photomontage and photo documentation were used to create a fiction of Soviet success in the 1930s (Germer

[12] *FRONT*'s aim was to communicate to China and other nations the authenticity of the Japanese empire during a time of significant global transformation. *FRONT* extensively covered Japan's military operations in Asia, with dedicated sections on the Imperial Navy, the Imperial Army and Manchuria (Kushner 2006).

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2015:242). Andrea Germer (2015) argues that the layout and use of colour in the *FRONT* spread (Figure 7) are modelled after the *SSSR Na Stroike* magazine's style – to which El Lissiztsy and Rodchenko contributed. The composition and visual angle of the flag in this photo collage are also reminiscent of the solid lines used in Russian Constructivism. *FRONT*'s photography was carefully and realistically crafted to reposition the image of Emperor Hirohito as a 'peaceful civilian and scientist'; this is a type of propaganda intended to mask his involvement in and responsibilities during the war (Germer 2015:260). Both Russian Constructivists and Japanese wartime photographers were encouraged to pursue photography to support the objectives of their respective wartime governments and strive for progress and order (Germer 2015:242).[13] Heller (2012) appreciates the appeal of *FRONT's* avant-garde concepts, artistic layouts and visually pleasing covers (Figure 8). However, he argues and laments that the magazine promoted 'savagery' and not peace (Heller in *PrintMag* 2012).

Figure 6: FRONT, *magazine cover for Issue 7*, 1943.
Magazine cover.
(Bijutsu Techo).

[13] *FRONT* and Soviet Russian magazines placed an emphasis on gender-specific photography (Germer 2015:261). *FRONT*'s Southeast Asian issues often featured women and civilians, thus feminising certain nations like the Philippines. The spread in Figure 7 feminises the Philippines by combining the flag and the female farmer (Germer 2015:261). Gender representation like this mirrored the larger societal ambitions of the Japanese Empire, similar to USSR publications like the *SSSR Na Stroike* magazine, by pushing for gender roles using visual communication, photography and design.

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There is common ground between the examples of Courbet, Russian Constructivism, MAVO and *FRONT* in being a collective ethos that rejects tradition and advocates for social, stylistic and political change. Yet the nature of the avant-garde ethos remains highly debated in the literature. Mike Sell (2010:20) and Daryl Chin (1985) agree that the avant-garde as an ethos is pluralistic and complex. It spans temporal periods and locations, revealing various relationships with institutions, mediums and movements. Sell (2010:3) hence proposes that the nature of the avant-garde is 'resistant' to providing a definitive answer to its meaning, owing to its adaptation across contexts.

Sell (2010:753) notes, however, that a critical questioning of the avant-garde ethos has brought dialogues and questions to the fore that are 'avant-garde' in their own nature.[14] The notion of the avant-garde has been questioned and changed through the rise of the American movements of feminism, postcolonialism and critical race theory (Sell 2010:73). These movements posed questions such as why not enough women are represented in art textbooks, or why there are perceived racial discrepancies in avant-garde art galleries and museums (Sell 2010:753). These discussions revealed instances of racism, sexism and classism in avant-garde movements (Sell 2010:754), ushering in a push for further change in social and academic discourses.

Additional criticism of the avant-garde is its historically Eurocentric viewpoint. An example is David Cottington's book, *The avant-garde: a very short introduction* (2013:46) which classifies the avant-garde as a 'pan-European phenomenon'. No mention is made of avant-garde movements in Japan or other Asian or African countries. Recent literature criticises the prevailing historical and academic approaches to teaching the avant-garde. Owing to prevailing Eurocentric views, the idea of a Japanese avant-garde ethos arguably challenges a Western understanding of the 'avant-garde' (Inaga 2010; Isaeva 2017; McArtor 2022; Yoshimoto 2008). Therefore, it is necessary to critically examine the prevailing Eurocentric perspective to define what the Japanese avant-garde ethos is and what differentiates it from its European counterparts. Subsequently, it can be established why Japanese designers may have initially

[14] The act of critically examining the avant-garde (and the problematic museums, systems and institutions that supported it) is an avant-garde way of thinking in itself, as critical questions are being asked and new methods are examined.

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followed European styles in their work. Following that, examples of avant-garde Japanese design after World War II are presented.

Some historians and critics raise questions about whether the concept of the avant-garde can exist in a Japanese context (Inaga 2010; Ridgely 2010; Sell 2010). Inaga Shigemi (2010) argues that the avant-garde as a concept is inherently Eurocentric and, therefore, incompatible with Japanese culture. He states that Eurocentrism does not allow for applying the term 'avant-garde' in Japan because of its "violence to the culture of the other" (Inaga 2010:82). Sell (2010) similarly notes a mismatch between Eurocentric and Japanese definitions of the term 'avant-garde'. It is a Western term that originated in twentieth century Europe and describes various movements in a European context. In other words, European art is at the 'centre' and all other avant-gardes are thus at the 'periphery' (Sell 2010). Inaga (2010:82) consequently argues that Japanese avant-garde art cannot be considered avant-garde in itself. Japanese art is the other in the 'periphery' of European art on the basis that the latter is the 'centre' of the avant-garde artistic practices. Therefore, Olga Isaeva (2017:16) maintains that it is necessary for the hierarchy that places European traditions above non-European ones to be revised in academic discussions. Without a revision of the Eurocentric viewpoint, definitions of 'avant-garde' may be confusing and incompatible across contexts, according to Inaga (2010:82).[15]

More recent literature (Isaeva 2017; Inaga 2010; Sell 2010; Mitter 2008) makes an effort to divorce Europe from the centre of the avant-garde and emphasises a more inclusive, global perspective. However, the efforts to decolonise art-history narratives do not eliminate the power imbalances between the avant-garde movements of Central Europe and other countries, including Japan (Hagener 2014). According to Malte Hagener (2014:200), the dominance of Central European avant-gardes was felt by artists and writers both in the European 'centre' and 'international peripheries'. This is evident in Japan, where the pre-war avant-garde emerged in response to European avant-garde styles rather than by renewing or opposing Japanese traditions. The pre-war avant-garde in Japan, however, is unlike the nature of the post-war ethos, which aimed to establish a renewed Japanese visual language, as is explained further.

Hagener (2024:199) argues that in the Taisho period (1912–1927), Japanese creatives and scholars had caught up with the West and were aware of Western trends, literature and art.

[15] However, even with academic revisions that include a more global view of the avant-garde ethos (Goodman 1999, 2009; Heller 2017), the nature of the avant-garde remains complex, as previously indicated.

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Nevertheless, they were not at the level of initiating their own avant-garde trends without Western influences. For example, only a few weeks after Filippo T. Marinetti published his *Futurist Manifesto*, a Japanese translation appeared in May 1909. Hagener (2014:199) heralds this as the impetus for the 'historical avant-gardes' in Japan (namely Futurism, Dadaism, Constructivism and Surrealism). This is an apt example of the internationalisation of the avant-garde ethos (Hagener 2014:200).

Isaeva (2017:16) questions the use of the words 'centre' and 'periphery'. She maintains that these terms position Japanese avant-garde movements and their art on a lower level than their European counterparts (Isaeva 2017:16). Similar to Hagener's (2014) argument that Japan had access to Central European avant-garde ideas, a unique Japanese avant-garde ethos was yet to be established in the pre-war years and would continue for a while until the early post-war years. Kamekura's commentary (in Meggs 1997:187) on Japanese design after World War II indicates that this issue persisted for decades. He explains that Japanese designers rushed to 'catch up' with European and American design culture to establish themselves as globally relevant and progressive (Kamekura in Meggs 1997:187). In an attempt to absorb as much Western culture as they could, and in order to 'survive' in the design world, Japanese designers considered their own traditions a hindrance to their work in light of growing Western design trends. They were worried that using too much Japanese imagery would not put them on par with Western graphic design (Kamekura in Meggs 1997:188). Awazu (1970) subsequently expressed concern that Japanese design was becoming too standardised by following international design trends.

Therefore, Inaga (2010) proposes that to be avant-garde – in the sense of experimenting with the new and turning away from the familiar or traditional – Japanese art must turn away from European academic techniques and embrace Japanese traditions. This is because the essence of the avant-garde philosophy is to reject tradition. Yet, if Japanese art and design deviate from European and American academic tradition, a contradiction arises. The avant-garde ethos, in its European expression, necessitates a rejection of Western Modernism (Inaga 2010:83). As explored previously, publications such as MAVO and *FRONT*, which emerged before and during World War II respectively, demonstrate references to European styles and ideologies like Constructivism and socialism. Thus, for Japanese designers trained in the principles of Western Modernism, being avant-garde would mean the rejection of recently acquired Western academic traditions and a striving towards experimentation (Inaga 2010:83). This dichotomy of influencing

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and cross-referencing the 'other' raises ambiguity when defining a Japanese avant-garde philosophy.

Evidently, the dissonance and conflict between definitions of the European and Japanese avant-garde are highly debated in extant literature. This is further seen in Sell's (2010) argument that the nature of the avant-garde ethos does not have a definitive definition, making it an ethos that is multifaceted and diverse. Inaga (2010:82) thus argues for recognising the unique Japanese perspectives beyond the influences of Western Modernism. Historically, the emphasis was predominantly on the avant-garde being taught through a European lens (Hagener 2014). It is therefore necessary to consider particular values unique to the Japanese avant-garde ethos.

2.1.1 Establishing a Japanese avant-garde ethos

Inaga (2010:82) maintains that Japanese art and design should only be considered avant-garde if influenced by Western Modernism or European avant-garde movements. However, this raises an interesting dichotomy: Japanese art and design had an influence on some European artists in the 1880s during the *Japonisme* phenomenon (Gliem 2008:18).[16] Traditional Japanese art – before the Western education of Japanese artists – was "free from the rules of Western academism" and was considered to be avant-garde in Europe (Inaga 2010:83). Throughout the 1890s, influential European critics, art dealers and collectors promoted Japanese art (such as woodblock prints) in exhibitions and publications (Conte-Helm 1992:141). This led to the *Japonisme* movement, in which Japanese art and textiles became especially popular in France during the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist eras (Gliem 2008:25). Japanese influence could be seen in various art forms such as painting, fashion and interior design, especially in the works of Louis Majorelle and Charles Rennie Mackintosh (Conte-Helm 1992:141; Meggs & Purvis 2016:116). The European craze for Japanese art represents an enamourment with the unfamiliar, mysterious otherness of Japan (Gliem 2008:23). In this way, Japanese visual art had acquired an otherworldly quality in the West. This phenomenon was also observed in theatre, novels and operas as a fashionable trend, as well as in Modernist art from the 1920s onwards, which lingered on from the *Japonisme* phenomenon (Gliem 2008:24).

[16] Starting as early as the late nineteenth-century, European artists such as Monet, Van Gogh, Munch and Chagall were inspired by the colour and composition of Japanese woodblock prints (Baeza 2019:[sp]; Bailey 2017:[sp]; Sotheby's 2019:[sp]).

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Helena Čapková (2014) emphasises how Japanese designers were influenced by European Modernism decades later. Although Japanese artists studying in Europe after World War II did not contribute directly to the Modernist *Japonisme*, they recognised strong Japanese influences on European art (Čapková 2013:383; Gliem 2008). Conversely, as a result, Japanese designers rediscovered their own culture through the lens of its adaptation to European art. When Japanese scholars returned from their education at the Bauhaus school, several felt a renewed interest in their own culture and traditional Japanese arts (Čapková 2014:383). Japanese designers' unexpected encounters with European 'Japaneseness' inspired them to revisit their own traditional art, imagery and symbols (Capková 2014:383) (Figure 9).

Therefore, it is essential to note that not all Japanese avant-garde designers favoured following European stylistic trends. Designers like Sato Koichi, Yokoo, Sugiura and Awazu sought a new Japanese visual language by moving away from or juxtaposing European influences with Japanese ones. This suggests a distinction between the early Japanese avant-garde and the more provocative, novel explorations of a Japanese visual identity that characterised the post-war avant-garde ethos. The case study in Chapter Four presents the work of designers who sought to create a uniquely Japanese 'grammar of design' (Nguyen 2010:1).

Unlike Inaga (2010), Steven Ridgely (2010:142) posits that avant-garde concepts and movements have always existed in Japan, albeit in varying forms. Ridgely (2010:142; in Marotti 2013:216) maintains that avoiding using the term avant-garde for Japanese art, design and theatre could disenfranchise legitimate forms of expression. The experimentation, expression and juxtaposition between European and Japanese styles are the essence of the Japanese avant-garde ethos. In other words, it is the experimentation that makes a movement avant-garde (Ridgely 2010:142). The creative dialogue between Japan and Europe arguably led to a transnational style characterised by the mutual appropriation and influence of the two cultures.

The avant-garde ethos is supported not only by a philosophy of rejecting tradition but also by developing new visual styles. The heart of the ethos also allows artists to engage in intellectual discussions and contribute to the evolution of artistic expression and societal transformation (Malhotra 2023:[sp]). Roxane Jubert (2006:293) mentions that the start of Japanese graphic design was the point at which the Association of Advertising Artists was founded in 1926. The association helped form a cohesive 'Japanese identity' among designers exposed to European design principles through studying at schools like the Bauhaus (Čapková 2015). Still, a cohesive

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Japanese style was difficult to achieve. Most Japanese avant-garde collectives, as discussed in the next section, did not form a joint artistic style. Instead, they pushed for freedom of choice in their stylistic approaches (Isaeva 2017:16). The Japanese avant-garde ethos is hence marked by dialogues and experiments with stylistic freedom, exploring both European and Japanese styles.

For example, post-war designer Tanaka Ikko's work (Figure 9)[17] exemplifies this stylistic cross-referencing among Japanese designers influenced by European Modernism. Recognised for his minimalist approach to design, Tanaka's work is characterised by clean, colourful and uncomplicated shapes. His simple, reductive aesthetic is reminiscent of similar modernist principles in European design, especially using grids, geometric shapes and flat colour. Yet, his work also contains traditional Japanese imagery and aesthetic principles, such as negative space, calligraphic influences, traditional *noh* masks and *geishas*. Tanaka gained international recognition for his poster design for the *Nihon buyō* performance in Los Angeles (Figure 9) (Design is History [sa]:[sp]). This work illustrates Japanese imagery with the stylised *Nihon buyō* dancer through geometric forms and a Modernist and Bauhaus-inspired sensibility through abstraction and colour. This internationally recognised poster also demonstrates Japan's reliance on its deep-rooted history and culture, integrating culture with design to showcase to a global audience (Petit 2023).

In the foreword of Kamekura's book, *Trademarks and symbols of the world* (1965), Paul Rand describes his love of Japanese design. Rand (1965:[sp]) agrees that the simplicity and directness of Japanese design have influenced Western artists from Gauguin to Rand himself. In addition, Kamekura Yusaku (in Meggs 1997:187) identifies what he calls a 'Japanese' sensibility in Rand's works (Figure 10). In the same vein as Čapková (2014), Japanese designers were surprised to recognise traditional Japanese styles used in a refreshed manner (Kamekura in Meggs 1997:188). In Rand's case, this may be a result of his admitted enamourment of Eastern philosophy and Japanese design. Kamekura (in Meggs 1997:187) interestingly contends that Rand's forms may even be more 'Japanese' than those of most Japanese artists.

[17] As a side note, Tanaka was one of the few Japanese designers to express avant-garde ideas visually rather than in violent street protests, according to Bartal (2012:72).

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Figure 7: Tanaka Ikko, *Nihon buyō*, 1971.
Offset lithograph, 103 x 72,8 cm.
Museum of Modern Art, New York. (MoMa).

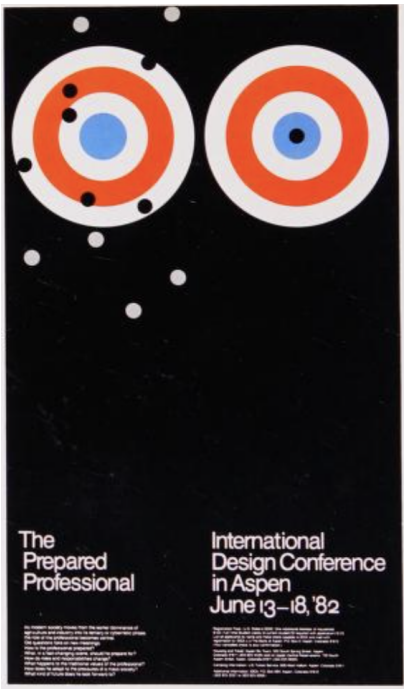

Figure 8: Paul Rand, *poster for the International Design Conference in Aspen*, 1982.
(Six Chapters in Design, Meggs 1997).

Jubert (2017:239) credits the start of the Japanese avant-garde to pre-war Japanese Modernist design of the 1920s like MAVO. Others argue that 'avant-garde Japanese design' only emerged after the 1940s, referring to the post-war years until the early 1980s (Bartal 2020; Fraser, Heller & Chwast 1996:10; Goodman 1999; Lupton in Goodman 1999). Bartal (2020:32) positions the start of the Japanese avant-garde with the anti-art movement and the political protests of the 1950s and 1960s.[18] For the purposes of this dissertation, it is important to further examine post-war avant-garde Japanese design in particular to understand its key philosophies and ideological underpinnings. These philosophies and ideologies are unpacked below.

- **The post-war Japanese avant-garde ethos**

Bartal (2020:50) challenges the stereotype of Japanese design as beautiful, sublime or simply a cultural phenomenon. He cites post-war avant-garde movements as tools for political protest,

[18] Various scholars label the rejection of Western art forms as an attack on Modernism (Havens 2017:41), anti-modernity (Starrs 2011:27) or anti-art (Bartal 2020:32; Tozawa 2011:4). It is argued that the post-war Japanese avant-garde can be traced to the anti-art movement of the 1950s and 1960s (Hoaglund 2012:1). Bartal (2020:39) suggests that the "anti-art" movement in Japan laid the foundations for new art forms that challenged traditional hierarchies and institutions.

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social critique and the proliferation of subversive ideologies. Similarly, for film scholar Isolde Standish (2011), Japanese avant-garde collectives formed a counterculture marked by themes of 'politics, porn and protest'. Therefore, post-war Japanese design is informed by a supporting ideology in the same way that every stylistic movement is (Rock 1992:125). Whereas definitions of the avant-garde differ, Standish (2011), Miryam Sas (2010) and Ridgely (2012) are all interested in the promiscuity and political messages of the Japanese avant-garde, especially during the 1960s and 1970s. It is important to note that because of their messages and subversive styles, Japanese artists and designers were marginalised in the 1960s, owing to the Western-centric power dynamics of the international art scene. The positions of designers such as Yokoo and Tanaami were further marginalised in the Japanese art system, according to Ikegami (in Cotton 2015:[sp]).

The 1960s, in particular, were a time of radical political protests which lasted more than 10 years (Bartal 2020). These protests were, in part, against the Japanese government and its security treaty (*Anpo*) that was signed in 1951 with the U.S.[19] Many students, including young designers, protested against socio-political issues such as the new government, the American occupation of the early 1950s, emerging capitalist and consumerist values and Japan's involvement in the Vietnam War of 1955 to 1975 (Bartal 2020:32; Cook 2012). This was a reaction against militarism and the changing political climate of the post-war years, with protesters viewing it as a return to Japan's role as an aggressor against other Asian countries (Bartal 2020:32). During the Shōwa period (1926–1989), students raised concerns about Japan's increasing militarism, imperialistic ambitions and ultra-nationalism (Kosaka 1990:32). Students witnessed social protests like the violent Shinjuku riot of 21 October 1968, where thousands clashed with police over Japan's involvement with the U.S. in the Vietnam War (Andrews 2016:75).

The political instability and protests prompted design students to adopt critical ideologies, question the government and explore new forms of expression (Bartal 2013:39; Hoaglund 2012:1). The post-war Japanese avant-garde movement encompassed experimental arts,

[19] Initial protests in 1960 opposed the Japanese government's plan to expand the bilateral U.S.–Japan Security Treaty which involved the presence of U.S. military bases in Japan. The demonstrators wanted Japan to regain its sovereignty and neutrality outside of American rule (Bartal 2020:32). Japan followed the Yoshida Doctrine, which focused on economic growth by relinquishing some national autonomy to the U.S.. This led to a 'subordinate independence' relationship, and according to historian John Dower (in Bartal 2020:32), protests aimed to revise the Yoshida Doctrine and regain Japan's sovereignty and neutrality.

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notably seen in theatre, film, graphic design and new architectural ideologies like Metabolism[20] (Bartal 2020; Sas 2010) and as a result, the post-war years in Japanese art marked a period of reflection and self-expression.

In addition, the work of designers during this time advocated for freedom of speech, expression and individual rights (Cahill 2009:28). For example, artists like Nakamura Hiroshi (Figure 11) began producing work that expressed painful memories from the recent war that ended in Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Hoaglund 2012:[sp]). In the 1950s, Nakamura's work often depicted stark realism, such as the increasing protests against American military bases. He sketched onsite in Sunagawa, where farmers protested government plans to use their land to expand the runways for Tachikawa Air Force Base. The farmers, whose families had cultivated the land for centuries, vehemently opposed the confiscation (Hoaglund 2012:[sp]). Nakamura considered himself a frontline reporter, using sketches instead of a camera (Hoaglund 2012:[sp]).[21]

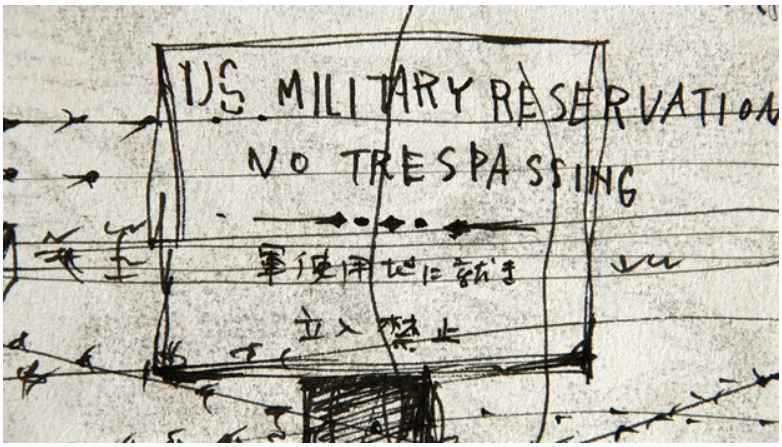

Figure 9: Nakamura Hiroshi, *detail of a sketch of the American military base at Tachikawa*, 1955.
Pen on paper. Courtesy of Nakamura Hiroshi.
(MIT Visualizing Cultures).

Yet, unfortunately for those in opposition, there was a failure to stop the renewal *Anpo* (Bartal 2020:32). Murakami (2005) argues that Article 9 of the Japanese constitution, which involved the disarmament of weapons for Japan, significantly impacted Japanese citizens' cultural

[20] The Metabolists were a group of Japanese architects and students in the 1960s. They proposed a new vision of urban living called 'Metabolism' which involved high-rise buildings made up of living capsules. The Metabolist vision assumed the city could be rebuilt from scratch and that architects would act as master planners. The Metabolists saw the ever-changing Tokyo environment as an asset rather than a deficit (Sand 2013:8).
[21] Similarly, Awazu's award-winning poster, *Give Back Our Sea* (1955) (Figure 29 in the case study) depicts the suffering of Japanese fishermen at military bases in their villages (*Bessatsu Taiyo* 2024:6).

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expressions. Japan was left in a vulnerable state owing to the renewal of *Anpo* and the increase in foreign (especially American) influence (Murakami in Eberhardinger 2012:4). Most of the population was against *Anpo*, and the country consequently saw numerous protests (Bartal 2020:34)[22]

In addition to the social protest movements, the 1960s saw a new socio-economic influence: the consumer revolution.[23] Prime Minister Ikeda served as the leader of this capitalist movement. In response to the early 1960s protests, Ikeda made an effort to focus public attention on the economy by enacting an income-doubling plan (Bartal 2020:34). This new policy lowered interest rates and taxes for private corporations like Sony and Honda, while also increasing the government's investment in infrastructure. Chong (2012:27) describes Tokyo in the 1950s and 1960s as a "multilayered matrix of avant-garde production and energy", standing out among cities devastated after World War II. This is as a result of the city's accomplishment of being rebuilt and expanded at an unprecedented rate and scale (Chong 2012:31).

2.1.2 Avant-garde collectives and the angura *movement*

As is evidenced in the literature review so far, the socio-political state in post-World War II Japan provided a rich ground of inspiration for subject matter in the creative fields (Chong 2012:31). The post-World War II years were also marked by a period of rebuilding Japan after its defeat. After the 1945 bombings, Tokyo emerged from its ruins (Figure 12) into a landscape for avant-garde ideas, expressed through protest, theatre and dance (McArtor 2022:6) during the 1950s to 1960s. In the 1960s, Japan continued to see a time of change, unrest, and innovation in the arts, resulting in the emergence of multiple art collectives (Bartal 2013).

[22] For the first time in Japanese history, demonstrations were particularly large and diverse, with protestors ranging from political radicals to housewives, students, taxi drivers and mainstream leftists (Bartal 2016:26).

[23] The 'consumer revolution' (*shōhi kakume*i 消費革命), which was introduced in the economic white paper *(keizai hakusho)* released in 1959, had significant coverage in newspapers during the early 1960s (Bartal 2020:34).

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Figure 10: Bombed ruins in Asakusa, Tokyo, 1945.
(Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington).

This was followed by rapid economic growth that renewed urban areas and established art institutions such as the Sogetsu Art Centre (discussed later) (Bartal 2020). The aforementioned energy in Tokyo that Chong (2012) describes is evident in the number of avant-garde 'anti-art' collectives that arose in the 1960s. Several subversive art collectives, theatre troupes and movements emerged across the country in the 1960s as a form of protest. Notable "anti-art" movements include *Gutai* and *Jikken Koubou* in the 1950s and Neo-Dada, the *ankoku butoh*[24] dance movement, Hi-Red Centre, *Mono-ha* and *angura* in the 1960s (Bartal 2020:32, 40; Chong 2012). Through public performances and guerilla-style events, these movements challenged the established power structures and facilitated the emergence of multidisciplinary and novel artistic expressions (Chong 2012:30). The Japanese post-war avant-garde ethos spread largely through cross-disciplinary collaboration between these collectives, with ideas being exchanged and collaborations occurring between designers, writers, playwrights and filmmakers (Hayashi 2012:26).

Japan is arguably often only recognised for its 'exotic' culture which has captivated Westerners for centuries (Barthes 1983; Graham 2014:140). This is illustrated by the aforementioned *Japonisme* trend of European artists experimenting with Japanese styles (Chiba 1998:19;

[24] *Ankoku butoh* (the dance of utter darkness) is a form of avant-garde dance theatre founded by Hijikata Tatsumi. *Butoh* is known for its use of cross-dressing, imitation, subversive strategies, references to death and even the killing of a live chicken onstage. Hijikata, who called his dancers 'terrorists', used these elements to critique bourgeois society's sexual and economic structures (Adriasola 2015:110; Andrews 2016:258).

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Chong 2012:31). However, as indicated in Chapter One, the late 1950s and 1960s brought a turning point in Tokyo's art scene that opened post-war, modern Japanese graphic design (instead of traditional works such as *ukiyo-e* prints) up to the international art world (Chong 2012:31). In the years following World War II, numerous Japanese creatives worked reflectively with international avant-garde artists by sharing their work, asking questions about conventional art and expressing their ideas through manifestoes (Isaeva 2017:16).

The heart of these collaborative avant-garde activities took place in Tokyo (Hrvatin 2017:244). In particular, the Sogetsu Art Centre in Tokyo (see Figure 3 in the appendix), a space for artistic collaboration and discourse, was a crucial driving force that advanced Japanese avant-garde work internationally. Various other organisations, like the Japanese Advertising Artists Club (JAAC), also helped foster the growth of Japanese post-war art and design.[25]

The Sogetsu Art Centre opened in 1958 and became a prominent location for developing avant-garde art, design and ideologies (Hrvatin 2017:244).[26] An experimental space for creative activities, the Centre emphasised holistic artistic creation with a commitment to cross-collaboration between Japanese and American multidisciplinary artists (Hrvatin 2017:244; Havens 2006:103). Though Japan still remained relatively 'cut off' to artistic developments internationally, the Centre encouraged international speakers to visit Tokyo (Havens 2006:103).[27] Thomas Havens (2006:103) credits the refinement and growth of the Japanese avant-garde to the success of the Sogetsu Art Centre, albeit an arguably short-lived success (the Centre closed in 1972).

On the other side of the globe, in 1960s New York, the Fluxus movement was founded by George Maciunas with the manifesto of 'purging the world' of 'EUROPANISM' (Maciunas 1963).[28] Fluxus was an international art movement that broke down artistic boundaries through

[25] Prominent designers in these collectives include Yokoo, Awazu, internationally recognised playwrights and directors Terayama Shuji and Nagisa Oshima, author Yuko Mishima and world-renowned creatives Yoko Ono and Yayoi Kusama (Valdés 2022:[sp]). Various creatives collaborated together: a student of John Cage, musician Ichiyanagi Toshi composed an opera dedicated to his friend Yokoo's design works in 1969, for example (Fu 2020:[sp]).
[26] It was opened in 1958 in the district of Akasaka, which was an affluent area that had been rebuilt rapidly after the War and was a modern, well-built location for designers to work in (Sumai Interior 2015:[sp]).
[27] For instance, during the early 1960s, the Centre welcomed influential artists and speakers from the New York avant-garde movement to Tokyo, including John Cage, David Tudor, Robert Rauschenberg and Merce Cunningham (Harren 2020:68).
[28] Fluxus, inspired by Zen Buddhism and influenced by the works of Marcel Duchamp and John Cage, prioritised the process of creation over the outcome. It celebrated humour, chance and ordinary experiences as it rejected the traditionals of the commercial art industry (Sothebys [sa]:[sp]).

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expressive, interdisciplinary approaches and is a key example of Japanese and American artistic collaboration (Baerwaldt & Martin 1991). Chieko Shiomi, Yasunao Tone and Yoko Ono moved to Fluxus Hub in New York to participate in the art and performance work, collaborating with Americans like John Cage and Joseph Byrd (Chong 2017:70-71). Other artists like Saito Takako and Ay-O helped shape Fluxus through frequent correspondence and travel between New York and Japan. They combined Fluxus concepts and events with the latest Japanese artistic developments (Chong 2012:71). This resulted in an international, collaborative exploration of inter-media and blurred boundaries between art and life as well as Eastern and Western philosophies and styles. Despite the nature of belonging to an avant-garde collective, collectives such as these had no constraints or requirements to make use of established art and design concepts (Kim 2017:[sp]). Chong (2012:[sp]) maintains that, unlike specific European-influenced pre-war avant-garde movements such as 1920s Modernism, post-war Japanese avant-garde art is not distinguishable by specific iconographic or stylistic similarities, nor does it share definitive characteristics.

In the early years of the Allied occupation, numerous Japanese cultural practices, from martial arts and theatre to Shinto worship, were sceptically viewed regarding their ideological and state-military functions. As a result, theatre, education, land ownership and businesses were reformed by the Occupation government (Eckersall 2006:6). Under American Occupation, traditional Japanese theatre (*shingeki*)[29] began to modernise by incorporating Western styles (such as realism and naturalism) and even attempted to perform American plays (Eckersall 2006:9). Some Japanese actors described it as a monolith that imposed realism and did not allow for theatrical freedom of expression (Goodman 1999:1; Takayuki in Goodman 2006:256).
In response to this, the *angura* movement emerged in Tokyo in the 1960s as a radical departure from the reformed *shingeki* theatre in reaction to the uncertainty of Japanese society towards these cultural and economic changes (Eckersall 2009:6).[30] William Andrews (2016) describes *angura* as an anti-establishment, counter-culture movement emerging from university theatre groups. University students in the 1960s were active in the *angura* movement, participating in plays and holding political protests (Goodman 1999:4). In fact, all the most popular theatre

[29] *Shingeki* (New Theatre) was a Japanese state-backed theatre rooted in Western-inspired realism and modernism. Its patrons and shows represented the epitome of bourgeoisie culture. Just as European avant-garde work protested the Establishment, so does Yokoo's work for *angura* theatre, which itself is a protest of *shingeki*.
[30] Key figures in the *angura* movement include playwrights and directors like Terayama Shuji, Kara Juro and Suzuki Tadashi, who sought to challenge and expand the boundaries of what theatre could be (Cohen 2009:134; Goodman 2006:262).

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groups in the 1960s emerged from student theatre clubs at major Tokyo universities (Goodman 1999:4).

Angura theatre productions, *butoh* dance experiments and avant-garde films became popular during the 1960s, which David Goodman (1999:1) refers to as a time of creative revolt. This period was an unusual time of freedom owing to the post-war chaos (Goodman 1999:2).[31] Theatre and film from the 1960s to 1980s thus turned into popular mediums for expressing concerns surrounding the unstable political status quo after the occupation and grappling with a new Japanese identity (Goodman 1999:1).[32]

One of the most iconic *angura* theatre posters presented in poster anthologies and the literature is Yokoo's (1966) *Koshimaki Osen* (Figure 2), created for the outdoor performance of the play of the same name (Petit 2023). The poster epitomises the *angura* ethos; it was intentionally provocative, rejecting the orthodoxy of *shingeki* theatre. The work sparked controversy among design critics owing to its perceived vulgarity in imagery and style, particularly its rejection of the then-prevailing rationalist design principles (*Centre Pompidou* 1996:99). Despite the criticism, the poster, distinguished by its bold colours and popular culture references, became a symbol of protest and non-conformity in the sixties, admired for its non-conformism, pop aesthetic and use of screen printing and collages of photographic elements and illustrations (*Centre Pompidou* 1996:99).

Angura is of particular interest to this study because its expressions were not limited to the mediums of theatre, dance and film but also to graphic design. *Angura* artists and designers often collaborated and inspired one another, blurring the boundaries between different art forms (Uen 2023:[sp]). Therefore, a deeper exploration of the *angura* space is necessary for this study.

According to Lupton (1991:vii), the *angura* movement introduced a fresh and rebellious graphic design scene that challenged the prevailing design culture of Japan. *Angura* took inspiration from the earlier anti-art *Gutai* group (or 'beatniks', according to Heller 2015:36) and the obscure

[31] On 21 October 1968, at Tokyo's busiest train station of Shinjuku, thousands of students violently clashed with police while protesting against the Vietnam War (Andrews 2016:75). The Vietnam War was of particular interest to the Japanese youth owing to the prevalence of the U.S. military in Japan (Goodman 1999:4).
[32] For example, opposition to *Anpo* renewal saw protests in Tokyo in 1960 (Goodman 1999:4). The Treaty (which dictated the surrender of Japan's weapons and military to the U.S. in exchange for protection if war arises again) resulted in the sacrifice of national sovereignty and political neutrality (Goodman 1999:4).

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'happenings' of John Cage in the 1960s. *Angura* groups embodied a sense of internationalism and rebelled against the dominant and conservative attitudes of Japanese tradition (Heller 2015:36; Lupton 1991:vii). In doing so, *angura* designers like Yokoo, Awazu and Hirano aimed to achieve a sense of' 'erotic rejuvenation' by blending traditional forms from indigenous Japanese arts with elements of Western popular culture, sexuality, vibrant colours and intricate collages (Lupton 1991:vii) (as seen in Figure 15).

Figure 11: Ruiko Yoshida, *photograph of Hijikata Tatsumi performing a* butoh *dance*, 1973.
10.30 x 25 cm.
Butoh Laboratory. (Nonaka Hill).

Designers often worked closely with *angura* playwrights and gained popularity for designing posters for their politically controversial productions (Goodman 1999). For example, the *butoh* dancer Hijikata Tatsumi (Figure 13) adapted novelist Mishima's *Forbidden colours* (*kinjiki* 禁色) into a dance performance and collaborated with the poet and playwright Terayama Shuji. Terayama, in turn, became close friends with Yokoo and commissioned him to design various posters for his experimental theatre group, *Tenjo Sajiki* (Uen 2023:[sp]). Yokoo also notably worked with photographer Hosoe Eikoh on a photomontage advertisement for an exhibition of Eikoh's photos of Hijikata in 1968 (Figure 34 in the case study) (Bartal 2016:33).

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Angura collectives participated in unconventional activities like performing on the streets in Shinjuku (Figure 14) and expressing more emotions and harsher political topics than traditional theatre (Goodman 1999). Using their bodies as a medium, angura actors, designers and *butoh* dancers pursued ideas of violence in art, absurdism, surrealism, rape (often a metaphor for the American occupation) and homosexuality (as an inversion of Japanese societal morals where sexual deviancy was a metaphor for political upheaval) (McArtor 2022:17; 33; 58). As a commentary on the volatile atmosphere following Japan's capitulation and the Allied occupation, performers insisted that the human body could inherently convey genuine pain and horror. In contrast, words had the potential to be misleading (McArtor 2022:31). For instance, faced with disillusionment after the renewal of the *Anpo* treaty and regular protests, Hijikata expressed his counterculture ideas and rebelled against bourgeois society by celebrating darkness and death (Andrews 2016:258). When creating *butoh*, Hijikata was heavily influenced by themes of the mutilated body, death, illness and eroticism (Kerner 2013).

Butoh dance expresses a fascination with death and the grotesque, through the dancers' unsettling convulsions, pained facial expressions, tattered hair and threadbare clothing (Wright 2019:[sp]). Hijikata maintains explicitly that his avant-garde dance form is a deviation from the performing arts of Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines (Centonze 2017:221). Thus, unlike the harmonious, spiritual qualities of aesthetics like *ma* and *mono no aware*, *butoh* embraces absurdity, deformity and an abject sense of the uncanny. *Butoh* posters (such as Yokoo's [1966] *The Rose-Coloured Dance;* Figure 35 in the case study) also express these ideas, particularly through the body as a metaphor for death.

Butoh and *angura* performances were regularly held in the Shinjuku Ward in Tokyo (Andrews 2016:262, 252; Centonze 2017:223; Nettleton 2014:5). Owing to the numerous protests, flash mobs and dance and theatre performances staged in the area (sometimes even at Shinto shrines), Shinjuku came to be known as *angura* city (Andrews 2016:239). *Angura* productions and their poster designs sought not only to comment on Japanese politics after the Second World War but also reject Western ideals of theatre and stage productions.[33]

[33] Productions include *John Silver: Love in Shinkuku (*1967*)* and *The Dog God (*1969*)* (posters by Yokoo and Awazu respectively) (Goodman 1999). These posters are discussed in the case study.

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Figure 12: *Diary of a Shinjuku Thief* being performed in Shinjuku, Tokyo, 1968. (Screen Slate).

Figure 13: Yokoo Tadanori, *poster for* Diary of a Shinjuku Thief, 1968. Silkscreen, 100 x 71,5 cm. M+ Collection. (M+ Hong Kong).

For example, performances were often held in Shinjuku's streets instead of actual theatres (Figure 14) (Goodman 1999:5). Shinjuku, as the epicentre of counter-culture, is celebrated in Terayama's renowned film and play *Diary of a Shinjuku Thief* (1968) (Figure 14 and 15).[34] The

[34] The film is a reinterpretation of *The thief's journal*, a 1949 French novel by the leftist writer Jean Genet. The plot follows protagonist Birdy (played by Yokoo himself) stealing from the famous Kinokuniya bookstore and being caught

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film examines themes of sexuality and identity in the context of post-war Japanese youth culture. The film's choppy, uneven cutting and structure align with its bold atmosphere, fully embracing the *Zeitgeist* of the *angura* (Andrews 2016:240). Similarly, the photomontage technique and psychedelic colours in the poster (Figure 15) illustrate the surreal aesthetic of the film and its unconventional plot (Andrews 2016:240).

Goodman (1991:3) argues that during the 1960s, some Japanese felt both occupied and alienated under the American occupation. As a result, Japan felt the need to create a new national identity. Some creatives were concerned with expressing and exploring this identity through theatre and design. Goodman (1991:3-4) discusses the duality between 'Japaneseness' and American culture experienced in the *angura* movement:

> Alienated by their own culture, they shared a certain psychological distance from it that empowered them to undertake some of the most trenchant examinations of Japaneseness ever attempted. Greatly influenced by American culture, they were at the same time alienated by the U.S., which was occupying their country, testing and stockpiling nuclear weapons, and fighting an unpopular war in Vietnam. This dual alienation led to a particularly fluid sense of identity: a protean quality and a capacity for experimentation.

The 1960s marked the age of 'quality differentiation', in which concerns about product excellence, durability and costs arose among consumers. As a result, the usage of posters as a form of product advertising became more common (Hirano 1996:61). The same time period saw the emergence of avant-garde art, which often drew from Western influences (Brewińska 2021:[sp]). Posters were not only used for purposes of advertisements during this time, however. Avant-garde posters served as works of art that expressed ideas concerning a post-war Japanese identity or ideologies held by designers. For instance, Kamekura Yusaku, who designed the first *Hiroshima Appeals* poster (Figure 30 in the case study), used the medium as an art form: it was way to promote the image of a new, re-emerging Japan with a focus on peace and prosperity (Petit 2023:[sp]). On the other hand, Oliver McArtor (2022) posits that *angura* artists specifically adopted narratives of war and oppression as metaphors to confront Japan's shortcomings and attempts at improving the nation.[35]

by a female employee, Umeko (Andrews 2016:240; Reinoos 2017:[sp]). Much of the film contains random sequences, strange dialogues and sexual acts in the bookstore.

[35] The shortcomings, according to some protestors, included Japan's participation in the Vietnam War (as a result of being under American occupation), the *Anpo* treaty, land reform policies and imperialism (Andrews 2016:250).

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At the same time, Japanese radio and newspaper media pushed narratives presenting a positive view of Japanese development and flourishing. On the contrary, *angura* sought to emphasise challenging and dark periods of Japanese history by means of theatrical productions and posters (McArtor 2022:8). For instance, Awazu often designed posters depicting 'horror, bloody history and menacing repetition' (Marotti 2013:216). *Angura* posters became infamous for the shock value inherent in their symbolism and narratives (Chong 2012:76), such as the use of naked women, abject bodies, blood, references to murder and suicide and antiestablishmentarianism. The proliferation of images of disfigured bodies and corpses in Japanese design mirrors the vulnerability of the post-war Japanese human condition (Hayashi 2012b:26).

Some *angura* posters became so popular and impactful that they 'revolutionised' graphic design in Japan (Goodman 1999; Sasame 2010:[sp]). Sasame (2010:[sp]) describes *angura* posters as theatre on walls or 'time posters'. Not only do the works often reference Japanese history, but they also act as a sign of the times by incorporating post-war messages of dissent and protest. Moreover, some posters, such as Awazu's *Inugami* (1969) (Figures 47 and 48 in the case study), do not directly depict the plot of the film or play; often designers chose to emphasise their personal interests or social views through particular imagery. These included religious symbols such as Buddhas, demons, hell, Hindu gods, *noh* masks harking back to traditional Japanese theatre, or graphic scenes of sexuality and death, as indicated above. In this way, *angura* posters did not merely act as advertisements but also functioned as a medium for designers to comment on the post-war socio-political context in Japan and critique war or imperialism (refer to the *John Silver* trilogy posters; Figures 38 to 39 in the case study) (Chong 2012:34). In this context, posters encroach on works of art with layers of meaning and messages (Hayashi 2014b:297).

At its core, it may be argued that the *angura* movement often focused on themes of otherworldliness and death. These ideas were prominently reflected in the movement's poster designs, frequently featuring abstract and surreal imagery, challenging traditional Japanese graphic design conventions. The posters were not only promotional tools but also symbolised the movement's spirit of rebellion and nonconformity. Drawing on a range of influences from traditional Japanese woodblock prints to European avant-garde art, the posters contributed to

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creating a new Japanese visual language, one of the unsettling visuals that evoke a sense of unease and otherworldliness in a politically charged climate.

2.1.2 The end of angura*, shifts in styles and a move towards advertising*

The *angura* movement was most prominent in the 1960s but was eventually lost as theatre moved towards more contemporary styles in the 1970s and was overshadowed by commercialisation in the 1980s. According to Hirano Takuo (1991:61), the period from the 1970s to 1980s is known as 'the age of assertion'. In this decade, consumers established standards for obtaining goods, embraced autonomy and became more discriminatory in consumer decisions rather than following trends. With the economic changes, most of the population shifted away from feudalistic ideologies and stopped suppressing their own desires for the benefit of the country. Instead, they began asserting individual needs and preferences (Hirano 1991:61).

Goodman (1999:12) notes a shift in the 1970s as the disposable income of Japanese citizens increased. Citizens placed more emphasis on the value of entertainment. Subsequently, there was an increase in the construction of new theatres. As a result, the *angura* movement lost its anti-establishment and countercultural character when more high-quality theatre spaces drew substantial audiences. According to Goodman (1999:12), the 'underground' movement then became mainstream. The intense metaphysical, sexual and religious themes that dominated design, film and theatre in the 1960s gave way to absurd comedies and dance forms by the 1970s, as Japanese citizens became less concerned with political issues and more interested in the keyword of the decade, namely entertainment (*goraku* 娯楽). These changes were subsequently reflected in poster design, as theatre posters moved from questioning the relationship between troupes and designers to more commercial and less personal works (Goodman 1999:12).

The change in graphic design trends in the 1970s was already suggested by Tanaka in a 1968 article in *Graphis*, where he states, "There are no longer any Oriental features unique to Japan's younger generation of graphic designers. With the rapid development of transportation facilities and mass communication media, Japan's graphic designers now share new trends with their counterparts abroad". He argues that young designers resist rational design and focus too much on decoration, owing to the influences of Art Nouveau and decorative design. This indicates that

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Japanese graphic designers moved beyond imitating European and American trends and began sharing new trends with other countries.

Then, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, more artists and intellectuals redirected their emotional energies, which were initially focused on political activism, towards artistic exploration. In a time when political sovereignty was still unattainable, artists aimed to establish cultural autonomy and independence through their work (Bartal 2020:32).[36] A selection of these works that deal with themes of otherworldliness and death are discussed in the case study.

As illustrated thus far, the avant-garde ethos is multifaceted and diverse. Therefore, it is necessary to briefly consider the changes in some avant-garde movements and their styles as social and economic climates change over time. Heller (2017) argues that stylistically, the work of Constructivists resulted in an innovative design language and methodology that impacted subsequent generations of graphic and product design, typography and architecture. For instance, although Russian Constructivism ended in the 1930s when avant-garde activity became unpopular under Communism, its stylistic influence lasted for decades (Heller 2017). The widespread influence of Constructivism (even as far from Europe as Brazil) is evidenced by a sizeable portion of twenty-first century design that exudes a similar style but without the 'burden' of the struggles or suppression that the early designers experienced (Heller 2017).[37]

Similarly, as later avant-garde movements like Pop and Op-art emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, most of the works by prominent Western artists in these movements did not contain explicit social messages, according to Douglas Egbert (1967:365). Avant-garde design initially challenges traditional conventions and promotes innovative approaches but is eventually absorbed into mainstream popular culture and advertising (Heller 2008:[sp] & 2017:[sp]). Heller's argument posits that commercial entities appropriate and dilute the subversive potential of avant-garde rebellion. This borrowing of styles changes the 'once-shocking' original avant-garde work into the commonplace as it is copied and reproduced *en masse* (Heller 2008:[sp]).[38]

[36] They attempted this by sharing their work overseas through various exhibitions in the U.S. and Europe (Graham 2014:52).
[37] For example, in Brazil in the 1950s and 1960s, neo-Constructivist artists Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica's works grew in popularity (Hillegas 2019:[sp]). They share a flatness, geometry and system-based approach to art with Constructivism, but they embrace abstraction more than realism and photography (Hillegas 2019:[sp]).
[38] Heller (2017:[sp]) notes that avant-garde artists and designers in Russia, such as the Constructivists and Productivists, developed alternative design languages that shaped graphic design practices for generations to follow, referencing how 'Soviet Russian design' has become a trend that can sometimes be seen in modern-day American

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In the 1960s, Egbert (1967:365) similarly argued that the basic concept of the avant-garde was shifting and assimilating into popular culture in most Western countries. Therefore, the 'necessary' tension and contrast between the avant-garde artist and the bourgeoisie (or official establishment) was no longer an essential prerequisite of the Western avant-garde. The influence avant-garde movements and styles have on subsequent art and design movements is notable because, once their eccentricity becomes more popular and accepted, the design object is no longer avant-garde but becomes part of mainstream media through advertising, fashion or graphic design trends (Heller 2008:[sp]). Thus, avant-garde designers must navigate the tension between subversion and assimilation into mainstream media, such as advertising (Heller 2008:[sp]).

The metaphoric deaths that graphic design witnesses in each era and trend that it encounters are worth noting. When a shift occurs in an era's popular style, so does the role of the graphic designer. Heller (2008:[sp]) suggests that many designers eventually transition into mainstream advertising, incorporating alternative approaches but contributing to the integration of counterculture (and the avant-garde ethos) into commercial advertising. This phenomenon is not unique to the West. It is also observed in post-war Japanese design as the economy improved and citizens had more disposable income and selective taste in their purchasing habits (Beasley 1980:16). This is evidenced by the fact that a few years into their careers, numerous Japanese avant-garde designers were approached by commercial brands to design posters and advertisements in their styles. Some avant-garde Japanese designers also became involved in advertising during the post-war years, eventually forming the Japan Advertising Arts Club (JAAC), which was active from 1951 to 1970 (Woodham 2006:224).[39] The Club significantly promoted and improved graphic design during the Japanese economic revival of the 1950s (Woodham 2006:224).

graphic design, typography and architecture. Heller (2008:[sp]) also mentions the psychedelic movement: its initial subversive, countercultural visual language was quickly adopted and repurposed for advertising, marketing and fashion trends in the U.S. and the United Kingdom. Therefore, the avant-garde – which pushes the boundaries of convention and challenges established norms – is ultimately taken up as a mere stylistic trend by commercial interests seeking to capitalise on its appeal (Heller 2008:[sp]).

[39] Eventually, accusations of elitism and a focus on aesthetics rather than social relevance led to the club's closure in 1970 (Woodham 2006:224).

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Figure 14: Yokoo Tadanori, *Once Upon a Time, PARCO*, 1996.
Screen print, 102,7 × 72,7 cm.
M+ Collection. (M+ Hong Kong).

Similarly, in the 1990s, Yokoo was approached by PARCO,[40] a large department store chain, to design bold, collage-like graphics for its advertising posters and magazines (Sand 2013:91) (Figure 16). PARCO is well-known for its unique approach to posters and advertising and for commissioning avant-garde designers such as Yokoo. Its advertising during the late post-war period embodied the spirit of the times, from highlighting women's independence in the 1970s to individual expression in the 1980s, displaying shifts in cultural and aesthetic preferences with each decade (PARCO 2023:[sp]). Yokoo (in Tate 2015:[sp]) is quoted as saying that working commercially as a graphic and advertising designer was not his intent but was necessary for financial survival. In working for commercial brands, the line is blurred between Yokoo's participation in the Japanese avant-garde ethos and appropriating his visual style simply for marketing purposes.

[40] PARCO is referred to as a cultural catalyst by Sand (2013:99) owing to the department store's influence over youth culture by their magazines, establishment of fashion trends and popular design exhibitions that they hosted from the 1980s onwards.

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In subsequent decades, Yokoo's work influenced other advertising trends. For instance, his 'self-advertisement' suicide poster and death notice (Figure 43 in Chapter Three) show a 'MADE IN JAPAN' typographic banner, Mount Fuji, and the red, rising sun (*hinomaru)*. In the 1960s, these symbols started appearing on packaging design and in advertising and thus became associated with a Japanese graphic identity and a 'Made in Japan' philosophy (Sougiya 2017:[sp]). When Yokoo's suicide poster appeared in the JAAC magazine in 1967 with a fake obituary announcing his death, the line between risky and novel avant-garde design concepts (such as creating one's suicide poster) and advertising was further blurred (Sougiya 2017:[sp]).

2.1.3 Defining characteristics of the avant-garde ethos as a whole[41]

Prompted by Inaga's (2010) question of whether a Japanese avant-garde ethos can exist, this section argues for the existence of a Japanese avant-garde ethos by examining the progressiveness and exploratory nature of *angura* theatre and other avant-garde collectives. To evaluate the work of a Japanese avant-garde designer, one must approach the work from a perspective that goes beyond the established artistic definitions and categories of the Western avant-garde (Chong 2022:[sp]). Hence, ways to examine the Japanese avant-garde movement include considering the following: underlying political messages, a push for new styles and media (such as collages and photomontages), juxtapositions between European and Japanese references, cross-collaborative ways of workings, and often political, fantastical or grim subject matter.

Post-war avant-garde design and theatre in Japan served as a vessel for expressing political and social ideas in a subversive and often shocking manner (McArtor 2022; Boulanger 2022). Since numerous avant-garde posters included sexual, controversial and dissenting themes, a clear distinction can be drawn between post-war avant-garde design and the avant-garde design of 1920s Japanese Modernism: they are stylistically and ideologically different (Fraser, Heller & Chwast 1996:10; Isaeva 2017:16). Although the examples given of pre-war and post-war Japanese design can be considered avant-garde, this dissertation focuses specifically on the ideological, stylistic and conceptual themes of the post-war avant-garde collectives, especially given the differences in pre-war and post-war stylistic and ideological approaches to design (Fraser, Heller & Chwast 1996; Jubert 2006).

[41] In referring to the avant-garde ethos as a whole, I am referring to European and Japanese examples but with particular focus on the Japanese avant-garde.

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Finally, despite the argument that the avant-garde defies definitions (Egbert 1967; Sell 2010), in examining extant literature so far, a few distinct characteristics of the avant-garde as an ethos, regardless of context, arise. First is questioning the norm and resisting the status quo by using art as a form of protest and pushing towards philosophical or stylistic change. Another characteristic is collaboration and cross-disciplinary work, blurring the boundaries between artists, playwrights and designers. The third characteristic is a lack of a standardised, recognisable style owing to the vastness of mediums wherein the ethos was expressed. As Ory Bartal (2013:53) states, avant-garde Japanese designers often felt misunderstood when the media or design exhibitions categorised them based on their political affiliations, or when their contemporary works are associated with traditional Japanese styles and grouped into a single aesthetic style (Bartal 2013:53). This statement came to light during conversations with designers who explicitly stated that they did not align themselves with any particular style or visuals commonly associated with other designers in their field. Most stressed that their design language was personal and used a mixture of traditional, contemporary, and international influences (Bartal 2013:53).

At this point, it is necessary to analyse Japanese aesthetic principles and ideas that constitute ‘beauty’ to underpin the philosophical and aesthetic concepts that shape the development, style and trends of post-war Japanese graphic design. Hence, the following section examines Japanese aesthetics in more detail.

2.2 Japanese aesthetics

> *“If a man were never to fade away like the dews of Adashino, never to vanish like the smoke over Toribeyama, but lingered on forever in the world, how things would lose their power to move us. The most precious thing in life is its uncertainty” (Kenkō 1981:7).*

This section briefly compares Western and Japanese aesthetics first, then unpacks four Japanese aesthetics that represent aspects of perishability, otherworldliness, tragic beauty and impermanence. This section is primarily informed by the work of Japanologists[42] Richard Keene (1969; 1981), Donald Richie (2007) and Steve Odin (2016), among others.

[42] A Japaonologist is an expert in studying Japan and Japanese culture or language (Merriam-Webster [sa]:[sp]).

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Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy concerned with defining and evaluating beauty (Richi, 2007:15). In the Western tradition, aesthetic appreciation focuses on admiring an object for its own intrinsic qualities rather than merely its practical uses (Richie 2007:15). Immanuel Kant (1970) emphasises the importance of individual subjective experience in aesthetic judgement. Specifically, Kant (1987:258) asserts that beauty does not depend on an object's tangible features. Rather, it is the harmony of the object and the viewer's subjective experience that elicits feelings of satisfaction in the viewer. Beauty thus arises from within the subject through the viewer's judgemental or cognitive mechanisms, not through attributes of the object itself (Kant 1987:215).

Richie (2007:15) posits that Japanese aesthetics prioritise process over product. This is unlike Western aesthetics concerned with the final product's beauty, or the Kantian (1987) view that the viewer's subjective contemplation is crucial to an aesthetic experience. According to Michael Marra (1999:18), art represents the capacity for beauty to be embodied through physical form and expression. By making art and meditatively contemplating its process, Buddhism asserts that one can attain a state of enlightenment called *satori* (Marra 1999:18). Similarly, Minh Nguyen and Yarran Hominh (2022:2) assert that there is a shared emphasis on the work's process among all Japanese aesthetics that ascribes its meaning and relevance, in contrast with a focus on the completed work. This stems from the process of creating art being seen as an occasion for meditation whereby the aesthetic experience becomes a religious experience (Bouso 2022).

According to Moore (1976:296) and Odin (2016:20), aesthetics have been the primary focus of Japanese culture throughout its history. Moore (1976:296) maintains that Japanese aesthetics[43] are Japanese culture's most outstanding, positive characteristics. The emphasis on process over product is evident in the pathway arts, which originated in Zen Buddhist (*zen bukkyo* 禅仏教) practices (Maraldo & Maraldo 2022:8; Saito 1997:377). 'Pathway' refers to the Chinese character *do* 道, meaning a path or a way of doing something. Examples include *kadō* (the way of flowers 花道); flower arranging and *shodō* (the way of writing 書道); calligraphy (Maraldo & Maraldo 2022:8).

[43] The word corresponding to aesthetics in Japanese, *bigaku*, was only coined in 1883 after a term was needed to define what non-Japanese referred to as 'aesthetic' in the Hegelian sense of 'the science of the arts' (Richie 2007:16).

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The pathway arts practices were refined during the Heian (peace and tranquillity 平安) period (794–1185 AD), when establishing aesthetic tastes was a cultural focus (Chambers 2012:6; Graham 2014:28; Prusinski 2012:26; Saito 2022:31).[44] Odin (2016:20) maintains that Zen Buddhism is a religion of beauty; as Kūkai (774–835), the founder of the Japanese Shingon school of *mikkyō* (esoteric Buddhism 密教) , asserts that the fastest way to attain enlightenment is to meditate on beauty and art. Hence, each of the pathway arts was practised by Zen Buddhist monks as a form of discipline and mastery (Maraldo & Maraldo 2022:8). In other words, the aesthetic sensibilities of the pathway arts developed out of Zen Buddhist practices.

Zen Buddhism is not the only religion that contributed to defining and refining Japanese aesthetics. Many principles stem from Shinto beliefs (Davies & Ikeno 2002:75). Shintoism (神道 the way of the gods) particularly impacts aspects of Japanese culture and art in its appreciation of nature (Meiring 2018:65). Early twentieth century Japanese philosopher Daisetz Suzuki proposes (in Eväsoja 2007:431) “Without being religious one cannot detect and enjoy what is genuinely beautiful”. Shinto’s emphasis on nature demonstrates that aesthetics, religion and nature are inextricably linked. To present further context, the Shinto religion is not monotheistic. Instead, all elements of nature, including trees, rocks, fire, moss and rain, are imbued with spiritual meaning (Meiring 2018:65) and offer places for a *kami* (divine spirit or god 神) to dwell.[45] Eighteenth century Shinto scholar, Norinaga Motoori (in Takamizawa 1985:1) defines a *kami* as anything that is extraordinary or awe-inspiring. Shintoism thus proposes that a *kami* can be present in anything, encompassing statues, trees, and even posters.

Religious traditions such as Shintoism and Buddhism form the fundamental basis of Japanese cultural customs and values (Daisetz 1970; Prusinksi 2012). The connection between nature, aesthetics and spirituality within Japanese culture and belief systems is hereby made evident. Consequently, visual symbols derived from natural phenomena can be found across diverse Japanese artistic mediums and cultural practices. These include design motifs, fine art, architecture, traditional attire and advertising design (Eväsoja 2007). For instance, Meggs and Purvis (2016:1214) illustrate the influence of nature on Japanese aesthetics through the example of family crests, called *kamon* (Figure 17).[46] *Kamon* are simplified graphic

[44] This was a time of national peace that allowed traditional arts and culture to develop and flourish as Chinese influences declined in Japan (Saito 2022:31).
[45] Moreover, being surrounded by nature is a prerequisite for a Shinto shrine to be built (Meiring 2018:65).
[46] These are commonly applied to various objects, including clothing, personal items, flags, gates, pillars, roof tiles, armour (Dower 1990:19) and even on the Japanese passport (Encyclopaedia Japan [sa]:[sp]).

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representations of birds, flowers, plants or animals in a circle. Several post-war Japanese design artefacts are similar to the design of *kamon*, employing symmetry, allusions to nature and a strong use of line and space (Meggs & Purvis 2016:1215).

Figure 15: Examples of *kamon* crests for popular Japanese families. [Sa]. (Encyclopedia Japan).

While Lauren Prusinski (2012) argues that Shintoism's appreciation for nature establishes the groundwork for Japanese artistic traditions, others maintain Buddhism introduced aesthetics to Japan. Daisetz (1970), in particular, is credited as the philosopher most instrumental in introducing Japanese aesthetics to the Western academic world, specifically through a Buddhist viewpoint. Eväsoja (2007) elucidates the interplay between Shintoism and Buddhism, proposing that their influence permeates an appreciation for nature across every facet of Japanese culture and daily life. This includes poetry, painting, traditional arts, textiles, cuisine, architecture, gardening and enjoyment of seasonal changes (Eväsoja 2007:430).

Eväsoja (2007:430) emphasises that Buddhist ideals sought to refine Shinto beliefs, which later influenced a love of nature. However, distinguishing definitively between Shintoism and Buddhism's aesthetic sensitivities is beyond the scope of this paper. Both religions shape Japanese societal values and are commonly practised together. For instance, worshipping at either a Shinto or Buddhist temple is acceptable (Canter 2011:1). The religions are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary (Canter 2011:1). Moreover, both Shintoism and Buddhism value beauty, simplicity and nature, thereby influencing the aesthetic principles that define

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beauty within Japanese culture.

Four Japanese aesthetics that elicit ideas of death, transience, emptiness, formless beauty, tragic beauty and mystery are now introduced. As previously noted in the summary of chapters, these are *ma*, *mono no aware*, *mujō* and *yugen.* The following section unpacks their connections to religion, otherworldliness, death and nature. This section intends to provide the basis for analysing how these aesthetics underpin notions of otherworldliness and death in the poster samples of the case study.

2.2.1 Ma*: ambiguity and charged emptiness*

Ma is an aesthetic quality filled with spiritual meaning. It refers to ambiguity (Nguyen 2010), both in its numerous definitions and in its character. The literature describes *ma* as the interval between spatial or temporal objects and events (Pilgrim 1986:255), negative space or spiritually-charged emptiness (Blaine 2015; Hara 2007) and the beauty of formlessness (Prusinski 2012:25). Sugiura (in Nguyen 2010:1) explains that the mystery and ambiguity of *ma* are experienced in a work of art or design that is deliberately vague and allows for multiple interpretations. He asserts that, although *ma* is a widely understood concept among the Japanese, it remains one that cannot be fully rationalised, especially in Western thought (Sugiura in Nguyen 2010:72). Part of the allure of *ma* thus lies in the challenge of synthesising it into a singular definition (Prusinski 2012).

According to Prusinski (2012:29), *ma* is a deliberate lack of explicit beauty; therefore, its aesthetic value is only appreciated when the viewer carefully considers all environmental and spatial factors around an object. Furthermore, *ma* refers to the interval, pause or emptiness between structural elements, which allows for a deeper appreciation of the relationships between objects, space and time (Prusinski 2012:37).

Japanese aesthetics are challenging to define using a Western viewpoint of aesthetics. As such, *ma* must be examined more deeply through its historical, artistic and religious origins (Gould 2022:58). For example, *ma* is often present in aspects of nature and art: it is a pause in space and time; an opening in a forest; an empty tea bowl ready to be filled; a strategic pause in music and the essence of a room ready to be filled (Blaine 2015:4). One Buddhist *sutra* (cited in Blaine 2015:7) illustrates this well: “Form is emptiness; emptiness is the form”.

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Designer Kenya Hara establishes in *Designing design* (2007:20) that *ma* is negative space, the relationship between an object and its surrounding emptiness. Although Hara (2007:202) describes *ma* as negative space, Nguyen (2010) is more concerned with the ambiguity that this space creates. In the case of poster design, one may deduce that a design with plenty of white space elicits a sense of *ma*, allowing for individual interpretation and a sense of spiritual silence and contemplation (Nguyen 2010:1). In this way, *ma* can be evoked using negative space in graphic design (particularly in the work of Sugiura, according to Nguyen [2010:1]). Negative space is essential for the balance of a picture (Blaine 2015:9). Through the lack of details, the viewer can escape and engage in a work without overly intellectualising it. Therefore, in a design or artwork, the empty space showing *ma* is equally essential as positive space or visible elements.

Richard Pilgrim (1986) defines *ma* through a religious lens, referring to it as a religio-aesthetic paradigm. According to Pilgrim (1986:257) and Prusinski (2012:27), Japanese religions have influenced the meanings of *ma* significantly. Firstly, the indigenous religion of Shinto's influence on aesthetic appreciation is necessary to consider. The concept of *ma* is reflected in the design of sacred spaces within Shinto shrines, where the interplay between the natural or physical environment and the spiritual realm creates a sense of betweenness and sacredness (Pilgrim 1986:262). Accordingly, the idea of *ma* in Shinto aesthetics allows for a profound connection with the natural world and a sense of harmony with the environment (Andrijauskas 2011:201; Prusinski 2012:27), especially regarding the importance of natural elements in Shinto shrines. According to Pilgrim (1986:267) *ma* embodies a relational sensitivity beyond physical space and time. *Ma* offers a profound aesthetic experience that transcends conventional categorisations because it is intertwined with both religious and aesthetic sensibilities (Pilgrim 1986:257).

Similarly, Zen Buddhism's emphasis on mindfulness and simplicity influenced Japanese aesthetics by highlighting the importance of silence, negative space and the significance of what is left unsaid or undone, reflecting the essence of *ma* (Prusinski 2012:10). Blaine (2015:9) also examines *ma* as a Buddhist concept for emptiness that has been employed in Japanese aesthetics. For instance, the role of simplicity and emptiness in Buddhism-influenced Japanese *sumi-e* ink paintings that only use a few swift, spontaneous strokes (Blaine 2015:3). She posits that these paintings are influenced by the philosophy of nothingness (*mujō*). *Sumi-e* paintings are simple in their use of minimal strokes and colour. In Japanese art, simplicity is attained

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through the strategic use of negative space (*ma)* (Du 2016:[sp]). Simplicity, however, is not the opposite of complexity in Japan (Avella 2004:9). Simplicity connotes purity, trust and nature, owing to the influence of Zen Buddhism's value of simplicity and austerity over excessive detail (Cavallaro 2013:46; Flowers 2008:27).

Though Blaine (2015) asserts that Zen Buddhism is the originator of *ma,* Shintoism also alludes to the principle of *ma* regarding the above-mentioned belief that natural spaces are areas for a *kami* to dwell (Meiring 2018:117). This is exemplified in the design of Shinto shrines, characterised by plenty of empty space (*ma*) and often surrounded by nature (Meiring 2018:117).[47] Positioning a shrine in nature is essential to provide natural opportunities for *ma* to exist and for a *kami* to dwell (Meiring 2018:117).

Nature is not the only condition for *ma* to exist, particularly according to Nguyen (2010) and Sugiura (in Nguyen 2010). Negative space or 'charged emptiness' offers a space for a *kami* to fill (Blaine 2015). Therefore, *ma* ascribes a spiritual meaning to emptiness (Nguyen 2010:1). As *ma* contributes to the spiritualisation of negative space in art and architecture, the artistic experience can become spiritual. In this way, the physical becomes the spiritual, allowing the otherworldly to be expressed in things of this world (Kisho 1979 in Nguyen 2010:1).

Finally, it is necessary to examine Japanese culture and language to appreciate why the ambiguity of *ma* is valued. Ambiguity is valued because being direct and forward is considered impolite in Japanese culture. This is rooted in cultural beliefs prioritising empathy and harmony over direct verbal communication (Mičkova 2003:137). Japanese people may exhibit ambiguity in their responses to preserve harmony, avoid embarrassment or show respect (Pizziconi 2008). In the Japanese language, *honne* refers to one's real opinions and sincere feelings, whereas the opposite, *tatemae*, is a public front, adopted to not disrupt harmony and offend others (Davies & Ikeno 2002:104; Matsumoto 1988:18; Mičkova 2003:137). Silence is often valued more than words. The proverb *iwanu ga hana* (silence is better than speech) demonstrates how quietness, whether through space or silence, is highly valued in Japanese language and culture (Pizziconi 2009:223).

[47] Most of Japan's 80,000 shrines are found in mountains, caverns, trees, rocks, rivers or seashores (Ono in Meiring 2018:117).

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The Japanese language displays ambiguity through the omission of sentence subjects and lack of distinction between binaries such as singular/plural or definite/indefinite objects (Keene 1969:296). In examining manifestations of *ma*, Pilgrim (1986:260) refers to the pauses that characterise spoken Japanese. Rather than follow a logical and linear narrative order, Japanese contains gaps and pauses[48] that create distinct spaces for spiritual or emotional energy (Takehiko in Pilgrim 1986:260). *Ma* is thus an aesthetic embodied in religious, linguistic, natural, architectural, cultural and artistic viewpoints.

2.2.2 Mujō *and* mono no aware*: impermanence and tragic beauty*

Impermanence is the most prominent tenet of Zen Buddhism. The concept of *mujō* is preached to advocate for detachment from one's body and earthly desires (Cavallaro 2013:87; Ohnuki-Tierney 2002:340).[49] Odin (2016:354) expands the meaning of *mujō* to transience and evanescence. According to Odin (2016:355), Japanese Buddhist aestheticism examines the concept of beauty in impermanence and positions perishability as a necessary condition for beauty to exist. *Mujō* refers predominantly to life's fleeting, perishable and impermanent nature. Odin (2016:20) asserts that a precondition to enjoy beauty is found in perishability. Therefore, the more temporary an object is, the more beautiful it becomes. *Mujō* is thus especially visible in the passing of seasons[50] (Doebler 2022:42; Odin 2016:20). The appreciation and value of the impermanence of an object can also be expressed through the term 'tragic beauty' (Odin 2016:126).

A Japanese term that perhaps best encapsulates *mujō* is *mono no aware* (the pathos of things) (Chambers 2012; Keene 1969 & 1981; Miller 2022; Prusinski 2012; Richie 2007; Saito 1997). Garcia Chambers (2012:3) defines *mono no aware* as "beauty tinged with sadness … evoked by recognising the frail and fleeting existence of things". A classic example of *mono no aware* is the Japanese cherry blossom, which perishes at the height of its beauty and only lasts for a fleeting time – thus, a fleeting beauty (Parkes & Loughnane 2023:1). The ephemerality associated with *mujō* and *mono no aware* is valued by the Japanese as the ultimate poignant

[48] An example is starting a sentence like *"haru wa…"* which can be translated to "As for/in terms of spring…" with a pause. This suggests that the speaker will talk about spring shortly but allows time for the listener to first ponder spring itself in the silence that *ma* provides (Pilgrim 1986:260 with translations by the author).
[49] Buddhist *mujō* is defined as impermanence or nothingness (Keene 1981 & 1969; Odin 2016:77; Richie 2007:72).
[50] There are 72 micro seasons acknowledged in Japan that take into consideration small acts of nature, such as fish emerging from ice in spring or rain moistening soil for the first time (Nippon.com 2015:[sp]).

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beauty (Chambers 2012:10; Graham 2014:94; Miller 2022:65). It is particularly the *condition* of perishability that is appreciated in Japanese culture as beautiful (Odin 2016:20).

Whereas Western aesthetics value permanence, the appreciation of *mujō* and *mono no aware*'s impermanence is a uniquely Japanese sensibility. According to Plato, ultimate beauty resides in the timelessness of eternal concepts. In Japanese culture, in contrast, beauty is most visible in transient objects that change over time (Odin 2016:355). Saito Yuriko (2007:184) agrees, describing the beauty and allure of ephemeral objects as the aestheticisation of transience.

2.2.3 Yugen*: profound mystery*

Yugen is an aesthetic that, through its expression of profound mystery (Ritchie 2007:52), builds a connection with otherworldliness and death. *Yugen* combines the characters of *yu* 幽 (dim or subtle) with *gen* 玄 (mystery or depth), implying a hidden beauty waiting to be discovered (Yanagi 2019:45).[51] Much like other Japanese aesthetics, *yugen* defies a simple English translation owing to its subtle and elusive nature. Andrew Tsubaki (1971:56) posits that finding a comparison of *yugen* in the Western world is difficult as the quality is rarely created or appreciated by Westerners. Nonetheless, a few scholars such as Eväsoja (2007), Odin (2016), Ritchie (2007), contribute to describing the principle of *yugen*. For Odin (2016:9), *yugen* is the shadow of tragic beauty and perishability. This suggests a close relationship between *yugen*, *mono no aware* and *mujō*. Eväsoja (2007:432) calls *yugen* mystery and depth, whereas Ritchie (2007:52) expands this definition to 'profound' mystery and depth. Perhaps the most specific definition is Odin's (2016:16) combination of the above, in that *yugen* is the profound mystery that is *specifically* evoked through darkness and shadows.

Yugen can manifest in several ways, as its myriad of definitions imply. Specific phenomena that act as 'portals' to *yugen* are provided by the aesthetics philosopher Zeami Motokiyo (1363–1443), who is also the creator of *noh* theatre. Zeami finds *yugen* in observing the sun going down behind a hill of flowers, wandering through a forest without intention to return and subtle shadows in bamboo forests (Zeami in Waley 1988:22). From these examples, it is evident that *yugen* is not only evoked through darkness and shadows, but also through experiences in nature.

[51] *Yugen* comes from the Chinese *youxuan* 優鉉, which means something that is too deep to see or understand (Richie 2007:54).

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Both *yugen* and *mono no aware* encompass a Buddhist appreciation for the profound and mysterious beauty of nature, albeit in slightly diverse ways (Graham 2014:78). According to Richie (2007:19), simplicity is a prerequisite for taste and beauty. The more simple or subtle a suggestion is, the more tasteful a work of art or expression of nature is. *Yugen* suggests an agreement that beauty or nature cannot be presented through with literal descriptions: a subtle suggestion is enough (Richie 2007:19). Hence, in Japanese aesthetic appreciation, there is a preference for simplicity and elusiveness over explicitness and completion.

Yugen, as seen in the literature reviewed so far, is associated with a sense of profundity (Eväsoja 2007; Odin 2016; Ritchie 2007). However, *yugen* is not only experienced in nature or *noh* theatre. Other examples are *haiku* poetry and fine art. *Haiku* achieves *yugen* through minimalist and suggestive language that prompts readers to explore meanings beyond the literal (Gilbert & Yoneoka 2000).[52] *Yugen* thus explains the subtle profundity of things that *haiku* poems only suggest between the lines. Furthermore, *sumi-e* ink paintings within fine art often use negative space to communicate a vague, obscure suggestion instead of depicting all the details of the object. As for woodblock printing, the use of shadow and colour may indicate *yugen*. Meggs and Purvis's (2016:567) description of Hiroshige's woodblock print (Figure 18) indicates an appreciation of *yugen*: Hiroshige captured subtle nuances of light and atmosphere, depicting the 'poetic splendour' of nature and relating it to the lives of ordinary citizens.

Although Meggs and Purvis (2016:567) do not use the term *yugen* directly, they imply it through the use of light and seasonal elements to create *yugen*-like shadows and darkness. Like the work of Hiroshige (Figure 18), many Japanese woodblock prints also depict landscapes. Aaron Murphy (2015:36) mentions that when a landscape is flattened into something two-dimensional, it can represent the sublime. This is because the depicted landscape is a liminal space: it is not technically a real landscape but a conveyed sense of a landscape. The sublime is elicited when the viewer is challenged to consider the landscape's grandeur (Murphy 2015:36).

[52] A *haiku* is restricted to three lines, 17 syllables and no rhyming (Gilbert & Yoneoka 2000:9).

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Figure 16: Utagawa Hiroshige, *Sudden Evening Shower on the Great Bridge near Atake*, 1857.
Colour woodcut on paper, 22,6 x 33,8 cm.
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation).

Murphy (2015:47) argues that adopting a Japanese viewpoint is necessary to experience the sublime and the beautiful together. Through the aesthetic principle of *yugen*, the sublime (in depictions of nature, shadows, suggestions, dreams or darkness) becomes beautiful. This is in contrast to the Western view that the beautiful and the sublime are opposites: appreciation cannot coincide with terror (Monk 1960). Bradley Murray (2015:45) asserts that it is possible to combine the beautiful and the sublime as long as one replaces the Western definition of beauty – that which is flawless and ideal – with one of imperfect perfection. Similarly, philosophy professor Dwight Goodyear (2012) likens *yugen* and the sublime by stating that beauty, mystery and *yugen* blend with the sublime to create a feeling of infinite magnitude or power that transcends our ability to understand the object of beauty in full. While a pleasant experience, the sublimity elicited by *yugen* may border on something terrifying because of its scale and profundity, as seen in Kant's (1987:292) sublime (Goodyear 2012:[sp]).

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Kant's (1987:255) idea of the mathematical sublime[53] can also evoke a similar sense of profundity. However, it is important to note that profundity is not inherent in the natural object itself, but rather in the mind's experience of comprehending its vastness. According to Kant, the sublime reveals the greatness of our rational minds, specifically our capacity for moral judgement (Kant 1987:246). The sublime appreciation is not experienced through the beauty or terror of the object itself. Rather, it is through a rational experience of observing a vast object or phenomenon such as a starry sky or landscape or contemplating the idea of nothingness and total darkness (akin to *mujō*) (Sanderson 2023:[sp]).

Furthermore, *yugen* points to a subjective, experiential dimension of beauty that goes beyond the mere objective qualities of an object (Tanizaki 1933:18). Therefore, an object is deemed sublime because it reveals the infinity of our reason (Sanderson 2023:[sp]). According to Kant (1987:129), we do not experience awe at the natural object itself, but rather at our mind's ability to comprehend and judge it as simultaneously beautiful and terrifying (amazement bordering on terror). Still, a feeling of profundity is felt through the sublime experience (Sanderson (2023:[sp]). Kant (1987:255) describes this feeling of the sublime as an aesthetic experience which combines delight, dread and horror. Moreover, even if one can just conceive thoughts about the infinite, it is indicative of the extrasensory perception and power of the mind.

Eväsoja (2007:427; 432) and Odin's (2016) definitions allude to *yugen*'s relation to the sublime by referring to the sense of profundity and mystery that *yugen* elicits. A key aspect of *yugen* is its emphasis on the unspoken, the unseen and the intangible (Odin 2016:337). Similarly, the sublime involves the inadequacy of the imagination to fully comprehend the magnitude and power of the object, suggesting the limits of human understanding. According to Richie (2007:54), *yugen* is an 'awareness of the universe' that evokes complex emotions that cannot be expressed through language. This definition is much like the sublime, elicited when one examines something massive and threatening beyond comprehension, such as the infinite blackness of space (Murphy 2015:47). *Yugen* has to do with the vastness and depth of the world we live in (*konoyo* この世) as experienced through our imagination but not with some other world (*anoyo* 彼の世). (Parkes & Loughnane 2023). As such, it is important not to misunderstand *yugen,* nor the sublime, as being otherworldly. As indicated above, for Kant (1987:270), the

[53] The mathematical sublime, simply put, is concerned with our perpetual engagement with vast objects (Murphy 2015:47). It is an encounter with something incalculable, beyond comprehension (Kant 1987).

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feeling of sublimity arises from the inadequacy of imagination to grasp the vastness of the world rather than from an otherworldly or supernatural source.

However, despite their similarities, *yugen* is different from the sublime as it requires the cultivation of *hininjō*, a detachment from subjective feelings (Odin 2016:127). Zen master Nishida Kitarō (1970) emphasises the importance of pure aesthetic feeling without rational thought in the appreciation of beauty in Japan. Japanese culture is founded upon pure aesthetic sensibility rather than rationalism, moralism or ritualism (Nishida 1970:274). Following Nishida, Odin (2016:235) posits that *yugen* is an expression of pure emotional experience that elicits a deep sense of mystery. This is key to noticing the difference between *yugen* and the sublime, as rational judgement and thought are prerequisites for the sublime (Kant 1987:106), but *yugen* can be felt without rationality.

Elsewhere, the connection between otherworldliness and *yugen* is not so clear. Whereas Parkes and Loughnane's (2015:[sp]) argument is that *yugen* is not otherworldly, Eväsoja (2007:431) observes otherworldliness in *yugen* that is expressed in *noh* plays. *Yugen* comes forth from the suggestiveness and obscurity of *noh* theatre's minimal dialogue and stylised movements, which are 'otherworldly' in how they stand out from our everyday routine and interactions, allowing for an escape from reality (Eväsoja 2007:431). It is unclear if Eväsoja (2007) considers *yugen* as otherworldly, or as something that only alludes to otherworldliness (particularly in *noh* theatre where the viewer must fill in the blanks when dialogue or movement is scarce). Nevertheless, otherworldliness provides an escape from reality and is the basis on which Eväsoja (2007:434) claims that fantasy and fictive reality are crucial aspects of Japanese aesthetic appreciation.

Murphy (2015:32) maintains that *yugen* is obscurity and a profound sense of mystery in the universe. Although not otherworldly in itself, it may allude to the 'other world' through death dreams. He suggests a parallel between death dreams and uncanny "*yugen*-like moments" from Japanese aesthetics (Murphy 2015:32). This view introduces a connection between *yugen* and death, which Japanese scholars and philosophers have not yet examined in the literature. Dreams, other worlds in themselves, are glimpses into the world of the dead and the world of the spirits as they come from a higher presence or deity (Murphy 2015:32). Consequently, dreams evoke feelings of *yugen*. Carl Jung's (2012:74) assertion that dreams at the end of one's life frequently contain death symbolism supports Murphy's (2015) exploration of death

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dreams. From a Japanese perspective, dreams about the dead often contain deep meanings and are also represented in literature and art (Araki 2021:18).[54]

By the above examples, it is argued that *yugen* is multi-contextual, appearing in nature, theatre, fine art, dreams and design. Accordingly, Chapter Four continues with a study of *yugen* by analysing how *yugen* is manifested in poster designs. To close this section, a quote from Tanizaki's *In praise of shadows* (1933:30) beautifully captures the essence of *yugen* and its beauty: "We find beauty not in the thing itself but in the patterns of shadows, the light and the darkness, that one thing against another creates". Therefore, Tanizaki (1933:30) proposes that if shadows did not exist, neither would beauty.

The literature discussed in this section illustrates how religion and beauty are interconnected in Japanese aesthetic appreciation. The Japanese aesthetic principles of *ma*, *mujō*, *mono no aware* and *yugen* emphasise impermanence and perishability. Table 1 summarises four Japanese aesthetics associated with perishability, impermanence, tragic beauty and death. In turn, these core values form the basis for the Japanese appreciation of otherworldliness and death, which is discussed in the following chapter. Consequently, the next chapter explores the concept of death as an aesthetic experience, a marker of beauty and an essential element of religion. The religious underpinnings of these aesthetics, specifically Buddhism and Shintoism, highlight the interconnectedness of aesthetics, religion and spirituality in Japanese culture.

	Aesthetic principle	**Religious origins**	**Basic definition**
1	*Ma* 間	Shintoism	Emptiness, formless beauty, white space, emptiness, ambiguity (Hara 2007; Nguyen 2010; Prusinski 2012;)
2	*Mujō* 無常	Buddhism, Hinduism (referred to as *anitya*)[55]	Nothingness (Odin 2016:77; Richie 2007). Being aware of nothingness leads to the appreciation of *mono no aware*.
3	*Mono no aware* もののあはれ	Buddhism and Shintoism	Impermanence, beauty tinged with sadness, tragic beauty, fleeting beauty and an awareness of impermanence

[54] Araki (2021:18) introduces a classical Japanese fairytale picture book called *eboshi orizōshi* (烏帽子折草子) wherein ghosts in dreams are shown as vague *yugen*-like gradients, occupying the same space as the sleeper. In one image, the protagonist Ushikawa meets the spirits of his father and son in a dream wherein he tells them that he feels like he is worshipping his father in the underworld (Kyoto University Rare Materials Digital Archive 2001:[sp]).
[55] The Sanskrit or Pali word for *mujō* is *anitya*, used interchangeably with *mujō* in Japanese Zen Buddhism (Odin 2016).

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			(Keene 1969 & 1981; Miller 2022; Odin 2016; Prusinski 2012; Richie 2007; Saito 1997).
4	*Yugen* 幽玄	Buddhism and Daoism	Instances of obscurity, darkness, shadows, suggestion or mystery and a profound awareness of the universe that evoke deep feelings.

Table 1: A non-exhaustive list of Japanese aesthetic principles and their definitions

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CHAPTER THREE: DEATH AND OTHERWORLDLINESS: A JAPANESE PERSPECTIVE

"We find beauty not in the thing itself but in the pattern of shadows,
the light and the darkness" (Tanizaki 1933)

The first section of this chapter examines the relationship between death, aesthetics and beauty in Japan by way of a literature review. First, an overview of Japanese views on death is given through religious and cultural lenses (Long 2001; Parkes 1998). Following an examination of the Japanese viewpoints on death and suicide, this literature review further discusses the romanticisation and sexualisation of death with a focus on the work and suicide of Mishima Yukio (Andersen 1987; Nemoto 1993). Sources consulted for this literature review include scholars of Japanese studies, philosophy and religion (Hearn 1899; Meiring 2018; Moore 1976; Odin 2007) and scholars of thanatology (Becker 1990; Fuse 1979; Long 2001; Miller 2022). The section concludes by exploring the concept of nihilism and its relationship with death from Western and Japanese perspectives, introducing the act of suicide as a form of active nihilism (Olivier 2007).

The second section of this chapter presents various aspects of otherworldliness based on literature discussing aura (Benjamin 1970), nostalgia and *furusato* (Chong 2012:38; Hayashi 2012a, 2012b, 2014:199, 2018:196; Robertson 1988), the uncanny (Freud 1919), fictional worlds (Evasöja 2017) and Japanese aesthetics and religious views on otherworldliness (Iwasaka & Toelken 1994; Miller 2022:68; Yamamoto 2008:163). The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings on otherworldliness and death and presents their similarities in the form of a theoretical framework for poster analyses in Chapter Four.

3.1 Death

In Japanese culture, a deeply rooted fascination with death is evidenced in numerous traditions, rituals, folklore and spiritual beliefs. For instance, ghosts,[1] monsters and death are culturally meaningful and well-received by Japanese audiences because these concepts are frequently depicted in art, literature and theatre (Iwasaka & Toelken 1994:13). Aaron Murphy (2015:103)

[1] Ghosts are an established trope in the Japanese arts and are represented not as 'spectral' apparitions but as embodied, hairy monsters (Bernard 2019:113), more similar to demons.

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contends that Japanese aesthetics are 'obsessed' with death, and as such, death can be an object of beauty. Arguing that Japanese aesthetics are 'obsessed' with death is a bold assertion. Yet, Japanese thanatology reveals that death is a significant aspect of culture, media, aesthetics and religion. Iwasaka & Toelken (1994) examine the array of Japanese funeral rites, literature and other death-related customs while Odin (2007) considers the relationships between death, beauty and aesthetics. Furthermore, Lafcadio Hearn (1899) explores aspects of the otherworld, poetry about death, and ghosts in his memoir *In ghostly Japan.* This chapter examines the literature that establishes the importance and aestheticisation of death in a Japanese context. The aim is to underscore how death is expressed in post-war posters for the next chapter's case study.

3.1.1 Thanatological standpoints in the West and Japan

Palliative care doctor William Breitbart (2017:277) describes death as "an annihilation of existence (of mind, spirit and body) ... a disconnection from all life experience and loved ones, and the cessation of consciousness is at the essence of death terror". In this sense, the idea of death provokes fear. Philosopher Graham Parkes (1998:76) examines how people in the West may come to terms with this fear. The Western approach to death involves a sense of 'practising dying' to overcome the fear of death. Breitbart (2017:277) illustrates this by pointing to a desire to escape death, or at the very least, conquer the fear of death through cryonics, artificial organs, immunotherapy and cell therapy. By engaging with these practices, one can metaphorically achieve what Parkes (1998:75) calls a 'Pyrrhic victory over death'. Attempting to slow down the ageing process or using cryonics perpetuates the notion that death can be delayed or even evaded. However, Parkes (1998:76) argues that this becomes problematic as individuals may become so preoccupied with prolonging life that they forget to genuinely enjoy life.

On the contrary, from a Japanese perspective, death is not seen as something that can be postponed or conquered. Parkes (1998:76) provides a contrasting view on death: in many Asian traditions, death complements life rather than existing separately from it. Buddhist and Daoist philosophers consider death to be an ongoing aspect of life. Similarly, Mara Miller (2022:68) maintains that from a Japanese perspective, the 'land of the dead' is seen as part of the world of the living – one that is invisible to the eye but spiritually reachable. The philosopher Dōgen (1200-1253) maintains that birth and death are recurring patterns that influence every aspect of

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existence (in Parkes 1998:76). In a Japanese context, life is a cyclical process defined by birth and death, also known as *enso* (円相) (Parkes 1998:76; Small 2018:[sp]).[2] Philosopher Nishida Kitarō (1965:11) recognises a paradox in living: to live is to be aware of one's death. As a continuous cycle of creation and dissolution, *enso* is described by Nishida as a 'continuity of discontinuity'. In simpler terms, living genuinely involves confronting and accepting death, and adopting the existential awareness that our lives are fleeting and perishable (in Odin 2016:334–336).

Within broader Japanese cultural beliefs, death is often associated with peace and transcendence. In this way, death which may be regarded as an aesthetic experience (Odin 2016:354).[3] Odin (2016) presents a link between the awareness of death and the aesthetics of *mono no aware* (tragic beauty or the pathos of things) and *mujō* (impermanence). According to Odin (2016:334), the Zen Buddhist awareness of life's temporality relates to these aesthetic values in that, firstly, death is seen as a fundamental aspect of the fleeting nature of life. Then, akin to Keene's (1981) position, the perishability of life is an essential condition for beauty. Moreover, *mono no aware* denotes a sympathy with ephemeral phenomena, including life and death (Minamoto in Odin 2016:369). It is important to recognise that the aesthetic underpinnings of *mono no aware* and *mujō* affect various cultural practices. For instance, Japanese homes often use rustic elements such as wood and paper over stone, indicating an aesthetic preference for items that can show wear and tear, fading or ageing (Keene 1981:24; Odin 2016:371).

Similarly, Parkes (1998:76) posits that *mujō* is felt when one understands life's transience and accepts that human existence is temporary. *Mujō* is a highly valued ideal of Buddhist origin, celebrated for embodying ephemeral beauty (Saito 2022:37). Zen Buddhism teaches that to come to terms with the *mujō* of life, one must not cling to life but appreciate death as inevitable. This echoes Breitbart's (2017:277) description of death as an 'annihilation of existence' in that death brings forth a strong realisation of the temporality and finiteness of life. Considering the similarities between *mujō* and *mono no aware*, it can be said that an experience of *mono no aware* results from the transience and impermanence of *mujō* (Odin 2016; Richie 2007:72). In

[2] *Enso* (which means 'circle') is a Zen concept that represents the universe, emptiness, enlightenment and the cyclical nature of life. It is often encountered in Japanese calligraphy and art (Enso 2024:[sp]).
[3] At this point, it is necessary to mention that Buddhist beliefs underpin many societal values and beliefs in Japan. While it may be true that some Japanese people hold Buddhist beliefs and participate in Buddhist practices, even though they may not be practicing Buddhists, this is an oversimplification as the relationship between religion and culture is more nuanced (Earhart 2004).

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essence, both *mono no aware* and *mujō* emphasise a sensitivity to the transience of life and beauty, with death being an integral part of this ephemerality.

There is thus a distinction between a Western perspective on death as separate from life, and Daoist or Buddhist beliefs that emphasise the interdependence of life and death as parts of a whole (Parkes 2011:76). Moreover, in Japan, death is not perceived as something to be feared but as a natural part of existence. In contrast to the Western view, death is something of intrinsic aesthetic value. This holds true for Japanese cultural artefacts, as some works of art, design, literature and theatre are imbued with symbolism and stories of death. Even as early as the 1700s, when *ukiyo-e* prints were made, death was celebrated through folklore and media (Graham 2014; Hearn 1899; Iwasaka & Toelkein 1994).

A further example of positive depictions of death is the way in which suicide, euthanasia and the Buddhist idea of paradise are inextricably linked (Long 2001:280). For instance, euthanasia in Japanese is *anarakushi* (安楽死): each character means peace, comfort and death, respectively. Comfort and peace refer to the Buddhist idea of paradise, a place of happiness without agony or pain (Kato in Long 2001:280). Death is thus not necessarily viewed negatively in Japan, nor is ceasing to exist a terror, as Breitbart (2017:277) notes.

3.1.2 Death practices in Japan

Numerous Japanese beliefs about the afterlife are related to interactions with spirits. Therefore, spirits and the afterlife are culturally and historically significant in Japan (Iwasaka & Toelken 1994). An example is the value placed on venerating and maintaining connections with ancestors (Iwasaka & Toelken 1994; Meiring 2018:68). Connections to ancestors are forged through events like *obon*, one of the largest festivals celebrated across Japan annually. The festival welcomes the spirits of ancestors and casts out demons (Iwasaka & Toelken 1994:28). It is a time of heightened spiritual activity during which many Japanese people are superstitious and careful not to offend the dead (Fuse 1980:57). The prevalence of this festival creates space for non-taboo, open conversations about death within communities and families.

According to a study by Susan Long (2001:283), even those who believe that there is no afterlife still claim to communicate with their ancestors. This demonstrates that religious beliefs about ancestor veneration and the existence of an afterlife maintain an influence on Japanese

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society. The afterlife, therefore, still holds significant value within daily life in Japan. Anything that disrupts social order and harmony (*wa* 和) between ancestors and the living is considered evil and sinful (Ono 1962:[sp]). As such, the proper postmortem rituals are essential. Maintaining the correct traditions during funeral rites ensures a peaceful transition of the deceased's soul to the afterlife (Iwasaka & Toelken 1994; Meiring 2018:72).

For example, before a Buddhist funeral or a cremation, it is tradition that the family spends an entire night with the body in a wake called *tsuya* (通夜) (Iwasaka & Toelken 1994:22). On the seventh day following death (*shonanoka* 初七日), a ritual is conducted where *sutras* (Buddhist scriptures) are recited, following the belief that the individual's soul returns to their place of origin. If this ritual is not performed, the deceased's spirit is believed to wander endlessly and cause trouble for the living (Kim 2012:246). On the forty-ninth day (*shijū-kunichi* 四十九日*)*, the soul of the dead supposedly begins a new life in *anoyo* (the 'other world'*)* or in *isekai* (異世界), a different or 'unsusual' world (Iwasaka & Toelken 1994:24, translations by author). At this point, the soul transitions from 'this world' (*konoyo*) to *anoyo*.[4] These temporal and spatial distinctions encompass not only the dichotomy between life and death but also the interplay between the realm of the living and the realm of the dead, evoking an atmosphere of transcendence and temporality, that is, *mujō*. Death and otherworldliness in the context of Zen Buddhism are therefore inextricably linked.

In contrast, Shintoism holds a unique perspective on death. Death is considered a curse and 'pollution' in the Shinto faith, owing to the supposed expulsion of negative energy when a physical body disintegrates (Meiring 2018:72; Okuyama 2013:14; Yamakage 2006:161). In fact, the pollution of death is so significant that Shinto priests conduct purification rituals to avoid the contamination and defilement of death (Norbeck 1952:270; Okuyama 2013:14). Shinto shrines are intended to be clean and pure places where the divine spirit (*kami* 神) dwells (Yamakage 2006:160). Shinto priests therefore rarely perform funeral ceremonies (Okuyama 2013:12).

Despite Japan's predominantly homogeneous society, the contrasting perspectives of Zen Buddhism and Shintoism on death highlight the ambivalence surrounding death practices and funeral rituals. As already established, Shintoism views death as impure (Meiring 2017),

[4] The Japanese language distinguishes between this world (*konoyo*) and that world (*anoyo*) linguistically. 'This world' uses the *ko-* prefix, indicating closeness, whereas the 'other world' uses the *a-* prefix, signifying a distance between the speaker and the object – something out of reach (translation by author).

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whereas some sects of Zen Buddhism place value on it as part of life (Parkes 2011:76; Small 2018:[sp]). Thus, one cannot make an absolute statement that necessarily encompasses what the entirety of Japanese society – and, by implication, Japanese designers – believe about death. However, in order to underpin the most widely accepted Japanese perspectives on death, it is essential to analyse both religious beliefs in this regard.

3.1.3 Romanticisation and eroticisation of death

As has been observed so far, the relationship between religion and death in Japan is of undeniable significance in academic discourse (Fuse 1980; Hearn 1899; Long 2001; Louw 2022; Meiring 2018; Miller 2022; Nanakai 2009; Norbeck 1952; Richie 2007; Yamikage 2006). Numerous scholars agree that responses towards suicide in Japan are highly ambivalent with both positive and negative views (Carrim 2014; Chozick 2007; Louw 2022; Picone 2012). Diving deeper, the aestheticisation and romanticisation of death – specifically suicide – is also a frequently discussed topic (Amussen 2020; Carrim 2014; Chozick 2007; Louw 2022; Miller 2022; Panzer 2022; Picone 2012). DJ Louw (2022) argues that death can be an aesthetic experience and that it elicits both positive and negative spiritual and aesthetic qualities. This is because traditional Japanese aesthetics and Zen Buddhist principles emphasise the value of transience and impermanence (*mujō*), suggesting that the frailty and temporality (*mono no aware*) of life are aesthetic values in themselves (Richie 2007:72).

Unlike Murphy (2015:42), who positions most Japanese aesthetics as appreciative of (or, in his words, 'obsessed' with) death, Odin (2016:129) maintains that death can only be appreciated as an aesthetic experience through the act of detachment. Indeed, both scholars agree that Japanese aesthetics appreciate death and impermanence. Still, the difference in views lies in whether it comes from a place of active 'obsession' (Murphy 2015:42) or one of calm detachment (Odin 2016:129). Only if death is viewed from the disinterested, unbiased and detached perspective of *hininjō* (the calm, serene detachment from emotions) can it be transformed into a dreamlike, elegant aesthetic and a romanticised experience (Odin 2016:129). However, this section establishes that detachment (*hininjō*) is not a prerequisite for aesthetically appreciating or romanticising death, which is examined later with the example of Mishima.

There is a contrast between the perception of suicide as noble and honourable when carried out historically by *samurai* or soldiers (Amussen 2020; Andersen 1987; Picone 2012) and the rise in

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suicide owing to contemporary Japanese societal pressures (Inoue *et al*. 2011:33; Long 2001; Picone 2012). Three historical practices of suicide have been aestheticised in Japanese culture: *seppuku* (切腹 cut stomach)*, kamikaze* (神風 wind of god) and *shinju* (心中 centre of the heart) (Fuse 1980; Hearn 1899; Mori 2017; Nanakai 2009; Shields 2012).

Seppuku is regarded as honourable and noble when done as a sign of self-sacrifice after the death of one's master or a lost battle (Fuse 1980:58). The *samurai* warrior code (called *Bushido)*[5] emphasises loyalty, honour and accountability for one's actions. As such, disembowelling oneself is considered a noble act when a warrior is faced with defeat or dishonour (Seward 1968). *Seppuku* has thus been romanticised in Japanese art and media for centuries, especially in film and theatre productions (which is discussed in detail in the next chapter). The motivations behind such portrayals can vary from the commemoration of the deceased and aestheticisation of death to a way of pacifying the angry spirits of the dead (Picone 2012:396). Despite most narratives viewing *seppuku* as a noble act, scholars like Mary Picone (2012:396) reiterate that it was sometimes forced upon a warrior or as a result of moral, financial or social pressure. *Seppuku* was outlawed during the Edo period (1603-1868) and is no longer practised. Still, rare instances of *seppuku* have occurred since as a means of political protest or national loyalty, such as that of General Nogizaka[6] and Mishima.

Another example of a historically noble suicide act is that of *kamikaze* soldiers during World War II. *Kamikaze* refers to the action of a fighter pilot deliberately crashing his plane into an enemy target, in the process killing himself (Mori 2017:1). The pilot was then posthumously deified and elevated to the status of a *kami* for his dedication to Japan (Shields 2012:195). Around 2000 *kamikaze* pilots and other 'martyrs' have been deified at the Shinto Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo.[7]

[5] *Bushido* is the seventeenth-century *samurai* warrior code of conduct, valuing loyalty, honour, respect, courage and patriotism. *Bushido* principles were associated with Japan's nationalistic mindset during World War II (Szczepanski 2019:[sp]).
[6] After a Pyrrhic victory at Port Arthur, General Nogizaka (Nogi) Maresuke requested to commit *seppuku* but was denied the request as it was outlawed. However, when Emperor Meiji died in 1912, General Nogi and his wife were able to fulfil his wish and end their lives by *seppuku* as an act of loyalty to the Emperor (Live Japan 2019:[sp]). The residence of General Nogi, who led multiple battles in the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars, was converted into what is now Nogizaka shrine in Roppongi, Tokyo. Having lived in Tokyo, I have become familiar with the temple, and experienced it as a peaceful place of Shinto worship, yet with a connection to the act of *seppuku* and military patriotism.
[7] Near the end of World War II, it was common for pilots to say they will "meet again at Yasukuni" (Yoshinobu 2013:[sp]). It is interesting to note that Yasukuni Shrine used to be called Tokyo Shrine for the Invocation of the Dead, indicating another connection between death, life, the Shinto religion and suicide (Shields 2012:190). Whether or not *kamikaze* soldiers ought to be enshrined remains a highly debated, controversial topic in global politics (Shields 2012:190). Regardless of the Yasukuni Shrine controversy, this study simply notes *kamikaze* as a suicide method which contributes to a holistic understanding death in a Japanese context.

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This demonstrates the importance that *Bushido* values place on sacrificing oneself for one's country. In this manner, *kamikaze* suicides – and by implication, death and war – are romanticised and enshrined by deifying those involved (Fallows 2014:[sp]).

A third Japanese suicide practice, *shinju* (double suicide; unity of hearts or lovers' suicide), is often romanticised in literature and visual media (Hearn 1899:194; Nanakai 2009:168). A typical Buddhist proverb is often uttered upon separation and heartbreak: *zensei no yakusoku-goto* (destined from a former birth), relates to the act of wanting to commit *shinju* with someone (Hearn 1899:193). *Shinju* is carried out as a suicide pact by two people bound by love in the hope that their love will continue in the otherworld.[8]

An example of the aestheticisation of *shinju* is seen in Shinoda Masahiro's film *Double Suicide* (1969). In the film, a merchant and his prostitute lover decide to commit *shinju* together. After killing his lover by her request, he then hangs himself in the hopes that their forbidden love will be secured and continue into the *anoyo* (Nakamura *et al.* 1995:17).[9] This murder–suicide is not viewed as a crime but as a reflection of the protagonist's deep desire to be with his lover, even in the afterlife. As the case study examines further, the filmic and aesthetic qualities of the film romanticise *shinju* and encourage a detachment from the reality and horror of suicide (Cornyetz 2001). Film and theatre are ideal visual mediums to evoke empathy and profound feelings of inspiration or knowledge of the suffering of others, as viewers are invited to imagine themselves in the position of those committing *shinju*.

It is important to note that the viewpoints above do not suggest that all narratives about suicide and death are aestheticised (Picone 2012). Barbara Picone (2012:393) suggests that, regardless of how prevalent death is in Japanese religion, culture, aesthetics and folklore, suicide remains a topic that evokes a variety of reactions. The acceptance of or resistance to suicide varies according to regions and temples (Picone 2012:393). While suicide is occasionally aestheticised and proliferated in Japanese media (Iwasaka & Toelken 1994:13), it remains an ambivalent topic owing to the varied responses it generates based on the context surrounding its occurrence. For instance, after World War II, *shinju* (double suicides) and suicide became a significant health concern in Japan, especially among the elderly as a result

[8] Hearn (1899:194) explains that a double suicide is often regarded as the result of cruelty or the breaking of a marriage promise in a previous life.
[9] The narrative's conception in 1791 demonstrates the longstanding history of *shinju*. The protagonist's act of hanging himself on a *torii* gate introduces a religious dimension, further intertwining religion and suicide.

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of career burnout (Inoue *et al.* 2011:33). One of the most pressing health concerns in post-bubble[10] Japan is suicide as a response to depression and societal pressure (Ozawa de Silva 2021:1).[11]

Another focus of this dissertation is on the aestheticisation of suicide in Japanese posters rather than its implications or prevention. Charles Hartshorne's 1987 essay, "The aesthetic meaning of death*"* (in Odin 2016:352), promotes the idea that death can have aesthetic value, indicating that it has the potential to be a veritable source of beauty. He argues that death can only be understood in correlation to life, which is itself an aesthetic creation and set of experiences comparable to a work of art, but is finite (Hartshorne 1987 in Odin 2016:352). As an aesthetic, the value of death then lies in its finitude and limitation (Odin 2016:352). Akin to the discussion on *mono no aware* in Chapter Two, Hartshorne (1987 in Odin 2016:352) argues that the beauty of an artwork is defined by its finite nature, and beauty cannot exist without finitude and mortality.

A profound romanticisation and eroticisation of suicide is embodied in the life, work and controversial suicide of the post-war author Mishima. Throughout his life, he regarded death and suicide as fascinating and even erotic (Frenţiu 2010:80). His literary works, particularly *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (1956), the *Sea of Fertility* tetralogy (1969-1971) and *Life for Sale* (1968), often include narratives of death and suicide which are highly aestheticised. Nina Andersen (1987:30) describes Mishima's works as expressions of his fascination with beauty in death; violence; and the fight between death and life. His narratives both romanticise death as aesthetic and use it for political commentary (Meyers 2010:[sp]).

His ideology suggests that one can only truly experience the fullness of an object's beauty after its destruction (Carrim 2014:1). For Mishima, beauty is synonymous with the act of destruction, while death is a manifestation of beauty (Amussen 2020:[sp]). In *Sun and Steel* (1968), Mishima presents communal suicide as a form of 'beauty', perceived by men in a highly erotic manner (Chozick 2007:[sp]). This implies that the concept of 'beauty', at least according to Mishima, is associated with homoerotic death, because the characters in his novel derive sensual

[10] This refers to the 'bubble economy', a time in which Japan experienced rapid economic growth in the late 1970s, only to 'pop' like a bubble and crash in 1992 (White 2022:20).
[11] In an attempt to reduce suicides, the Japanese government implemented prevention strategies such as dispatching volunteers, posting signs with hotline numbers and increasing police presence at suicide hotspots such as Aokigahara ('suicide forest') (Nedelman 2018:[sp]). In 2020, Japan held the highest suicide rate of all G7 developed nations (WHO 2020:[sp]).

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gratification from death and martyrdom (Chozick 2007:[sp]). Then, in his acclaimed novel *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (1956), Kyoto's golden temple, *Kinkakuji* is violently set ablaze by a worker after he becomes obsessed with the temple during World War II. The protagonist is so enamoured of the temple's beauty that he believes his only outlet of expression is through destroying it. Moreover, the actions of the protagonist in *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (1956) reflect Mishima's own desire to annihilate anything beautiful, ultimately fulfilled in his arguably individualistic act of *seppuku* (Napier 1989).

Miller (2022:71) argues the aestheticisation of suicide may suggest subtler motivations at play, such as influencing societal values or emotions. Mishima was passionately in favour of restoring pre-war values and the role of the deified Emperor, which, unfortunately for Mishima, did not come to fruition (Frenţiu 2010:80). He committed *seppuku* as a means of reasserting the lost identity and honour of imperial Japan when, in November 1970, he disembowelled himself and had himself beheaded in front of a crowd after he and his militia, the Spear Society, failed a coup attempt to seize national power (Hodge 2021:[sp]; Meyers 2010:[sp]).[12] His *seppuku* was a result of his ongoing pessimism about Japan's new materialism, pacifism, democracy, consumerism, and a loss of national harmony post-World War II. In Mishima's view, these post-war attitudes undermined traditional Japanese spirituality and morality (Frenţiu 2010).

While his suicide was politically motivated, it was his constant examination of death and beauty throughout his personal and literary life that still makes him a controversial yet respected acclaimed figure in the Japanese arts (Chozick 2007:[sp]). Ultimately, for virile Mishima, the concept of *seppuku* extends beyond notions of suicide and self-destruction (Amussen 2020:[sp]; Chozick 2007:[sp]) and becomes an aesthetic act of beauty, fully materialised through destruction and eroticism.

Jasmine Amussen (2020:[sp]) describes his suicide as 'pornographic', reflecting the intention that Mishima had to romanticise his death and the homoerotic desire to die young and preserve his youth. Andersen (1987:30) agrees that Mishima's fascination with death is connected to sexuality. For him, death, suicide, blood and destruction constitute beauty, not sadomasochism. Damian Flanagan (2014:13) further argues that the 'Mishima incident', as his suicide came to be

[12] It was Mishima's dream to restore the deification and power of the Emperor and, with his militia, overthrow the pacifist, democratic government (Frenţiu 2010:69). His suicide is the last case of *seppuku* being performed in Japan and the first time someone committed ritual suicide since World War II (Hodge 2021:[sp]).

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referred to, was not simply a political protest but also a vain manner in which Mishima could finally live out his longtime fantasy and romanticisation of suicide. Since childhood, Mishima indulged in erotic fantasies of pain and death, particularly the heroic deaths of soldiers. For Flanagan (2014), Mishima's *seppuku* therefore served as a political facade for his 'sadomasochistic' desires to have a euphoric end, echoing Andersen's (1987:30) suggestion of the link between sexuality and death in Mishima's mind.

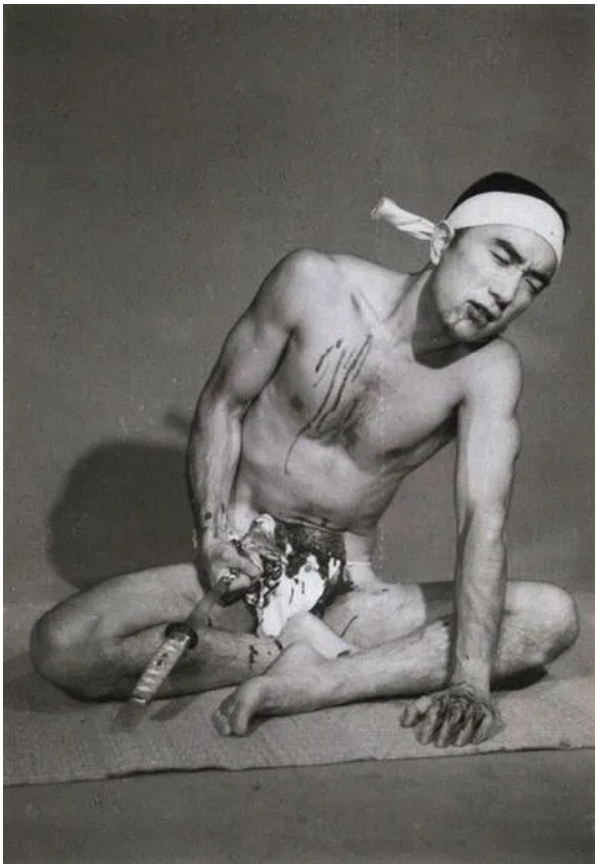

Figure 17: Shinoyama Kinshin, *Portrait of Mishima acting out* seppuku, 1969.
Black and white photograph, size unknown.
Gift of the photographer.
(Timenote).

Figure 18: Yokoo Tadanori, *Ballad Dedicated to an Amputated Little Finger*, 1967.
Silkscreen, 102,9 x 72,4cm.
Museum of Modern Art, New York.
(MoMA).

Mishima's sentiments were expressed in numerous ways. For instance, years before committing suicide, intending to explore expressions of honour and beauty in his death, he staged his *seppuku* in a series of black and white portraits (taken by Shinoyama Kinshin; Figure 19)

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(Shambu 2008:[sp]).[13] Bodily mutilation, often documented photographically, was Mishima's way of engaging with the idea of death without yet killing himself**.**

Mishima's ideologies did not remain within his literary circles or militia, however. He was close friends with Yokoo and eventually became a muse in Yokoo's work, having featured in numerous posters. Mishima had a considerable influence on Yokoo's posters, which depicted a fusion of the real and the otherworldly and illustrated the surreal, metaphorical and erotic narratives in Mishima's works (Friedman-Benda 2010:[sp]; Mount & Kurabayashi 1994). Another example of the aestheticisation of bodily destruction can be seen in Yokoo's poster in Figure 41, dedicated to Mishima. This work depicts Mishima's portrait beneath a severed pinkie finger[14] with the text (behind Mishima) reading: 'let's die' (translation by author). Chapter Four critically analyses this poster's aestheticisation of death in more detail.

It may be argued that in light of Mishima and Yokoo's works, a link exists between death and eroticism. The aestheticisation of death shifts the idea of death from merely that which comes after life towards something of beauty and erotic value. This may indicate why some Japanese avant-garde posters that show themes of death also heavily depict nudity and sexuality (discussed in detail in the next chapter).

Some post-war designers and playwrights used representations of sex to dissent from the post-war Japanese government. For scholars such as David Goodman (1999) and Vera Mackie (2006), death, protest and sexuality in post-war Japanese creative circles (theatre troupes, authors and designers) are strong, provocative themes.[15] These themes were not merely presented in *angura* posters because the plots of some avant-garde performances and films were filled with sexual scenes and discussions. Instead, post-war designers used these posters to express their creative liberties by opposing post-war ideas through explicit sexual imagery, even if the production did not have anything to do with sex.

On this note, it is necessary to mention that, unlike in the West, sexual imagery has not always been taboo in Japanese art. Erotic *shunga* prints and books have held popularity since the

[13] Mishima preoccupation with the idea of his own death led him to conceptualise his own book, co-authored with Yokoo, titled *Yukio Mishima: the death of a man*, years before his suicide in 1970 (032c 2020:[sp]). The book was only published 49 years later (Amussen 2020:[sp]).
[14] Members of the Japanese *yakuza* (a mafia-like organised crime group) remove the top of their pinkie finger (*yubitsume*) as retribution for a serious offence (Bosmia *et al.* 2014).
[15] These are exemplified in the literary works of Mishima or the posters of Yokoo.

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Heian period (794 AD-1185). Initially called *warai-e* ('funny images'), the prints were considered entertaining or even forms of fine art (Ishigami & Buckland 2013:40). Despite being banned[16] in 1872 with Japan seeking to be seen as a 'civilised' country by the West, *shunga* were still valued as family heirlooms and even included in some bridal trousseaus. Eventually, they were disseminated as fine art and exhibited overseas, now forming part of *Japonisme* collections at European and American museums (Ishigami & Buckland 2013:53).

Whereas *shunga* are arguably still considered valued works of Japanese art, it is the context and manner in which *angura* posters portrayed nudity that was shocking and taboo. For instance, Yokoo's *The Rose Coloured Dance* (Figure 35 in the case study) depicts two women, one with fluorescent green fluid spurting from her breast, directly resisting the formality and class of Japanese beauty standards (Goodman 1999:49; Mackie 2006:99). By using erotic elements in their films and posters, Japanese avant-garde creatives explicitly confronted societal norms and post-war censorship, contributing to the countercultural movement aimed at societal transformation (Andrews 2016:255-258).

Furthermore, the shock value of sex as a theme in *angura* may be seen as a form of nihilism. As Japan succumbed to American influence, materialism and capitalism, traditional Japanese values no longer held as much sway as before (Andrews 2016:14-15). In the early post-war years, some designers found little reason to try to retain traditional Japanese values under a government that they felt had 'failed' them (through food shortages, corruption, shunning of disabled war veterans and lack of job opportunities) (Andrews 2016:11-14). As a result, members of Japanese avant-garde circles may have used explicit discussions and depictions of nudity and sex as a way to cope with the shock and 'meaninglessness' of post-war society.

In an older example of death in visual media, death prints (*shini-e* 死絵) suggest a commercialisation and aestheticisation of death and suicide (Yamada 2012:106) (Figure 21). *Shini-e* prints date back to the 1850s and depict a deceased actor, musician or *ukiyo-e* artist (Fiorillo 1999:[sp]; Yamada 2012:106).[17] These prints ensure that the individual is recognised as

[16] In 1872, as the Meiji period brought forth the rejection of earlier 'uncivilised' customs, the Ordinance Relating to Public Morals (*ishiki kara jōrei*) banned the sale of *shunga* and targeted customs such as public nudity and mixed bathing (Ishigami & Buckland 2013:39). Alongside explicit photographs and any book containing sexual imagery, *shunga* were classified as 'excessively scandalous' and 'obscene' (Ishigami & Buckland 2013:40).
[17] …or soon-to-be deceased, if a suicide is planned or if death is imminent because of illness.

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an important member of society even after their passing (Yamada 2012:106).[18] In death prints, individuals often wear death dresses or ceremonial attire associated with *seppuku* (Fiorillo 1999:[sp]). The prints also sometimes include the deceased's posthumous Buddhist name and an occasional death poem written by them or a family member alluding to the reason for their suicide (Fiorillo 1999:[sp]). By illustrating the individual's memorial stone alongside them, the prints serve as a bridge between life and death. In other words, the viewer is left to contemplate mortality and in somewhat of an iconoclastic manner, commemorate and venerate the individual. Thus, their lives and deaths are aestheticised and commercialised through the death prints.

Figure 19: Artist unknown, *death print of actor Tamashichi*, 1860.
Woodblock print, size unknown.
(Viewing Japanese Prints).

In the context of a culture that historically celebrated death and suicide in media such as death prints and poems, suicides and death in Japanese art are not taboos. On the contrary, they contribute to the rich visual narrative of death in Japanese culture spanning centuries. It is thus

[18] Sometimes death prints were issued as early as three to four days before the suicide of the individual. Death prints were often in high demand, depending on the person's popularity. In 1854, the suicide of Ichikawa Danjuro VIII resulted in the production of 200 *shini-e* prints, a record high at the time (Fiorillo 1999:[sp]). Actor Tamashichi, who performed onstage until minutes before his death despite illness, was so popular that his *shini-e* was reproduced in a cheaper format and made available to more fans to capitalise on sales (Fiorillo 1999:[sp]).

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unsurprising that some post-war Japanese designers also employed themes of suicide in their work, as evidenced in Chapter Four's case study.

3.1.4 Death and nihilism

It is worthwhile examining the relationship between death and nihilism in the sense that the death and destruction of war may result in some individuals developing a sense of pessimism or nihilism. Nihilism involves rejecting traditional values and moral principles, suggesting that life is meaningless (Hatab 1987:91). This view, which Nietzsche (1968:9) terms as 'radical nihilism' entails that there are no objective truths and that nothing has intrinsic value. Furthermore, radical nihilism must be reacted to or acted upon as a response to the loss of a value system (Nietzsche 1968:9).[19] Such reactions are classified as either 'passive' or 'active' nihilism (Nietzsche in Olivier 2007:58).

Jean Starobinski (1985:242) proposes the concept of 'posthumous pleasure', in which (while one is still alive), detachment from the fear of death allows one to "see human life and this world in a new light". This 'posthumous pleasure' is similar to that of active nihilism in a number of ways. In contrast to radical, pessimistic nihilism, 'posthumous pleasure' suggests that even in light of the inevitability of death, life is *not* meaningless. This attitude of melancholic satisfaction is similar to a Zen view where the acceptance of death allows for a deeper enjoyment of life (Parkes 1998:9). It may be argued that mortality then ought not to lead to nihilistic hopelessness: for instance, as Parkes & Loughnane (2023) suggest, contemplating death should prompt one to engage in a meaningful life by living in the moment, engaging in creativity, and expressing gratitude for the future.

Some scholars argue that there was a general embracing of nihilism in post-war Japan owing to widespread national changes and difficulties under the American occupation (Au 2016:29; Liu 2022:3; Olivier 2007:55). For instance, faced with the atomic bombings and deaths during World War II, Japanese citizens had to come to terms with unprecedented destruction. As result of governmental restructuring under Allied rule, a shift from a formerly imperialist, militarist power

[19] Two Japanese value systems that crumbled at the end of World War II were, firstly, the Japanese wartime dream of establishing an empire called the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' (Shamoon 2012:147) and, secondly, the nationalistic and patriotic *bushido* (the *samurai* warrior's way) values embodied by Japanese soldiers during the War (Olivier 2007:57; Ohnuki-Tierney 2002:41).

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to pacifism[20] took place in the early post-war years (Adriasola 2015:115; Andrews 2016:27; Comotti 2017:259; Orr 2001:104).[21] Both Murakami (2005) and Daniel White (2022:78, 209) refer to the dismantling of Japanese imperialism under Allied occupation as a de-masculisation or 'castration' of the nation. As a result, the shift towards democracy, military pacifism and modernisation contributed to a perceived loss of national identity, which created a general sense of pessimism or nihilistic 'post-war lethargy' (Nishitani 1990:3).

This pessimism resulted in a sense of nihilism, which emerged during a post-war shift away from traditional values (such as self-sustaining, imperialist, *samurai* and *Bushido* values). In addition, as Japan became more exposed to Western influences under the Allied occupation, this gradual transformation of traditional values gave rise to consumerism and individualism (as opposed to conventional Japanese collectivism) (Bartal 2020:37-38; Olivier 2007:55).

Olivier (2007:58) puts forth the argument that nihilism in post-war Japan was *not* existential or passive. Instead, it was a form of 'active nihilism' – coined by Nietzsche (1968:17) – as a result of various positive activities pursued in the aftermath of the war. Some maintain that the difference between Western and Japanese nihilism is found in the actions it inspires in society (Olivier 2007; Orr 2001). Olivier (2007:58) further distinguishes Japanese nihilism from its Western version, in that some Japanese citizens embraced active nihilism by endeavouring to establish new morals and values (as a reaction to those from the war that were deemed inhumane). For instance, following Japan's surrender and having been 'deceived' by their wartime leaders, Japanese artists voiced their anti-war sentiments through visual media (Orr 202:110). These creatives actively participated in new forms of meaning-making, which was evidenced by their rejection of authority and emphasis on individual action, personal responsibility and determination (Olivier 2007:58).

To illustrate the prevalence of an active nihilistic mindset in Japan, philosopher Nishitani Keiji (1990) argues for the 'self-overcoming of nihilism'. This suggests that, instead of accepting the pessimistic view that life is meaningless, one can practice active nihilism to overcome pessimism. Active nihilism, in this view, is a form of meaning-making and creativity in the face of

[20] Pacifism is evidenced in the numerous anti-nuclear and anti-war movements that arose in post-war Japan (such as the *Hiroshima Appeals* campaign).
[21] The U.S. government forced Japan to denounce its right to its own military forever, which was deemed exceptionally 'foolish' by Mishima (Flanagan 2014:8). More changes that resulted from Japan's defeat included land reforms, the construction of American military bases and widespread food shortages (Dower 2000).

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what would otherwise be pessimistic or passive nihilism. As Nishitani (1990:173) puts it it is "the attempt to come to grips with nihilism in the form of a personal experiment" – that is, 'self-overcoming'. This is exemplified in post-war Japan by productive activities such as offering medical assistance to war victims, distributing food, authoring books reflecting on the war[22] or striving for excellence as a virtue in the arts and education (Olivier 2007:58).

Therefore, active nihilism is a form of courage, opposite to 'cowardly' passive nihilism (Olivier 2007:58). In this way, the proactive approach to cultural evolution in post-war Japan (that is amid the social, cultural and political changes of the time) contrasts with the more reactive nihilism seen in Western societies that grappled with the loss of traditional belief systems (Olivier 2007:59). Creating art, writing books, participating in social services or striving for excellence is, according to Olivier (2007:58-59), the best ways that post-war Japanese creatives confronted the bleak reality of a 'nullified' world – passivity is seen as the wrong response.

Yet, despite the arguable positivity that active nihilism may bring, James Orr (2001:39,43,110,133) maintains that, for some, a "victimhood" became ingrained precisely through the abovementioned (active nihilistic) activities, evidenced by political rhetoric and propaganda in post-war Japanese design, literature, theatre and film productions.[23]

Nihilism, death and detachment remained prevalent themes of avant-garde Japanese war literature.[24] Some authors came to terms with the violence and effects of the War by writing extensively about sadness, grief, fear, confusion and death.[25] Literary themes included brutality, dehumanisation, executions, reflections on morality and resilience in the face of war (Keene 1978:28, 8, 45). This resulted in some adopting a "victim consciousness", according to Orr (2001).[26] Writer Dazai Osamu, for instance, became internationally recognised for his tragic

[22] Authors affected by the aftermath of the War established a new genre called atomic bomb literature (Comotti 2017:256). Subsequently, many books on the topic were converted into theatre productions. Examples are critically discussed in Chapter Four.
[23] A renowned film noted for its anti-war theme is Kinoshita Keisuke's *Twenty-four eyes* (1954), in which a young teacher experiences the rise and fall of Japanese nationalism (Bock 2008:[sp]).
[24] Avant-garde Japanese literature include romantic and nihilistic works published after World War II by authors such as Mishima and Dazai Osamu (Shunsuke (2020:[sp]). Mentions of Japanese post-war literature in this section serve to build a broader understanding of the cultural context of media in post-war Japan, aiming to present the influences and themes that surrounded the avant-garde graphic design community at the time.
[25] The works of Dazai, Umezaki Haruo, Ooka Shohei and Mishima, among others, contain strong themes of disillusionment and loss of purpose after Japan's defeat (Keene 1978:100). Kojima Nobuo's book *The American school* deals with the American occupation through the eyes of a group of Japanese English teachers.
[26] However, Keene (1978:101) argues that Japanese people could not justifiably adopt a victim mentality after the War, in light of its own war crimes.

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literary depictions of post-atomic bomb Japan. Keene (1978:100) calls Dazai a 'spokesperson of a generation' in response to how influential Dazai's narratives of death and national nihilism were post-1945.[27] Dower (2000:178), on the other hand, is highly critical of Dazai's book *The setting sun* (1947), equating the author's nihilism and despondency with a 'victim mentality', stating that "Whatever he may have lacked, Dazai was not lacking in a self-pity that resonated strongly with the deep strain of victim consciousness then pervading society".[28]

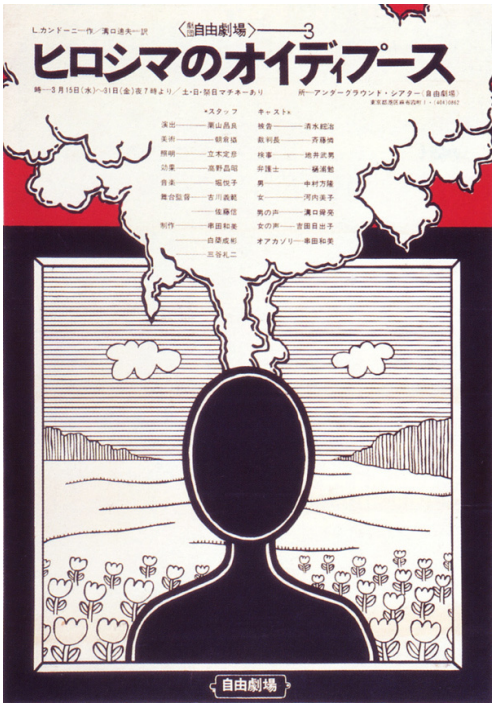

Figure 20: Kushida Mitsuhiro, *Oedipus at Hiroshima*, 1967.
77,2 x 54,6 cm. Courtesy of Kishida Mitsuhiro.
(50watts).

Returning to World War II history in Japanese post-war arts, in *angura* theatre too, the threat of nuclear war and Hiroshima's legacy was front of mind (Goodman 1999:36). The poster for Kuriyama Masayoshi's play, *Oedipus at Hiroshima* (1969) (Figure 22) takes a literal approach in illustrating this. It depicts a mushroom cloud coming from an anonymous victim's head, bringing the massive scale of the attack on numerous people to the mind of the individual.

[27] In Dazai's *Winter's fireworks* (1946), he demonstrates a nationalistic sentiment, voiced by a female character: "We say defeated, defeated, but I don't think that's so. We've been ruined. Destroyed. [From one corner to the other, the country of Japan is being occupied, and every single one of us is a captive.] Rural people who don't find this shameful are fools…" (quoted in Dower 2000:180). The square brackets indicate a portion that was later censored.
[28] At the same time, however, Dazai found beauty in decay and believed that despair could be overcome with love. A year later in 1958, Dazai and his mistress committed alcohol-induced *shinju* by drowning in a canal. In this way, he immortalised himself as a tragic and complex symbol of unstable romanticism, degeneracy and nihilism of the early postwar years (Dower 2000:176).

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Furthermore, regarding active nihilism and victim consciousness, Paolo Stellino (2013) posits that suicide is an act of passive nihilism stemming from an existentialist viewpoint and a potential result of people finding no meaning in life. However, it can be argued that Mishima's *seppuku* is also a form of active nihilism, albeit from a different ideological standpoint than the above-mentioned examples of Japanese active nihilism. Whereas some designers accepted individualistic viewpoints that became prevalent in the post-war context, Mishima, on the other hand, still held to traditional *samurai* and *Bushido* values. As evidenced previously, since *seppuku* is widely viewed as a dignified historical practice, the Japanese view of suicide can arguably be considered an act of bravery over cowardice – and therefore, an act of active nihilism (Olivier 2007:58; Nietzsche 1968:17). Following this logic, Mishima's politically motivated *seppuku* is a display of active nihilism, since it was, according to Mishima, a reaction to Japan's new politics under American occupation and a loss of Japan's '*samurai* spirit'[29] (Flanagan 2014:21). The end of Mishima's manifesto exemplifies his personal sense of active nihilism "let us restore *Nippon* [Japan] to its true state and let us die" (in Stokes 1999:28). In this way, the fact that he is willing to die for his value. Yet, his suicide may also be considered a result of a "victim consciousness": it is precisely because the Emperor had to denounce his deity during the occupation that Mishima planned his *coup* and wrote his manifesto: Mishima considered Japan akin to a victim that required restoration to its former glory (Flanagan 2014:15).

However, not all media or personal activities were pessimistic and nihilistic in the face of post-war adversity. For example, the photobook, *Living Hiroshima* (Figure 23), published in 1947 by the Hiroshima Tourism Board (Figure 23), includes 378 photographs that capture the destruction and reconstruction of Hiroshima after the atomic bomb. Books such as this aim to discourage future war by showing graphic scenes of destruction but also reflect resilience (Shunsuke 2020:[sp]).

[29] Mishima is quoted (in Stokes 1999:249) as saying "My ideal is … to revive the tradition of the *samurai*, through my literature and my action".

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Figure 21: Hiroshima Tourism Board, *Living Hiroshima photo book*, 1947.
Hiroshima Tourism Board
(Synaesthetic Mag).

Published in English for international audiences, books like *Living Hiroshima* intend to promote peace rather than victim identity (Shunsuke 2020:[sp]). In Orr's (2001) view, publications like this would not be representative of Japan's nihilism and victim identity but may instead be regarded as a product of active nihilism (Olivier 2007:58). Moreover, *Living Hiroshima* also serves as a means of coming to terms with the changing narrative of the nation described earlier (Shunsukue 2020:[sp]).

From the 1960s, Japan's design and art scene experienced a revolution owing to a maturing of a long period of learning from and imitating Western art and design (Shunsuke (2020:[sp]). This revolution occurred simultaneously with the rise of Japanese avant-garde movements, which brought forth numerous new, bold posters. A notable indicator of the avant-garde ethos in post-war design is the intertwining of complex elements such as technology, philosophy and culture against the backdrop of the post-war years, with the 1960s being the point at which these elements intersected (Shunsuke 2020:[sp]). Through examples like the above, it may be argued that the effects of World War II profoundly influenced the subject matter of literature, whether in a positively intended manner (*Living Hiroshima)* or as a result of disillusionment and nihilism.[30]

[30] For example, in the work of Dazai, Umezaki, Ooka and Mishima.

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To summarise the discussion in this section, the diagram below (Figure 24) illustrates the argument that designers' reactions to changes in post-war by means of poster design is a form of active nihilism. In this sense, their act of creating radical and subversive designs was a way of coming to terms with and combatting the struggles they faced during the post-war years. It may be argued that active nihilism was manifested in their posters through representations of death and sex as a form of protest and desire for another world. To further support this argument, the next section introduces and expands on the concept of otherworldliness.

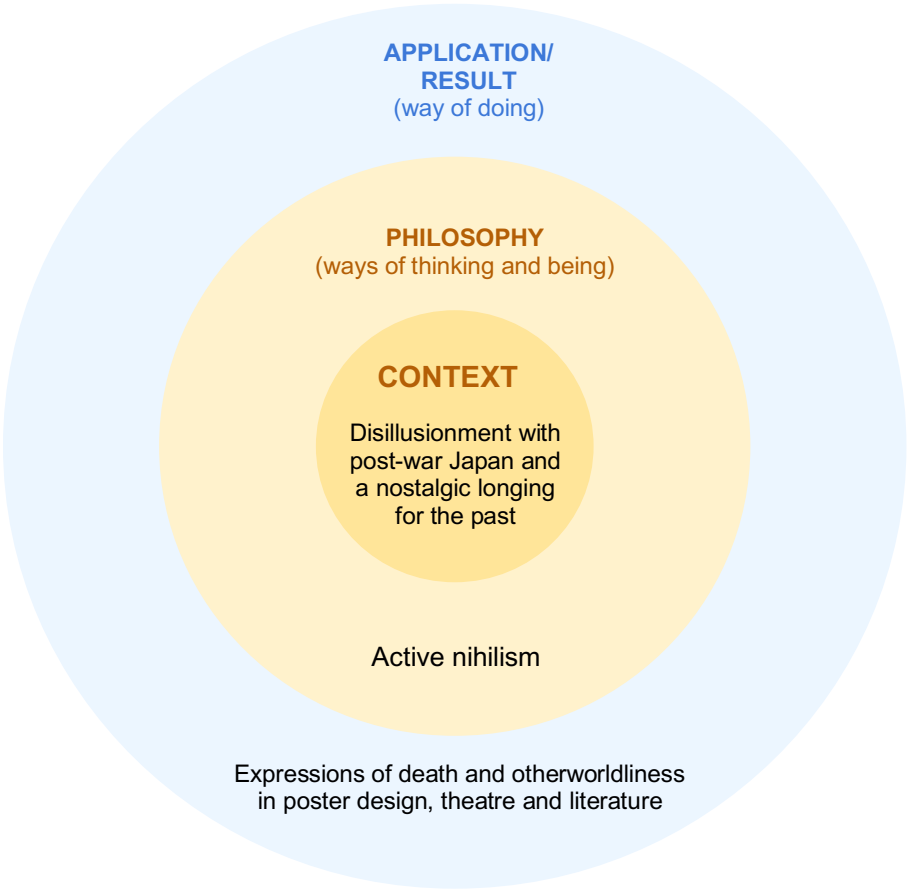

Figure 22: Diagram illustrating the links between disillusionment, nostalgia and active nihilism. Figure by the author.

3.2 Otherworldliness

Walter Kaufmann (1978:359) describes otherworldliness as the result of disenchantment with the world. As a result of Japan's World War II defeat, many Japanese citizens experienced a sense of disillusionment and disenchantment with the new democratic government under

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American occupation (Andrews 2016:258). They felt unsatisfied with initial problems such as food shortages and illness. Kaufmann refers to Kant's 1781 book, *Critique of pure reason* (Bernard 2020) and posits that Kant views the otherworld as a place where one can find what does not exist in this world, namely freedom, immortality, virtue or happiness and God (Kaufmann 1978:359). Otherworldliness in this context refers to desirable ideals that can only be found outside daily experiences (Kaufmann 1978:360). Kaufmann (1978:360) also suggests that a person who is dissatisfied with the world and himself would be better off thinking about God and another world. In this way, mentally transporting oneself to another world can ease the burdens of the present, akin to how Japanese designers created 'other worlds' in their work to come to terms with the economic, financial and identity shifts of the post-war years (Hayashi 2012).

Moreover, as mentioned earlier spirits (*kami*) and the otherworld (*anoyo*) are prevalent topics in Zen Buddhism and Shintoism. For instance, the 'land of the dead' is believed to be invisible to the eye yet spiritually reachable upon death or communication with the dead (Miller 2022:68). Despite Kaufmann's (1978) position that the otherworld is a desirable place outside of this life, it does not necessarily mean that followers of Zen Buddhism or Shintoism are dissatisfied with themselves or the world. It highlights that death and the otherworld are prevalent in Buddhist and Shinto beliefs and are inherent to Japanese cultural practices (Canter 2011:2; Miller 2017:75).

Therefore, otherworldliness is a multifaceted term, depending on the context to which it is applied. Hence, for the purposes of this dissertation and the theoretical framework, the concept of otherworldliness follows extant literature and is organised into the following four subcategories:

- Fantasy and fictional worlds
- Nostalgia and *furusato* (故郷)
- The uncanny
- Benjamin's (1970 [1936]) aura.

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3.2.1 Otherworldliness as fantasy and fiction

Minna Eväsoja (2007), a Japanese studies professor, argues that the concepts of fantasy worlds and fictional realities are aesthetic values that captivate Japanese people. She elaborates that the allure of Japanese traditional arts is rooted in their ability to create alternate worlds and evoke a feeling of otherworldliness. This is owing to the historical proliferation of fantasy worlds and fictional realities in Japanese culture (Eväsoja 2007:433). As seen in the previous chapter, informed by Iwasaka and Toelken (1994), depictions of ghosts, demons and the dead are not uncommon in Japanese theatre, film and traditional arts. These practices in Japanese media and culture conjure worlds of fantasy and fiction (Eväsoja 2007:433). Depictions of death and aspects of an unseen world, such as ghosts and demons, have been prevalent in Japanese visual art and printmaking since the 1700s. This is especially seen in *ukiyo-e* prints, like Figure 25, wherein a ghost figure appears in the top left panel.

Figure 23: Utagawa Kunisada, *Broken Plate Ghost Okiku by Kyosai and Kichisaburō III as Asayama Tetsuzan*, 1863.
Woodblock print, 35,1 x 24,2 cm. (Egenolf Gallery).

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Ukiyo (floating world 浮世) refers to the carefree atmosphere and transience of the entertainment and red-light districts in urban centres like Kyoto and Edo (Edo is the name for Tokyo from the 1600s to the late 1800s). In this case, 'floating' refers to a fleeting moment in time, rather than literal floating (Graham 2014:78; Harris 2012). These entertainment districts, which included geishas and *kabuki* theatres, provided an escape from people's everyday worries (Graham 2014:78). The term *ukiyo-e* (floating world-picture)[31] became used to describe woodblock prints showing the people and activities of the areas, especially fashionable women and *kabuki* actors (Graham 2014:25). The idea of a floating, transient world, where the invisible becomes visible, reflects Eväsoja's (2007:27) discussions about fantasy and fictional 'other worlds' in Japanese aesthetics and art – especially since *kabuki* is generally fictional. Intended for an affluent audience that valued entertainment and the transience of life, it may be argued that *ukiyo-e* prints transported viewers to fleeting moments of an 'other world' (Wanczura 2023:[sp]).

Ukiyo-e prints often portray imaginary and real scenes through various visual techniques such as gradients, multiple perspectives and layouts with typographic descriptions. Figure 25, for example, depicts a new world that is half fantasy and reality. The print depicts the *kabuki* actor Kichisaburô III in one of the most renowned Japanese ghost stories, the *Tale of Okiku*.[32] Okiku's ghost is creeping up into the top left panel, scaring a watchman (shown in the two circles) whose lantern bursts into flames. The lanterns in the title panel (top right) were used by the Edo fire brigade.[33] The print not only depicts a ghost story and the actor who plays in the *kabuki* rendition of the tale but also shows the real fire brigade lanterns of 'this world'. In this way, three "worlds" are shown together, evoking an otherworldly moment in multiple real and fantasy timelines. The case study in the following chapter also considers how avant-garde Japanese graphic designers were influenced by the otherworldly subject matter and techniques of *ukiyo-e* prints (Saito 2009:66).

[31] *Ukiyo-e* is translated as 'pictures of the floating world', where *ukiyo* means floating and *e* means picture.
[32] The story is as follows. After the villain, Tetsuzan, secretly breaks a plate from a set of ten, Okiku is forced by him to count the plates and accused of losing the tenth. Tetsuzan has her killed and thrown in a well, after which she becomes a resentful ghost that emerges from the well and can be heard crying and counting to nine (Kunisada: Broken Plate Ghost Okiku [sa]).
[33] Fires were of tremendous concern in Edo, owing to the number of wooden structures in the city.

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3.2.2 Otherworldliness as nostalgia and furusato

The term 'nostalgia' stems from the Greek roots *nostros* (return home) and *algia* (longing) (Boym 2007:7). It denotes a sentimental recollection or 'dreamlike return' to a more 'sublime' historical period (Heller 1991:34). By referencing the sublime and dreamlike qualities, Heller (1991:34) points to the otherworldly qualities that nostalgia possesses. Harvey Kaplan (1987:1) personifies nostalgia as a warm, glowing feeling. He acknowledges that nostalgia is a complex philosophy that can be accompanied by bittersweetness or, as he describes, feelings of joy, elation and infatuation (Kaplan 1987:1).

During Japan's post-war years, nostalgia played a crucial role in coping with the uncertainties of the time. Millie Creighton (1997:239) examines how post-war Japanese nostalgia did not arise from positive feelings but from fear. As mentioned earlier, during the American occupation, fears arose that traditional Japanese values might become extinct amid the rapid modernisation of cities (Creighton 1997:239). On the same note, according to Heller (1991:34), nostalgia is an effect of people's fear of facing the present – a 'desperate clinging to the past'. In the context of an influx of American media and philosophy, Japanese society, in general, was fearful of the changes happening during the post-war years (Tonō 1983:39). Moreover, nostalgia is not only a longing for the past but a consequence of accepting a new view of space and time (Boym 2007:8). It is a yearning for another world, one of authenticity outside of the post-war sense of homelessness (Robertson 1988:497), and an acceptance and acknowledgement of the present. Nostalgia was, hence, a way for some to cope with the fears and uncertainties of the present and future.

Various scholars explore the nature of the term *furusato* ('old village' 故郷) in Japanese culture and literature (Chong 2012:38; Hayashi 2012a, 2012b, 2014:199, 2018:196; Robertson 1988). *Furusato* is a comparable to nostalgia, but where nostalgia is intangible, *furusato* refers to the place that evokes the nostalgia. The nostalgia towards one's 'hometown'; (*furusato*) was particularly proliferated in late post-war visual culture to promote cross-country tourism in the context of rapidly modernising Japanese cities such as Tokyo. Hayashi (2014:199) and Chong (2012:38) suggest that photography and travel advertisements with *furusato* landscapes (traditional villages and forests) contributed to the formation of a new Japanese identity after the fall of imperialism. Hayashi (2014:285) argues that Japan's pre-war image and imperial territory were nullified at the end of World War II, and so, a new visual narrative had to be constructed.

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He describes this as an ever-evolving network of visual media that establishes a visual field where some Japanese people may feel at home as the nation's narrative evolves (Hayashi 2014:199).

A particular narrative disseminated by travel agencies in the 1970s is that of a harkening back to traditional *furusato* values. For instance, in 1970, the Japanese government sought to 'sell' nostalgia and promote tourism through the *Discover Japan* campaign (Hayashi 2014:300) (appendix Figure 4). The promotional posters for the campaign showcased nature and architectural photography aimed at inspiring travel across the country, evoking feelings of nostalgia, and fostering post-war patriotism (Hayashi 2014:288). With the tagline '*utsukushii Nihon to watashi*' (Beautiful Japan and myself), the campaign sought to instil a sense of national pride following the War (Creighton 1997:239; Goodman 1999:10; Hayashi 2014:199), intertwining one's identity (as 'myself' *watashi*) with Japan's natural beauty – a source of pride unaffected by the destruction of war.

Heller (1994:35) suggests that using nostalgic imagery in design produces a longing for traditional, homespun values in some consumers. This was evidenced in Discover Japan posters: against the backdrop of a rapidly urbanising and modernising environment, the campaign used architectural and landscape photography to evoke nostalgic feelings for rural Japan. By connotation, a longing for traditional Japanese values was also evoked as the photographs depicted farming, fields, traditional-style houses with tatami mats and temples far removed from the urban landscape of Tokyo (Bartal 2013:54; Hayashi 2018:200).

Hayashi (2014:285) argues that Japan's pre-war image and imperial territory were nullified at the end of World War II, so a new visual narrative had to be constructed. He describes this as an ever-evolving network of visual media that establishes a visual field where some Japanese people may feel at home as the nation's narrative evolves (Hayashi 2014:199).
Discover Japan's posters evoked nostalgia to construct a refreshed identity for post-war Japan—one in which citizens could experience both the 'modern' (for instance, Tokyo) and the 'traditional' (a *furusato* village). In this way, posters represented a new Japanese modernity combined with images of a traditional past (Goodman 1999:10).

A parallel may be drawn between the disillusionment that Japanese designers experienced in the post-war years and their longing for 'another world' outside of the destruction of the city—

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that is, the longing for the traditional *furusato*. It may therefore be argued that *furusato* is associated with otherworldliness in that it represents a nostalgic longing for a bygone, 'other world' that is distant from the post-war destruction and later national modernisation.

3.2.3 Otherworldliness as the uncanny

Freud's concept of the uncanny provides a different perspective of otherworldliness; one invoking fear, confusion, horror and dread. His psychoanalytical essay "The Uncanny" (1919), opens with a definition of the German word *unheimlich*. *Unheimlich* denotes something strange or unfamiliar, which Freud (1919:219) explains as anything that arouses dread, horror, distress and repulsion.[34] Freud (1919) introduces the uncanny by examining the realm of fiction.[35] He describes how the discomfort of the uncanny occurs through the blurred lines between reality and fantasy (Freud 1919:29). Sentiments of dread and horror are often associated with death and corpses (Freud 1919:241). In essence, the uncanny suggests an overlap between the themes of otherworldliness and death.

Other scholars, such as Julia Högman (2014) have explored ways that the uncanny appears in fine art and media. Högman (2021:4) examines how video games allow players to experience a 'strange allure' when presented with bloody bodies and monsters. She defines the uncanny as an unsettling yet pleasurable horror of doubting whether something is imaginary or not (Högman 2021:4).[36] Kaufinger (2021), on the other hand, considers fine art a realm where the uncanny is reflected and experienced. This is achieved by depicting a 'double' or a self-portrait, akin to Freud's (1919:8) literary references to body-doubles and *doppelgängers*. Rather than a sign of immortality, seeing a body-double evokes fear and becomes a 'harbinger of death' (Freud 1919:14). The portrayal of a double in film and art, whether through reflections, shadows or *doppelgängers*, questions the line between self-perception and the perception of self by others

[34] The term uncanny is defined in various languages throughout Freud's (1919:221) essay, with Arabic and Hebrew dictionaries defining it as demonic and gruesome.
[35] Freud (1919:8) states that E.T.A. Hoffmann's novel *The devil's elixir* (1815) contains a mass of themes that depict the uncanny through ideas of bewilderment, a body's double or *doppelgänger*, telepathy and confounded experiences between self and other. In another example inspired by the uncanny, Kaufinger (2021:7) gives reference to *The room in the tower* by E. F. Benson, in which the uncanny idea of a double (body) is depicted. The protagonist's dream mirrors reality, blurring the lines between the physical and supernatural.
[36] Video games thus evoke fear and uncertainty by challenging notions of reality and imagination through distorted environments, eerie symbolism and unsettling characters (Högman 2021:7).

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(USC 2012:[sp]). The fear of encountering one's double stems from self-criticism and an awareness of one's darker, socially unacceptable traits.[37]

Figure 24: Frida Kahlo, *Without Hope*, 1945.
Oil on board, 36 x 28cm.
Dolores Olmedo Collection, Mexico. (Art History Project).

Kaufinger (2021:4) points to Frida Kahlo's painting, *Without Hope* (Figure 26) as a work that evokes uncanniness through its mysterious and uncomfortable imagery. A funnel filled with dead animals, sausages and a skull lead to her mouth, representing her struggles with force-feeding by her doctor (Kahlo 2021:[sp]). By means of a self-portrait, Kahlo presents an uncanny body double. Her portrait, disembodied from her living self, alludes also to death by force-feeding, particularly suggested by the skull on top of the food in the funnel.

If the uncanny may be applied to literature, video games and fine art, its use may be extended to design. The uncanny comes through Japanese *ukiyo*-e prints which often showcase depictions of skeletons, death, demons and ghosts (Figure 27) (Iwasaka & Toelken 1994:13; Lynam 2022:[sp]). As 'imagined spaces between life and death', ghosts, by proxy, skeletons, evoke the uncanny (Schlipphacke 2015:170) – they are both unreal and otherworldly, yet strangely familiar. Hereby, the skeleton – alive and dead at the same time – that the skeleton evokes arouses unpleasantness (Freer 2013:332; Freer 1919:241).

[37] In addition, encountering one's double brings out the protective instinct of one's ego when faced with unfamiliar or uncanny aspects of the self. The idea is that when the self is presented in an unfamiliar or negative light, it triggers a need for self-protection (USC 2012:[sp]).

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Figure 25: Utagawa Kuniyoshi, *Takiyasha, the witch and the skeleton spectre*, 1844.
Colour woodblock triptych, 101.6cm x 71.12 cm.
Victoria and Alfred Museum, London. (Victoria and Alfred Museum).

3.2.4 Otherworldliness as akin to Benjamin's aura

Walter Benjamin introduces the concept of aura in his seminal essay titled "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*"* (1970 [1936]). Aura refers to the innate authenticity, originality and life that an artwork such as a film, literary work or photograph contains (Benjamin in Hansen 2008:336).[38] Benjamin (1970:225) argues that the advent of photography, which allows for the reproduction of an image, has led to a crisis in art that he refers to as the decline of the aura. This decline alters how art is experienced and valued. Benjamin (1970:224) presents artistic value through a binary of the worship-worthy 'cult value' of an original versus the lowered 'exhibition value' of a work that has been duplicated. The originality of a work becomes lost and dies (or 'withers') when it is mechanically reproduced and commodified as a result (Benjamin 1970:221; Hansen 2008:344; Markus 2001:6).

The theory of aura has attracted the interest of numerous literature and film scholars since it was translated into English in *Illuminations* (Arendt 1970; Furuhata 2014:181). In 1960s Japan, there was a similar interest in Benjamin's work. Benjamin's (1970) German essay, originally published in 1936, was translated into Japanese in 1965 (three years before the English translation). It was published in Fuji Xerox's magazine *Graphication* (Furuhata 2014:181-182).

[38] However, Benjamin (in Eiland & Jennings 2006:58) first defined aura when he was under the influence of drugs, in Protocols of drug experiments, as something that "appears in all things, not just in certain kinds of things, as people imagine". As Hansen (2007:336) observes, this is a sharp contrast with his later definition of aura as an "aesthetic category" (the more widely-accepted meaning of his aura introduced above).

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As a result of the widespread adoption of Benjamin's ideas in Japan, some post-war Japanese designers like Yokoo and Awazu embraced photography and technical reproduction as a powerful way to disseminate their work. They rejected the idea that technical reproduction (such as photography or lithography) kills the 'aura' or 'cult value' of an original work (Furuhata 2014:188; Moriyasu 2003:45). Instead, they propose that the mass reproducibility of posters itself created the worship value of the work and produced posters as a way to embody their philosophy.

As the notion is applied to visual media, including film and photography (Benjamin 1970:281 & 221), it is possible to argue that it is equally relevant to other visual media, such as poster designs. Introduced to Japan during the American occupation, designers used the technical reproduction method that lithography offered to speed up poster production and allow for mass production (Gliem 2008:18; Tonō 1989). If Benjamin's argument is that an original work's aura "withers" upon it being mechanically reproduced, then a Benjaminian application to posters would suggest that, if a poster is reproduced, it loses its authenticity and aura. To reiterate, technological duplication (in this case, reproducing posters by lithography or silkscreen) is argued by Benjamin (1970:224) as that which causes a work to lose its aura and in exchange, gain a commodified, exhibition value.

Whereas for Benjamin (1936:32) every reproduction of a technical work is a 'ruthless annihilation' of the original, Yokoo and Awazu view the reproduction of posters in a more pragmatic light. Through lithography and silkscreen reproduction, these designers explored the antithesis of aura by examining the metaphoric idea of the original's death (Hayashi 2012a:94). Benjamin's mechanical reproduction was adopted and renamed by Awazu as *graphism* (*gurafizumu* グラフィズム) (Awazu 1967; Furuhata 2014). By the process of *graphism,* the mass reproduction of posters creates a world of multiple images and visual signifiers. By exploring *graphism*, Awazu's reproduction and juxtaposition of signs is indicative of his search for 'meaning' in his work (Awazu 1972; *Awazu Kiyoshi makuri hirogeru* 2012:2). This is not to say that designers who create 'semiotic scrambles' in their work stripped traditional images (such as *noh* masks, rising suns, mountains or other elements of nature) from their inherent meanings. Rather, it is the seemingly random and abstract combination of these elements that allows the viewer to participate in the meaning-making process, evoking a sense of fantasy and otherworldliness (see Yokoo's *Koshimaki Osen* from Figure 2).

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However, the logic that a poster can lose its 'cult' or worship-value through reproduction (Benjamin 1970:225) necessitates the existence of worship-worthy 'cult' posters in the first place. This may seem improbable – since, as a poster, by nature, is a reproduction and therefore an original cannot exist. Thus, a Benjaminian view would argue that posters, by nature, can never contain aura or cult value (unless only a single, original print exists). Here exists a life/death dichotomy inherent in the nature of a poster: the otherworldly notion of aura gives life and worship value to a work; yet if a poster is duplicated mechanically, its aura is lost and the original 'dies' (Arendt 1970:221, 245).

Miriam Hansen (2008:340), on the other hand, describes aura as an elusive and intersubjective experience that encapsulates the individuality and authenticity of a person or an object. Aura is elicited simply by observing an object while simultaneously 'being observed' by it (Chicago School of Media Theory 2004:[sp]; Hansen 2008:343). In other words, that which is inanimate becomes animate and can in a sense, contain an uncanny sense of life (Freud 1919). Hence, the aura of an object conveys otherworldliness, particularly when the object – the poster – is personified by Hansen's (2008:343) definition of aura and appears to gaze back at the viewer.

Similarly personifying the poster, Elizabeth Guffey (2015:183) describes how propaganda posters may contain otherworldly or 'magical powers'. When a poster becomes a means of representing a political system or narrative, it acquires a magical quality (Guffey 2015:183). Guffey (2014:183) states that supporters of political movements view posters as a representation of something more than a decoration. She refers to political and protest posters that become cult or fetish items outside of their original context (Guffey 2014). However, taking a political poster out of its original context can only be facilitated by its reproduction and dissemination. In a similar vein, Yokoo's posters were so coveted that they were often stolen from walls outside theatres (Moriyasu 2003:45). This happened either for reasons of aesthetic appreciation or for aligned political views that the viewers held. It may be argued that this suggests that his posters, despite being duplicated, do, in fact, have a 'cult' status that would otherwise be reserved for an original work – akin to Guffey's (2014) notion of 'magical' posters.

Finally, it is worth noting that the act of artistic and technical reproduction holds value in the Japanese arts. In the Buddhist pathway arts, such as calligraphy and flower arranging, the more accurately a student was able to reproduce the work of their artistic master, the more valuable the work (Maraldo & Maraldo 2022:8). As such, traditional Japanese aesthetics have always

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valued reproduction and accuracy (Maraldo & Maraldo 2022:8). Given this cultural history, it may be argued that copies and reproductions of artworks *are* 'worship-worthy' in and of themselves and, contrary to Benjamin's (1970) view, do *not* lose value when mass-produced. It is precisely this technical reproducibility of posters that became a key factor in the proliferation and popularity of the medium in Japanese avant-garde design (Furuhata 2014:87).

3.3 The interface between otherworldliness and death

The previous sections in this literature review have shown that religious views necessitate faith in the existence of an 'other world' to believe in life after death. As an example, Zen Buddhist and Shinto ideas towards death, suicide and ancestor veneration reflect the belief in the existence of a spiritual 'other world' (*anoyo*), effectively combining the two concepts of otherworldliness and death under the umbrella of religion. In other words, life after death and Buddhist 'paradise' necessitates a belief in the otherworldly. Thus, when evaluating the definitions and themes of otherworldliness and death, it becomes evident that there are numerous similarities and overlaps in meaning between them. By employing a theoretical framework, this section presents the interface between otherworldliness and death.

Moreover, a theoretical framework is required for the case study to situate the themes of otherworldliness and death in the context of Japanese graphic design and to rigorously analyse the poster samples. Establishing a framework based on the intersection between otherworldliness and death allows for a nuanced and multifaceted analysis method, rather than considering otherworldliness and death as separate themes for analysis. This framework also aids in synthesising the academic viewpoints that inform the definitions of otherworldliness and death in this study to examine and illustrate how these theories are made visible in design practice, specifically in Japanese avant-garde posters.

The two overarching themes of otherworldliness and death are broadly categorised into three contextual subcategories, namely ① Japanese history, society and culture; ② religion and ③ philosophy and metaphysics to form the theoretical framework (Table 2). For the poster sample analyses, the respective subcategories numbers (①, ② or ③) are combined with respective letters (A, B, C or D) from the left column to categorise posters more specifically.

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THE INTERFACE BETWEEN OTHERWORLDLINESS AND DEATH			
① Japanese history, society and culture			
#	Concept	Concerning otherworldliness	Concerning death
A	Japanese aesthetics	Specific aesthetic principles that reflect otherworldly, temporary and effervescent qualities such as *yugen, mono no aware, mujō* and *ma.*	Though not an aesthetic principle in itself, death has been aestheticised in media, art and culture. Japan has a strong culture of expressing and romanticising death.
B	Fantasy and fiction	Depiction of ghosts, demons, skeletons and spirits in *noh* and *kabuki* plays, literature, *angura* theatre, folklore and *ukiyo-e* prints. The term *ukiyo* means *floating world*, referring to an idealised world distinct from the troubles of the present world.	Death posters produced before or after the passing of a *kabuki* theatre actor venerate them but also aestheticise and commodify their death. The aestheticisation of suicide and death in Japanese *angura* theatre and film.
C	Japan's World War II defeat	Not applicable.	Destruction from the war on numerous Japanese cities resulted in literal deaths, while the American occupation signifies a symbolic death of imperial Japan and its national identity.
D	Romanticisation and sexualisation of death and suicide	*Shinju,* or double suicide, stems from folk tales about lovers who take their lives to be together in the 'other world'. *Shinju* has often been romanticised in Japanese literature and theatre.	Mishima and Yokoo romanticised and sexualised death, especially as a means of political protest.
② Religion			
#	Concept	Concerning otherworldliness	Concerning death
A	Zen Buddhism and Shintoism	The existence of *anoyo* and *konoyo* indicates a separation between 'this' and 'the other" world.	Death is seen as impure in Shintoism but as a transition to the next world in Zen Buddhism. The contrast in beliefs makes for a rich ground for various interpretations of the meaning of death in Japan. In addition, *seppuku* is accepted as a noble act when committed by *Samurai* warriors who followed the Zen Buddhist ideal of *Bushido*.
③ Philosophy and metaphysics			
#	Concept	Concerning otherworldliness	Concerning death
A	The uncanny	The uncanny refers to something that arouses feelings of dread, horror and otherworldliness.	People are prone to experiencing the uncanny when it comes to death and corpses since nobody can fully grasp the concept of their death (Ruers

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			2019:[sp]).
B	Aura (and death of the original)	Aura is what Benjamin (1970:235) terms the sense of uniqueness that emanates from a work of art only if it has not been mechanically reproduced. By name, the term aura suggests the otherworldly personification of art.	The loss of aura in a work may be viewed as a metaphoric death of an original work of art. Some Japanese designers like Yokoo and Awazu embraced mass reproduction in objection to this.
C	Nostalgia and *furusato*	*Furusato* evokes a longing for a 'lost homeland' before World War II, reflecting nostalgia and a way to come to terms with a new post-war national identity.	Nostalgia is experienced in a post-World War II Japanese context for an Imperial past that died after the American occupation. The *furusato* longing for the traditional hometown stems from the metaphoric death of traditional Japanese values as Japan transitioned into a modernised country open to foreign influences (Hayashi 2014; Robertson 1988).
D	Nihilism and detachment	Nihilism may result in detachment from the present to escape to a fantasy or 'other' world.	Active nihilism (Nietzsche 2011; Olivier 2007) embraces the cycle of life and urges creativity to combat the fear of death, destruction or war.

Table 2: Theoretical framework showing subcategories of otherworldliness and death and categorises their overlaps. Table by the author.

The framework is appropriate for analysis because, as Julianna Jones (2011:361) posits, understanding and interpreting visual design from diverse cultures requires cultural awareness. Objective cultural awareness is necessary because symbols, images and semiotic meanings can vary between the viewer and the creator. Thus, a comprehensive literature review as the basis for the theoretical framework on the abovementioned Japanese views regarding otherworldliness and death may now be applied to the case study analysis.

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CHAPTER FOUR: CASE STUDY – POSTER ANALYSES

> *"It is only through the aesthetic qualities of creative events that one overcomes nihilism, despair and vacuous actuality" (Odin 2016:193)*

This chapter offers an analysis of selected poster designs by Japanese designers who were active during the post-war years between 1950 and 1985. The case study evaluates how the poster designs present themes of otherworldliness and death, whether conceptually or directly through imagery and typography. In addition, the significance of posters as outlets for visual expression and social commentary is examined by discussing the socio-political context wherein the designers worked. Chapter Three's theoretical framework informs the analysis of the subject matter and visual techniques used in the posters. The case study is divided into three sections, namely posters in category one (culture, history and the arts), posters in category two (religion and spirituality) and posters in category three (philosophy and metaphysics).

At this point, it is necessary to briefly review the historical contextual analysis and interpretive approaches of this case study (Bennett 2006). In analysing avant-garde Japanese posters' subject matter and styles, it is necessary to reference its socio-political context, on the basis that a work of art, or a poster, cannot be viewed or interpreted in isolation. According to psychologist Lev Vygotsky (in Bennett 2006:74), the mind does not work in isolation; it is influenced by the environment and the context of the activity. Thus, it may be argued that repeated representations of otherworldliness and death in avant-garde Japanese poster design are influenced by the post-war context. To this end, the images in the posters are analysed according to its meanings within the contextual environment (underpinned by activity theory as a principle), whether that environment be religious, historical, personal, cultural or political.

The posters are analysed using the theoretical framework put forth that categorises concepts of death and otherworldliness in three distinct categories: ① Japanese history and culture, ② religion and ③ philosophy and metaphysics. Moreover, various subcategories support each main category (Table 2).

The following describes how the framework guides the poster analyses:

- **Analysis:** Each poster is analysed by way of a semiotic analysis. The poster's imagery, symbolism, and compositional choices are analysed, and offer a thorough perspective of

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each poster's representations of death and otherworldliness, whether literal or metaphorical.

- **Interpretation:** The analyses also examine the posters' cultural, religious and philosophical concepts by means of a historical, contextual analysis. This systematic approach ensures a clear and consistent analysis across the poster samples. The hypothesis is that, by examining the interplay between visual elements and the categories in the framework, it becomes evident how Japanese avant-garde posters explored themes of otherworldliness and death.

- **Categorisation:** Based on the analysis and interpretation, each poster is categorised according to the theoretical framework. This label reflects the specific categories and subcategories of the framework. For example, a fictitious poster depicting a ghost will fall within ① culture, history and the arts, and then within subcategory B: fantasy and fiction. Accordingly, it is assigned ①B. Moreover, if the poster also contains contrasts of light and dark, it may also be assigned category ① Japanese aesthetics, because a specific usage of light may illustrate *yugen*. It is necessary to preempt that, depending on the posters' subject matter, some posters may belong to more than one category or subcategory.

4.1 Posters in category one: Japanese history and culture

The concepts that fall under this category are Japanese aesthetics, fantasy and fiction, Japan's World War II defeat and the romanticisation and sexualisation of death. Numerous post-war posters represent death through themes of dissent and war. Avant-garde design commentaries on societal and political issues are often subtle and complex with political, social, humorous and controversial narratives in film, theatre, dance and design (Andrews 2016:258; Eckersall 1999:56).

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4.1.1 World War II and active nihilism

According to anthropologists Andrea de Antoni and Katja Centonze (in De Antoni & Raveri 2017:109, 186, 224), post-war Japanese art is characterised by complex narratives. Metaphors, hidden meanings and complexity indicate Japanese citizens' multi-faceted experiences and memories after the war. The early years of post-war Japan developed under themes of 'death and desire' regarding its dissidence against Japan-U.S. bilateral agreements (De Antoni & Raveri 2017).

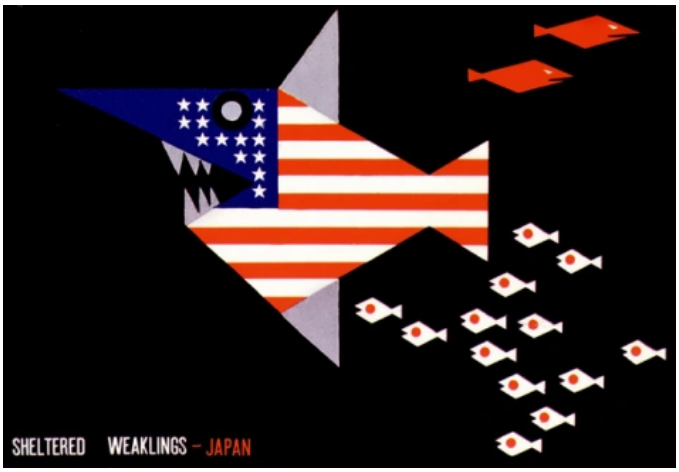

Figure 26: Takashi Kono, *Sheltered Weaklings*, 1953.
Silkscreen, 98,5 x 72,5 cm.
National Museum of Art, Osaka. (Smithsonian Education).

Early post-war Japan saw a scarcity of food, finances, clothing, medical care and construction resources such as metal (Dower 2000:161, 615). Another such resource, as it relates to design, was a shortage of high-quality paper for poster design (*Bessatsu Taiyo* 2024:660; Dower 2000:160). Nevertheless, Japanese graphic design and posters flourished – in fact, some posters were printed on thicker card stock instead of regular printing paper, which helped preserve the posters over time (*Bessatsu Taiyo* 2024:660). Designers like Takashi Kono, in particular, used posters to communicate social messages (*Bessatsu Taiyo* 2024:660). In *Sheltered Weaklings* (1953) (Figure 28) Takashi uses fish as a metaphor for the U.S. and Japan as part of a multi-level narrative. Rather than an overt explanation, the viewer is invited to interpret the meaning of the fish and the flags in the socio-political and temporal context of the work.

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Takashi's metaphor depicts Japan's state after World War II. The large, geometric shark forms a holding shape for the American flag, representing the U.S.' presence in Japan. Behind the shark is a school of smaller fish patterned with the Japanese flag. The suggestion is that as Japan is protected by the U.S.; they are safe from predators represented by the angrily squinting red fish. These red fish represent the Soviet Union and China, in light of the threat of communism and the ongoing Cold War (Dower 2000:429, 516). Indeed, after Japan's defeat, the U.S. led Allies in the occupation and rehabilitation of the Japanese state. Yet, for Takashi, the loss of the war left Japan as a helpless victim, under the sole mandate of the U.S. the changes it led Japan into. In other words, this poster reflects his personal concerns about Japanese citizens mindlessly following the U.S. after the San Francisco Treaty of 1951, despite the government being in favour of the Treaty (Sandler 1997:88).[1]

A close reading of the poster reveals impressions of death and Dower's (2000:25,129) notion of post-war Japanese victim consciousness. Firstly, death is reflected in the black background, indicating dark or deadly waters. This suggests an uncertain future ushered in by the U.S..[2] War and death are metaphorically presented yet inextricably linked in this poster. Within the post-war context, this poster reminds the viewer of the war and death that led to the Allied occupation. Moreover, it elucidates the 'death' of the imperial Japanese state. Viewers of the work are, therefore, reminded of the Treaty that metaphorically undermined Japan's independence.

Moreover, the use of poster design as a medium is also arguably an act of active nihilism in the face of Japan's victim mentality (Olivier 2007:5). In the 1950s, several large Japanese cities still lay in ruins from bombings. Following Orr (2001:39, 43, 110, 133) and Dower (2000), it is clear that some Japanese citizens formed a nihilistic narrative of themselves as victims. Thus, the post-war nihilism served as a catalyst for visual media, such as posters, to further propagate a victim mentality by referencing war and the unstable political situation (Chong 2012:30).

A victim consciousness, proliferated by visual communication (such as Figure 28), formed part of the identity that Japan constructed for itself, post-World War II. As Dower (2000:25) argues in *Embracing defeat* Japan experienced 'historical amnesia' related to its war crimes against other

[1] In the 1950s, an intellectual conflict arose about embracing democratic and liberal Western ideals without becoming overly influenced by American culture. The balance would be to incorporate Western ideas and academic knowledge while exploring traditional Japanese folk values and heritage to rebuild a new Japanese identity (Andrews 2016:14).
[2] Moreover, Japan would later be complicit in the Vietnam War owing to its association with the U.S. (Andrews 2016:296). Even though Takashi could not have predicted this, it may be argued that he foresaw a dark future for the country under American occupation.

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nations. A ‘preoccupation with their own misery’ led some to ignore the suffering that they had inflicted on other nations mere years earlier (Dower 2000:25). In his poster design, Takashi arguably displays historical amnesia and critiques the victim mentality by suggesting that Japan blindly follows the US. In doing so, he downplays the image of Japan as the aggressor (Dower 2000:521; Keene 1978:101). Hence, according to the analysis, Takashi’s poster is classified under the following categories: ①C (World War II defeat) and ③D (nihilism and detachment).

Figure 27: Awazu Kiyoshi, *Give Back Our Sea*, 1955.
Offset print, 103 x 72,8 cm.
21st Century Museum of Modern Art, Kanazawa. (Nonaka Hill).

Soon after the metaphoric death of imperial Japan (following its defeat), some Japanese villagers experienced a different kind of death in the early post-war years. This was a death of livelihoods, jobs and land (*furusato*). Over 2,800 American military bases and facilities were built in Japan following the San Francisco Peace Treaty (Bartal 2016:19). The construction of these bases often encroached on Japanese farmlands and oceans. Farmers and fishermen lost their

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habitats in their *furusato* homelands. It is possible to argue that Awazu's award-winning[3] poster, *Give Back Our Sea* (*Umi wo kaese* 海を返せ)[4] (Figure 29), highlights this issue.

In doing so, the poster depicts a disheartened fisherman behind razor wire, while a U.S. warship floats in the background. Awazu intended to raise awareness and protest against a military base that was being constructed at a fishing village in Kujukuri (*Shakaika* 2019:[sp]). Around this time, Japan was still a predominantly agrarian economy (Waswo 2010:45). Therefore, the uproar surrounding the U.S. military possession of Japanese farmlands was particularly prevalent. Per Robertson's (1988:494) definition of *furusato* as a traditional home(land) or native place, Awazu's work depicts the fisherman's loss of *furusato*. The poster thus also alludes to the Allied occupation as a harbinger of the end of imperial, 'traditional Japan' (Robertson 1988:512). Furthermore, Awazu's tactile design process illustrates nostalgia: the fisherman's outfit is made of fabric cut-outs from Awazu's childhood *kimonos*. Using clothing from his childhood, Awazu suggests a longing for an unreachable world that exists only in memory.

Awazu embodies active nihilism by using the design process as a way to overcome internal post-war nihilism (Nietzsche in Schultz 2021:13; Nishitani 1990:32). Active nihilism rejects the idea of escaping life's challenges and emphasises self-overcoming and empowerment (Nishitani 1990). Active nihilism, in this sense, suggests empowerment in the face of nihilism, encouraging individuals to transform despair into engagement. Japanese philosopher Nishitani's (1990) active nihilism speaks to this and is understood existentially *and* historically.[5]Nishitani (1990:173) emphasises the historical and cultural (contextual) aspect of nihilism, arguing that nihilism can arise in connection with the context of an era (and its religion and philosophy). This requires a historical investigation to understand the manifestations of nihilism (in Schultz 2021:173). Awazu's poster reflects his active nihilism in the face of his context through his proclivity to use design in bringing awareness to social issues.[6] In this way, the poster depicts the state of the Japanese fishermen's current world while hinting at a pre-war 'other' world.

[3] This poster was awarded the grand prize at the *Nissenbi* (Japan Advertising Artists' Club) exhibition in 1955 (*Bessatsu Taiyo* 2024:48).
[4] On a linguistic note, the casual level of speech in the grammar may come across as impolite or as a command. "Give back our sea" as a phrase is a demand with no room for formal negotiation. (Grammar analysis by author).
[5] Nishitani's work during Japan's post-World War II modernisation explores parallels between nihilism in Europe and its emergence in Japan, suggesting that both faced a crisis of meaning and existential questions (1990:174).
[6] As a further example of his social commentary, see the *Fallout* magazine cover (1957) (Figure 5 in the appendix), which depicts a mother and her child after the Hiroshima bombing (21st Century Museum of Modern Art Kanazawa 2019:[sp]).

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Accordingly, the poster is assigned the following categories: ①C (World War II defeat) as well as ③C and ③D (active nihilism and *furusato* nostalgia).

Around thirty years later, in 1983, the *Hiroshima Appeals* campaign was formed as an opportunity for designers to promote peace and awareness about nuclear war, through the medium of poster design (JAGDA 2023:[sp]).[7] For instance, Kamekura Yusaku was selected to design the inaugural campaign poster (Figure 30) (Sato 2024; JAGDA 1983).

The Hiroshima bombing in 1945 is deeply etched in the memory of the Japanese people. The catastrophic event shattered the nation's imperial aspirations and became a catalyst for artistic expression (Holborn 1983:51). In Kamekura's poster (Figure 30),[8] he uses unexpected graphics to approach the anti-nuclear issue. Kamekura (in JAGDA 1983:[sp]) intended the flames emanating from butterfly wings to form the central focus, rather than depicting a literal anti-nuclear message (for example, of a bomb detonating or a mushroom cloud).

Kamekura (in JAGDA 1983:[sp]) expresses an intention to evoke genuine fear by suggesting the threat of nuclear weapons as it destroys beauty through flames. By capturing the moment the butterflies catch fire, Kamekura references the moment the atomic bomb detonated above Hiroshima on 6 August 1945 (Sato 2024:[sp]). Thus, the butterflies represent beauty destroyed by a nuclear bomb. The poster suggests complete vulnerability and the unavoidable aftermath of nuclear war, namely death and the destruction of beauty.

Interestingly, Kamekura (in JAGDA 1983:[sp]) states that he avoided political messaging in the poster and designed it on "neutral grounds … divorced from politics, philosophy and religion". Yet, despite his statement that the poster is devoid of philosophical or religious meaning, it may be argued that the work underscores several Buddhist philosophies.

[7] The project lasted until 1991 but was reinstated in 2005 by the Japanese Graphic Design Association (JAGDA).
[8] Akira Yokoyama was commissioned by Kamekura to create the illustration. Kamekura continually pushed Akira to make the illustration more powerful and impactful and eventually enlarged the butterflies himself (Kamekura in JAGDA 1983:[sp]) .

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Figure 28: Kamekura Yusaku, *Hiroshima Appeals*, 1983.
Offset lithograph, 103 x 72.5 cm.
Museum of Modern Art New York. (Artstor).

Firstly, the underlying emotion evoked is *mujōkan* (無常観), the Buddhist notion of impermanence (Odin 2016:361). It is elucidated from the interplay of beauty (butterflies) and death (flames) relates to Odin's (2016:9) metaphysics of tragic beauty. The illustration's interplay between light, nature and death prompts the viewer to recognise the pathos of life's temporality. In this way, the work reflects key Buddhist concepts of impermanence (*mono no aware*), suffering and the evanescence of life (Odin 2016:361).

Kamekura (in JAGDA 1983:[sp]) describes the illustration as 'pregnant with pathos'.[9] Moreover, Yuriko (2008:184) terms the Japanese artistic preference for the beauty of evanescence as the 'aestheticisation of transience'. There is clearly an inextricable link between death and beauty in Japanese aesthetics. It is the finitude of the butterflies' lives, abruptly shortened by the flames,

[9] As presented in the literature review, one of the most widely-accepted translations of *mono no aware* is "the pathos of things". Pathos in Japanese is *hisoukan* 悲愴感, which combines the characters for 'sad' or 'sombre' with 'feeling' or 'sense'.

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that makes them a fleeting beauty. Thus, the poster falls under the following categories: ①A (Japanese aesthetics) and ①B (World War II defeat) as the most prominent categories, and then ②A (religion) and ③D (nihilism and detachment).

Kamekura also consistently played a leading role in establishing and sustaining the national identity of post-war Japan in the realm of visual design by repeatedly producing symbolic images for the public, many of which were commissioned by government authorities (Hayashi 2014b:302). Through the perpetuation of visual culture, such as the annual *Hiroshima Appeals* posters, the city gained emblematic status.[10] After the War, Hiroshima transformed into a city marked by a dark war history but with signs of hope for a better future.

In line with this, the Hiroshima-Nagasaki Film Festival, established as a 'record of the atomic destruction', for which Nagai Kazumasa designed the poster (Figure 31), is also a direct reference to death. In Nagai's work, the bomb blast is represented by the geometrically sharp and angled 'boom' shape, containing a dismembered toy doll (emblematic of the death of thousands of young children or those orphaned by the war), that fills the sky above a Japanese landscape.

Figure 29: Nagai Kazumasa, *Zero Nuclear Weapons*, 1980. Silkscreen, 103 x 72,8 cm. (Hoover Institution).

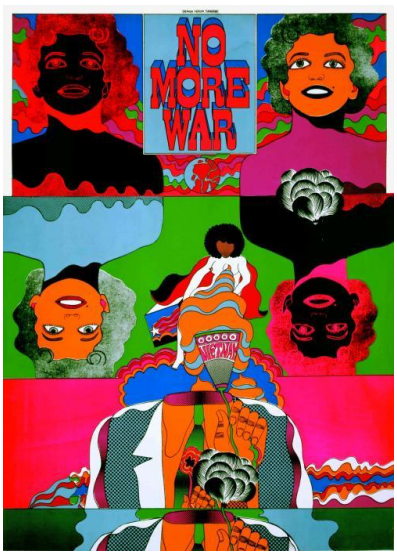

Figure 30: Tanaami Keiichi, *No More War 5*, 1967. Screen print, 104 × 74 cm. The Cabinet Gallery Hong Kong. (M+).

Figure 31: Fukuda Shigeo, *No More*, 1968. Silkscreen, 103 x 72,5 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York. (MoMA).

[10] *Hiroshima Appeals* posters are presented to the mayor of Hiroshima yearly but have also been shown overseas. They were exhibited at the G7 Hiroshima Foreign Ministers' Meeting in 2016 and at numerous sister cities (JAGDA 2024).

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Other anti-war posters include Tanaami's *No More War* (Figure 32) and Fukuda's *No More* poster (Figure 33). Communicating the essence of the late 1960s and 1970s, Tanaami employs American Pop Art and psychedelic trends in his work for its recognisability (Figure 32).[11] Tanaami (in Tate 2015) states that "Pop art was a very common term and anybody interested in art knew about it.… Pop Art was easy to understand and it was associated with a modern, urban image – it was popular".

As Heller (in Heller & Fili 2006:8) suggests, style is the graphic imprint of an age. For Tanaami, presenting an anti-war message in his work is not only a sign of the times but something deeply personal. He explains (in Tate 2015):

> Today, I still create works that deal with my experience of war as a child. This moment of fear that a whole city can disappear just within a moment is a memory that has been recorded deep in my mind; it does not go away. Bomb blasts that burn the skin; weirdly shining orange flares; enormous bright red columns of flames; machine gun fire from combat planes; the smell of scorching corpses lying on the streets. This extreme reality attacked the young me. The fact that it almost feels like yesterday, although it is far away in the past, shows that to me it really was a big incident.

Memory and personal trauma are recurring subjects in Tanaami's work. Recollecting his childhood memory of "watching the silvery scales of his grandfather's goldfish glittering in the crossfire" and seeing the brutality of war, his series transforms abject horror into surreal, otherworldly fantasy with hallucinating patterns and vivid colours (Lau 2018). The colours appear like drug-induced hallucinations that are intended to reflect near-death experiences and intolerable illnesses[12] (Lau 2018). His work shows a clear reference to psychedelia as a design trend, similar to vinyl covers such as those of The Psychedelic Sounds of the 13th Floor Elevators (design by John Cleveland 1966) or Disraeli Gears (designed by Martin Sharp in 1967).

Nishitani (in Krummel 2019) posits that the Japanese Buddhist response to nihilism is activity and creativity. Nishitani proposes that engaging with the Buddhist notion of emptiness (*mujō*)

[11] The poster, which is in a series of similar ones protesting the Vietnam War and Japan's complicity in it, shows a hand in the middle holding a flower that reads 'VIETNAM'. Though Tanaami never considered himself a Pop Artist, he acknowledges being inspired by Pop Artists like Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein, whose works he found in magazines and books in Japanese bookstores (Tanaami in Tate 2015).
[12] Illnesses as a result of World War II include atomic bomb sickness or acute radiation syndrome (ARS).

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allows individuals to transcend nihilistic tendencies using creative and experiential approaches (in Werner 2020). It is possible to make the link that this bolsters the importance of activities such as poster design as a means of engaging with the emptiness left by the war (active nihilism) over simply *thinking about* the war (nihilistic cognition). This philosophy is clearly reflected in Tanaami's work where his *No More War* series (1967) is an expression of active nihilism.

In a more abstract manner, Fukuda's poster, *No More* (Figure 33), as part of an anti-war series, depicts a skull made of hundreds of tiny missiles. Fukuda's poster is evocative of war casualties, whereas Nagai's (Figure 31) is more direct, depicting a young blonde boy or a doll, representing children caught in the middle of the war (represented by the 'boom' shape). These are metaphors for violence and the plight of children, particularly those orphaned after the war.

The above posters are aimed at protesting war and thus also communicate death (subject matter) and active nihilism (the nature of poster creation in its contexts). Therefore, they are assigned the categories of ①C (World War II defeat) and ③D (nihilism and detachment).[13] While Nagai, Tanaami, Fukuda, Kamekura, Awazu and Kono were commenting on World War II and its aftermath, other avant-garde Japanese designers were concerned with exploring symbolism and reproduction to create a new visual language for Japanese graphic design (McArtor 2022:42). Frustrated with the Modernist influence that other designers were copying from European and American design, Yokoo and Awazu sought to redefine what 'Japanese design' meant and put to death the ideals of Western Modernism. Yokoo and Hosoe, in particular included many symbols unique to Japan: flags, *shinkansen* bullet trains, Mount Fuji[14] and cherry blossoms (Figure 34).

Central to Yokoo's work is his exploration of the interplay between traditional Japanese culture and Western influence and the contrast between post-war modern and pre-war traditional Japan. Yokoo's typography is deliberately anti-Modern, as he employs old-fashioned calligraphy

[13] Tanaami's series, in particular, adds a touch of otherworldliness through his usage of Western styles and hallucinating patterns representing drug-induced confusion. However, the framework does not cater for otherworldliness represented visually by references to Western design trends.
[14] Mount Fuji is one of the most recognisable Japanese images. It is highly praised in Japanese visual culture, ranging from Katsushika Hokusai's renowned red Mount Fuji series (Appendix Figure 9) to modern-day packaging, print, souvenir and graphic design.

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of which the characters are, from time to time, written from right to left (Tonō 1983:24).[15] The symbolism in his posters is often an ironic critique of Japanese nationalist symbols or a reference to his contemporaries and friends (Rawlings 1974:104). For example, in the poster for Hosoe Eikoh's 1968 photography exhibition (Figure 34), a photo of *butoh* dancer Hijikata is combined with his friend Mishima's hand-painted calligraphy. The irony in the poster lies in the two Japanese flags (*hinomaru* 日の丸) which would otherwise indicate national pride and power. Yet, the flags stand in contrast to the rest of the poster's allusions to nuclear war, destruction and a loss of home. In this way, his work juxtaposes national pride with a melancholic admission of Japan's militaristic past, particularly with his frequent use of the rising sun flag (*Kyokujitsu-ki* 旭日旗) in other works (such as Figure 36), which was banned in Japan from 1945 to 1954.

Figure 32: Yokoo Tadanori (poster) and Hosoe Eikoh (photograph), *Kamaitachi*, 1968.
Silkscreen and paint, 103 x 72,6 cm.
Michael Hoppen Gallery. (Artsy).

[15] Prior to World War II, horizontal writing from right-to-left was used for limited spaces, such as on temple gates or shop signs. Thereafter, influenced by English and other Western languages, a left-to-right system was employed. Right-to-left reading is now only used to replicate antique writing styles (such as in tourist areas or some newspaper captions and titles) (Obana 1997:86).

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Yokoo worked with Hosoe to produce the poster (Figure 34) for Hosoe's exhibition and book launch, called *Kamaitachi* (Chong 2012:78). *Kamaitachi* (literally 'sickle-toothed weasel') is a mythical weasel-demon that haunts rice fields and slashes its victims with a sickle (Chong 2012:78; Holborn 1983:53). According to Igarashi (2000:3), visual and popular culture that transcended the boundaries of political discourse and conveyed memories of loss and devastation helped Japan's national identity survive the war-related destruction. In 1944, when Hosoe was 12 years old, he and his family evacuated to a small village after Tokyo was firebombed. Hosoe's *Kamaitachi* photo series is nostalgically set in a similar traditional rice-farming village. As part of the series, Hijikata enacted the *kamaitachi* demon and performed *butoh* dances with villagers (Shashasha 2024).

The photograph of Hijikata perched on a fence shows him overlooking a rice field by a foreboding sunset. Red skies in posters are signature visuals employed by Yokoo. When he was eight years old, the U.S. Air Force conducted seemingly endless bombing raids over Japan. Yokoo recalls (in Rawlings 2011:102) seeing the sky "turn a deep red as they bombed Kobe and Akashi" and contemplates whether the fear he felt at the time unconsciously influenced the heavy use of red in his work. Yokoo describes the bombings as his first experience of fear triggered by the outside world, and yet, he perceived something 'sublime' in those catastrophic moments (Rawlings 2011:102). Moreover, in the context of the nuclear age, the red sun evokes a subliminal feeling similar to what Yokoo may have experienced during the bombings: a combination of awe and fear. In this way, the poster's immersive imagery and mythical references transport the viewer into an otherworldly realm.

The work is thus also indicative of the Kantian (1987) mathematical sublime: the expansive landscape, ominous red sunset and inherent meaning of the poster in its context elicit a sense of wonder and dread. Moreover, by flattening the landscape in a photograph format, it becomes a liminal space (Murphy 2015:36). It is merely a landscape translated into a poster. Still, it elicits the sublime as the viewer is challenged to think deeper about the grandeur of the rice fields and the mystery of the sunset.

Mark Holborn (1983:53) suggests that every step of the poster and photography production was ritualised: firstly, the photos of Hijikata were taken by Hosoe of Hijikata, secondly, Yokoo designed the poster and lastly, the calligraphy in the centre was done by Mishima. It is interesting to note that the gold-ink handprints, which only appear on a few editions, were made

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by Hijikata. 'signing' the posters in this way became an individual ritual. It can be argued that the exclusivity and limited availability of Hijikata's handprints may be a way of returning the work to its cult value, potentially restoring its aura. Art with cult value is characterised by its exclusivity and the reverence it commands (Benjamin 1970:225). In the example of religious art, which is only on display to clergy, the work's exclusivity reinforces the idea that its significance lies in its limited accessibility and the rituals surrounding it (Benjamin 1970:225). Benjamin argues that viewing a work with cult value is often associated with a sense of awe and spiritual significance, which cannot be replicated in reproductions. Thus, it may be argued that by ritualising the creation process of the poster and emphasising the uniqueness of Hijikata's handprints on a select number of posters,[16] an aspect of cult value and aura is reassigned to the poster.

The last step of the so-called ritual is the moment at which the two-dimensional photographic world becomes three-dimensional. During the exhibition opening at the Nikon Salon in Tokyo, Hijikata evokes death by performing a visceral *butoh* dance as he had in Hosoe's series (Holborn 1983:52).[17] Perhaps the process was a cathartic expression of active nihilism for Yokoo, Hosoe, Hijikata and Mishima. As Odin (2016:193) suggests, "it is only through the aesthetic qualities of creative events that one overcomes nihilism, despair and vacuous actuality". The collaborative process reveals the intertextuality that this project embodies between photography, design, calligraphy and dance. This truly encapsulates the cross-collaborative tenet of the Japanese avant-garde ethos.

The poster may be classified firstly under ①A and ①C as a reference to a traditional folktale (fantasy) and the aftermath of the War, then under ③C (nostalgia and *furusato*), ③D (nihilism and detachment) as an expression of active nihilism and lastly, ③B (aura) for its 'neo-aura'.

4.1.2 Bodies, the abject, sexuality and the uncanny

Angura researcher Peter Eckersall (1999:57) posits that *angura* contributed to the construction of a new, radical way of self and bodily expression, questioning traditional boundaries of expression and identity. Much like Hijikata using his body as a form of expression, bodily references continued to be used as strong *angura* symbolism, especially in mutilated,

[16] Despite the work being on display to the public and having innate exhibition value, in Benjamin's (1968:225) view.
[17] Hijikata extensively related *butoh* dance to the idea of death. He stated that to dance *butoh* is "to make gestures of the dead, to die again … although [he's] not acquainted with Death, Death knows [him]" (in Bieszczad-Roley 2011:100).

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sexualised, abject or deceased forms. As touched on previously, Goodman (1991:10) contends that blood, dead bodies and nude women reflect the troubled mental states of *angura* playwrights and designers after the war, in part, as a sign of political protest and rebellion.

On the other hand, Igarashi Yoshikuni (2000:5) contends that in the aftermath of the war, many Japanese discovered their bodies as entities that survived destruction and thus embodied historical continuity. Their bodies became sites for national rehabilitation, thus overcoming the historical crisis that Japan's defeat created (Igarashi 2000:5). Instead of political protest (although some designers did participate in protests), visual culture and poster design acted as an escape from the socio-political unrest (McArtor 2022:42). Similarly, Igarashi (2000:73) states that during the post-war period, many Japanese creatives focused on culture rather than politics to construct new national identities.

Goodman (2009:71) contends that in a time when revolutionary and political freedom was not achievable, sexual freedom took preference. Sex and its visual expressions became an easier way of protesting as opposed to military coups, for instance. As this section shows, numerous *angura* productions and posters revolving around sexuality, crime, death and the body exemplify this cultural and visual shift. Unlike the above-mentioned examples (of Kono, Tanaami, Fukuda and Kamekura), *angura* posters do not always show overtly political messages. Rather, as already indicated in Yokoo and Hosoe's work (Figure 34), a new visual narrative was created. This style is characterised by bold and subversive 'semiotic scrambles' representing Japanese war history, the female body, the abject and grotesque, and murder and suicide (Goodman 2009 & 1999; Hayashi 2014b:297; Mackie 2006; Wong 2018:134).

Bodily representations often came in the form of the sexualised female body. The female body, particularly that of the American woman, was a considerable focus for avant-garde artists. Depicting women suggests the complex desire of Asian men to possess women, albeit only in imagination, argues Ikegami Hiroko (in Cotton 2015). Tanaami's ongoing depictions of Western women in his posters (such as Figure 33) often included images of wartime fighter planes, making a reference to his war memories (Ikegami in Cotton 2015) and juxtaposing the sexualised, popularised female image with narratives of death and desire (de Antoni & Raveri 2017:23).

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In addition, Vera Mackie (2006:101) notes that the proliferated image of the female body was also partly used in dissent towards the Japanese government's increasing censorship and the state-backed *shingeki* theatre, and that it was used as a metaphor for post-war society. In 1960s Japanese posters, the abject depiction of bodily fluids being expelled was, at times, a metaphor for political corruption or increasing environmental pollution (Mackie 2006:101).

Figure 33: Yokoo Tadanori, *Rose-Coloured Dance: À La Maison De M. Civeçawa*, 1965.
Screen print, 104,14 × 73,82 cm.
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles. (LACMA).

Rose-Coloured Dance: À la Maison de M. Civeçawa (Yokoo 1965) (Figure 35), produced for a *butoh* performance by Hijikata, illustrates Mackie's (2006:101) statement. The woman on the right has a green fluid squirting from her breast as she dips her hand into an American-style tin of tuna. This shocking portrayal of the nude women, reminiscent of the Western art tradition, contrasts with the traditional Japanese imagery: imperialist rising suns, *mono no aware*-invoking cherry blossoms and *tsunami* waves reminiscent of Katsushika's *ukiyo-e* prints (appendix Figure

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10).[18] Moreover, the style of the poster resembles the *ukiyo-e* prints in its use of flat colours (Goodman 1999:10). It is important also to note that *ukiyo-e* prints were made to reflect the evanescence of life and the fleetingness of old Edo pleasure quarters – now only a snippet of a bygone world that evokes otherworldliness.

Feelings of otherworldliness and the uncanny are deepened when the viewer knows the original source of the women. The portraits of the women are copied from the painting *Gabrielle d'Estrées and one of her sisters* (circa 1594, by an unknown artist at the Fontainebleau School). This appropriation, along with the photomontage of the women indicative of a newspaper clipping, evokes a sense of temporality. The women are frozen in time at least twice; once by the original artist and again by Yokoo's imitation of them within his commentary on post-war Japan. Furthermore, Yokoo's affiliation with Hijikata's *butoh*[19] and the controversial combination of elements (traditional symbols with abject, nude female bodies) indicate a lack of concern for the establishment and for commercial advertising.[20] In this way, the work expresses Yokoo's resistance towards *shingeki* realism and unspoken Japanese rules of hierarchy and societal obligations (Richie in Mount 2016:450).

Subsequently, the poster in Figure 35 is classified into the following categories: ③D (death of aura) with regard to Yokoo's usage of colourful, flat *ukiyo-e* style graphics, ①C (World War II defeat and post-war Japan) and ③C (nostalgia) owing to the use of the imperial wartime Japanese flag (sun rays) and post-war modernity signifiers like the bullet train and bodily fluid (representing environmental pollution or political dissent). Lastly, category ①D (romanticisation of death) may also be relevant since the poster is for a *butoh* dance, which, as mentioned earlier, Hijikata refers to as 'the dance of death' or 'utter darkness'. The aesthetically appealing poster contrasts with the unsettling and abject theme of death, especially in the visceral manner in which the body is used in *butoh* choreography.

[18] The contrast between traditional and modern is further emphasised by the modern *shinkansen* train at the top of the poster and the pop-art tuna can at the bottom.
[19] The poster displays photographs of the surrealist writer Tatsuhiko Shibusawa (on which the performance's name is based), the *butoh* dancers Hijikata and Kazuo Ono, and three birds that represent the artists and designers Yokoo, Nakanishi Natsuyuki and Mitsuo Kanoh, who collaborated with Hijikata (Getty [sa]:[sp]).
[20] Yokoo protested against design that served consumerism and is quoted (in Bartal 2020:57) as saying: "it would be better if designers clarified the themes of their own lives. It is fine for a designer to recognise that design and economy cannot be separated, but then then he should reject it. When the designer is working, there should not be any consideration whatsoever of the commercial aspects". He continues to posit that designers should "use their [commercial] work to explore autobiographical themes" of their lives and thoughts.

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Furthering the discussion of the female body in the Japanese avant-garde, Mackie (2006:100) states that 1960s *angura* literature, film and posters displayed a fascination with women who committed crimes. The true case of Abe Sada, a sex worker who asphyxiated her lover during intercourse and cut off his penis in 1936, became a widely repeated theme in *angura* visual culture. She painted a love note on her lover's corpse with her finger dipped in his blood and carried his testicles in her handbag for a few days thereafter (Nornes 2021:60). After turning herself in, she was sentenced to a mere six years in jail and released after only serving five.

Before examining the posters of Abe, it is necessary to understand the political context surrounding the murder. It is not only the contrast between Abe's perceived beauty and her gruesome crime that captivated the imagination of designers and filmmakers but also what her crime came to symbolise afterwards. Abe's crime served as a fascinating distraction from the failed military revolution of 26 February 1936 (Goodman 2009:71). The 'February 2 incident' was an unsuccessful *coup d'état* initiated by rebels of the Japanese Imperial Army (Goodman 2009:65). On that day, troops occupied the Imperial Palace and other government buildings, seeking to replace Japan's parliamentary system with the emperor's sole rule (Goodman 2009:65).[21] Yet, despite their deification of the emperor and opposition to democracy, the rebels called for reforms that were fundamentally socialist, which they later termed 'Imperial Communism' (Shillony in Goodman 2009:65). Decades later, in the 1960s and 1970s, the ideological ambiguity of the incident became a recurring theme in avant-garde literature and film (Goodman 2009:65).[22] Notably, the failed revolution was often juxtaposed with Abe's crime. While some writers and posters simply reflected her scandalous character, others dealt with the political implications of her crime.

Abe's story offered an alternative to the political revolution epitomised in the failed military *coup*. Bringing the February incident and Abe's stories together, several writers and filmmakers used Abe as a symbol for political revolution (Goodman 2009:71).[23] Satoh Makoto's *Abe Sada's Dogs* (1975) (appendix Figure 6) positions Abe in the context of the February 26 incident, using her

[21] Claiming that evil politicians prevented the emperor from addressing social and economic injustices, the rebels believed that eliminating the politicians would allow the emperor to personally save Japan (Goodman 2009:65).
[22] The adaptation of Abe's story into film and theatre is part of the *ero-guro-nansensu* (erotic, grotesque nonsense エログロナンセンス) genre (Bartal 2020:154). The trend highlights a dark Japanese fascination with grotesque, erotic- culture- that- flourished- outside of the mainstream Japanese styles of the time (such as traditional and contemporary minimalism) (Bartal 2020:154).
[23] Famous examples include Ōshima's *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976) and Hiroshi's poem *Abe Sada* (1977).

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character to comment on the complex meaning of 'revolution' in the 1960s.[24] Presented here is a dichotomy between female/male, sex/revolution and eroticism/militarism. As Goodman (2009:72) infers from works by Ōshima Nagisa and Sekine Hiroshi, Abe (gendered female) represents an *erotic revolution*, an alternative to the *military revolution* (gendered male). In this way, the idea that personal sexual freedom could be an alternative to political revolution became a popular avant-garde concept.

Similarly, Murakami Takashi (2005:141) calls post-war Japan a 'castrated' nation. He believes that one way in which Japan desensitised itself after the war is through visual representations of hyper-violence, such as monsters, explosions and scenes of destruction and death (Murakami 2005:141). Moreover, as a result of post-war Japan's symbolic loss of masculinity[25] (specifically, the death of nationalism and militarism; gendered male), *angura* poster design in particular utilised representations of power over the female body in an 'erotic revolution' (Goodman 2009:72; White 2022:128), mainly through sexual imagery that includes rape. Many erotic themes are proliferated through Japanese avant-garde 'soft-porn' films,[26] and are merely hinted at in some posters (as demonstrated in Yokoo's *John Silver* poster series, Figures 38 and 39) (Mackie 2006:96).

Some posters depict Abe as an abject figure (Mackie 2006) while in others, she is elevated to a popular culture icon similar to the Mona Lisa – which he also used widely in his work – in that they are both widely recognisable and have uncanny, expressionless faces. Abe as an abject body is seen in Hirano's poster for Satoh's (1973) comedy about Abe (Figure 36). Although Abe was 31 years old at the time of the murder, Hirano makes her appear older and does not appear to fetishise her. Going against Japanese beauty standards of an ideal female, her body appears grey and muddy, her face is expressionless and tired, her stomach is larger than in reality and she holds a bloody knife. In the back, her dead lover is tied up.

[24] Satoh's film, set in 1936, starts with the lines: "Martial law was in effect, but … women in the Imperial capital continued to get knocked up". Here, Abe symbolises eroticism and biology, which are unaffected by politics. Even martial law cannot restrain pregnancy. Contrary to the works of Sekine and Ōshima (which closely follow Abe's confession), Satoh's play is a fantasy that describes the relationship between politics and eroticism. It challenges the idea that eroticism can serve as a substitute for political revolution (Goodman 2009:72).
[25] Daniel White (2022:128) also refers to the loss of military control under the American occupation as a 'castration' of the nation, whereas McArtor (2022:33) posits that rape functioned as a powerful metaphor for the American occupation.
[26] The most widely-referenced film in the literature is Ōshima's highly-controversial LGBT-version of Abe's story, *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976).

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Figure 34: Hirano Kouga, *Abe Sada: A Comedy*, 1973.
Offset lithograph on paper, 102,5 x 72,8 cm.
Cooper Hewitt Collection, New York. (Cooper Hewitt).

Yet, from a different perspective, Abe appears pregnant. In this case, Hirano could be suggesting the feminine eroticism/masculine militarism dichotomy that Satoh presents in *Abe Sada's Dogs* (see Footnote 113). In this way, a pregnant Abe represents femininity and sex in its fullness (that is, life), and her dead lover represents the masculinity of the February 2 incident (that is, death). In either case, this version of Abe contrasts with the predominantly 'decorative women' of many other *angura* posters (Mackie 2006:100), discussed later in this section. Figure 36 may be classified into the following categories: ①D (Romanticisation of death; specifically, repurposing Abe's gruesome crime into a profitable story in a time where erotic, gruesome images were trending underground) and ③A (the uncanny).

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Figure 35: Awazu Kiyoshi, *Abe Sada, Sekine Hiroshi Shishu*, 1971.
Offset print, 72.8 x 51.5 cm.
Kawasaki City Museum, Kawasaki. (Nonaka Hill).

The preoccupation with death, murder and Abe is demonstrated differently in Awazu's poster (Figure 37). Abe as a 'decorative woman' was a constant source of fascination to Awazu; she frequently appeared in his work. Her uncanny, expressionless face, akin to the mysterious smile of the Mona Lisa, adds an otherworldly element to her proliferated visual presence in the 1970s. The use of the grey halftone printing technique depicts Abe as even more uncanny, distant and mysterious, particularly for those familiar with what she is capable of. Yet, it still appears that Awazu romanticises her. As De Antoni and Raveri (2007:23) suggest, the idea of an attractive woman who turns out to be a cruel monster is a popular subject in Japanese art and literature. The allure of such a woman is a kind of sublime danger: the more intelligent, captivating and sensual she appears, the more dangerous and deadly is the monster inside her which leads her lovers to their demise.

In the case of this poster, one may question whether beauty and death can indeed co-exist. The poster suggests both themes but downplays the element of death, instead choosing to aestheticise and 'worship' Abe's image. It may be argued that her beauty and mysterious gaze reduce the perceived severity of her crime and her inextricable association with murder and

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death. Accordingly, Awazu's *Abe Sada* (1971) falls under the following categories: ①D (Romanticisation of death, by means of romanticising the image of a murderer), ③A (the uncanny) and ③B (the death of aura, in the sense that Awazu reproduced the same image of Abe across many of his works (see Figure 7 in the appendix for another example).

Apart from Abe, many women represented in avant-garde Japanese posters are rarely named. Women are mainly used for decorative purposes and as 'ornaments' for avant-garde visual culture, especially in *angura* works (Mackie 2006:103). A mysterious and sexualised female figure appears in Yokoo's posters for Kara Jurō's theatre series *John Silver: Love in Shinjuku* (1967), *John Silver: Continued* (1968) and the cover for the book *John Silver: The beggar of love* (1965) (Figures 38, 39 and 40). Unlike Awazu's Abe poster, Yokoo's posters suggest a *yugen* mystery rather than an uncanny mystery. The mystery lies in the invisible but suggested nudity of the woman's body. As Mackie (2006:101) suggests, in *angura* culture, there is a fascination with the possibility of seeing the female body or genitals.

Figure 36: Yokoo Tadanori, *John Silver: Love in Shinjuku*, 1967.
Silkscreen, 74 x 102,6 cm.
National Museum of Art, Osaka. (Poster Auctions International).

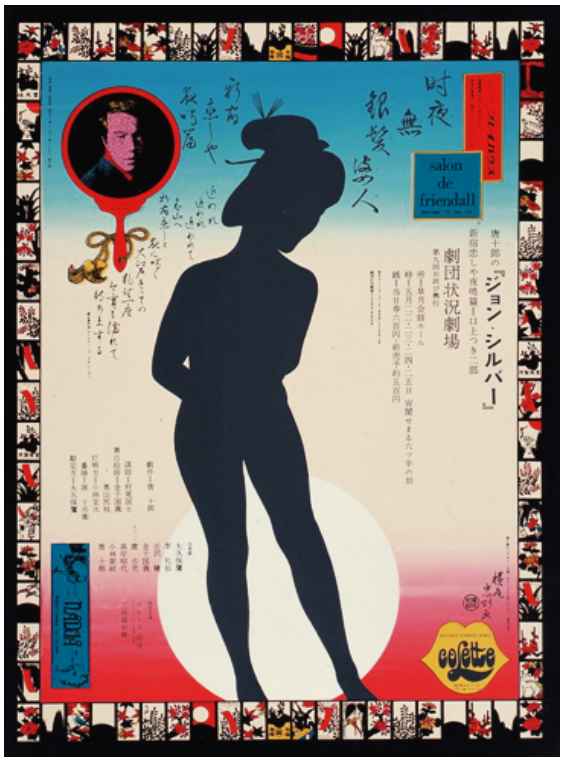

Figure 37: Yokoo Tadanori, *John Silver: Continued*, 1968.
Silkscreen, 74 x 102,6 cm.
National Museum of Art, Osaka. (Omnibus).

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The slender figure in Yokoo's posters is the antithesis to the grotesque female representation in Hirano's poster of Abe (Figure 37) (Mackie 2006:100). The silhouette obscures any context as to who the woman might be, stripping her of an identity. She has no name or story, except the inference that she is a *geisha* prostitute.[27] Goodman (1999:10) interprets the standing woman's pose as sexual with her hands tied behind her back. This may differ from viewer to viewer, but Goodman (1999:10) suggests this considering the context of the play, wherein John Silver rapes women who are symbolic of Asian nations. Thus, if a reference to sexuality is the only reason why she is included on the poster, it may be argued that her individuality is as good as dead as she only exists for the male gaze, and her body only exists for colonisation (that is, Japanese colonisation of Asian territories during the Pacific War).[28]

Figure 38: Yokoo Tadanori, *John Silver: The Beggar of Love book cover*, 1965.
12.5 × 17.6 cm. (Kosho).

The theme of identity and ways of being was a central concern in the 1960s *angura* space (Eckersall 2006:73). Kara's *John Silver* trilogy uses the character of John Silver, borrowed from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883), as a metaphor for Japan's colonisation of East Asia during the Pacific War (Eckersall 2006:73). In Kara's adaptation, John Silver's wooden pirate leg does not symbolise adventure, but rather the destructive impact of war (McArtor 2022:33). Described by Eckersall (2006:73) as a 'spectral presence', John Silver is

[27] Her hair is in the Shimada-style of the Edo period (1603 to 1868), often worn by *geishas*.
[28] These include, but are not limited to, Manchuria, Thailand, Laos, The Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan and Malaysia.

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otherworldly, embodying different identities and meanings: a pirate, a mythical and historical figure, and one that preys on young Asian bodies for sexual pleasure.

His otherworldly 'presence' is also synonymous with death. Silver kills his victims and claims their gold teeth as his bounty. This alludes to themes of occupation, exploitation and fascism, reminding the viewer of Japanese war profiteering, state-organised prostitution rings and enforced labour camps (Eckersall 2006:73). According to Christopher Mount, art curator and author of *The complete posters of Tadanori Yokoo* (2010), Yokoo deserves much acknowledgement for "the balance and conflict between the beautiful and grotesque that characterises a great deal of current Japanese art" (in Design Observer 2010).

The book cover for *John Silver: The beggar of love* (Kara 1965, Figure 40) prominently depicts the silhouette of Silver, overshadowing a woman being sexually assaulted, presumably by himself. In this portrayal, Silver represents hypermasculinity as he exerts dominance over the woman. In this way, the male body is equated with war and power, as the woman symbolises Japanese-occupied Asian territories during the Pacific War (Eckersall 2006:73). In *angura* visual culture, depictions of rape are often used as metaphors for experiences of war and political abuse of power. Additionally, rape may be associated with death, in the sense of losing autonomy, purity and safety.

Moving on to a metaphoric death – that is, the death of aura in a mechanically reproduced artwork – Yokoo's inclusion of *hanafuda* cards and an apology note challenges Benjamin's (1970) aura. Each poster's border is made of to-size *hanafuda* (Goodman 1999:10). Their magery adds a sense of ironic fantasy and tradition to the otherwise anti-traditional, shocking nature and commentary of the poster. While preparing the artwork to take to the print shop, Yokoo took real *hanafuda*, glued them to plywood, and asked the shop to duplicate them onto the poster (Uesaki 2012). From a Benjamanian perspective, it can be argued that photocopying and mechanically duplicating the cards remove their inherent aura, but in this case, the *hanafuda* are already duplications of other cards. Going deeper, when the first poster is printed, and only one exists, it has aura and is an original work. Yet, if the poster is duplicated, it

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becomes aura-free and loses cult value. Now, the work only has exhibition value, Benjamin's concept for art post-aura (1970:225).[29]

John Silver: Continued (Yokoo 1968, Figure 39) presents a dichotomy between private and public, humorously blurring the boundaries between designer, client and viewer. On the bottom right corner (next to Yokoo's signature stamp and the Colette sponsor stamp) is an apology note in vertical text: "Dear Kara Jurō, please forgive me for being late with this design" (Goodman 1999:10; Uesaki 2013:[sp]). Incorporating this private message into a public medium challenges the roles of the designer, client and viewer. Where posters are intended to convey a public message, this poster conveys a private one that is so miniscule, it becomes something of an inside joke between Yokoo, Kara and whoever else notices it.

Furthermore, the role and function of the poster (Figure 39) are of interest to Yokoo, as the poster was late and did not serve its role as a pre-event advertisement (Uesaki 2013:[sp]). Yokoo thus described the poster as "deviating completely from the function of a poster in that it was completed on the morning of the day of the performance" (Uesaki 2013:[sp]). The question thus arises whether the poster then gains a sense of aura and mysticism since, according to Yokoo, its fundamental function and purpose were lost once it was not delivered on time and became a personal message.

In contrast, Uesaki Sen (2013:[sp]) argues that once a poster is printed, it cannot deviate from its function as a poster. It cannot go back to what it was in its pre-printed state. Therefore, it always maintains the function of a poster. It appears that Yokoo over-spiritualises his design process in attempting to remove the poster from its media and 'exhibition value' (Benjamin 1932) simply by stating that it 'deviated' from the function of a poster. The poster announces a specific event but afterwards still remains a poster (Uesaki 2013:[sp]). For this reason, designer Kamekura (in Uesaki 2013:[sp]) sarcastically called Yokoo a 'genius in his own mould'.

In the *John Silver* poster series (Figures 38 and 39), Yokoo juxtaposes multiple meanings and worlds: the reference to the tradition of *ukiyo-e*, the world of *geishas* and prostitutes, *hanafuda* fantasy, *angura*'s challenging of *shingeki* theatre, the otherworldly nature of aura and its death

[29] On the other hand, Patricia Emison (2021:13) suggests that art does not need to invoke cult value. The crucial criterion is that the viewer finds the work both meaningful and somewhat unfamiliar, leading to contemplation (in contrary to Benjamin's 'despised distraction') as the goal, not adulation or worship. The new aesthetics Benjamin (1970) promoted is no longer 'new enough' (Emison 2021:13).

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and references to war, rape and death. The assigned categories for the posters are hence ①C (World War II defeat), ①B (fantasy) for *hanafuda*, fantasy and metaphors and ③B (aura).

Mackie (2006:97) indicates that, unlike the 'soft-porn' poses of women in *angura* posters (Figures 35 to 39), when the male body is shown, it is in the form of a *samurai*, a gangster or someone associated with 'hypermasculinity' (for example, Mishima, who was also a bodybuilder). Briefly introduced in Chapter Three, *Ballad Dedicated to an Amputated Little Finger* (Figure 41) demonstrates the aestheticisation of suicide and bodily destruction, but in a witty, sophisticated manner. The poster of Mishima hints at the *yakuza*'s pinkie-cutting practice (Mount 2016:447). This is arguably humorous as Mishima was not a member of the *yakuza* 'cult' but he formed his own 'cult' called (The Spear Society). Moreover, his non-membership of the Yakuza is emphasised in horizontal text at the left, which reads 'Yakuza aren't the only real men'.

Figure 39: Yokoo Tadanori, *Ballad Dedicated to an Amputated Little Finger*, 1967. Silkscreen, 103 x 74 cm. (Museum of Modern Art, New York).

Figure 40: Yokoo Tadanori, *Yuhi Shosetsu*, 1968. Silkscreen, 103 x 74 cm. Courtesy of Yokoo Tadanori. (M+ Hong Kong).

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Lastly, although Mishima did not have any tattoos, Yokoo adorns his arms with them in the photograph, further reinforcing a yakuza-like identity for Mishima: tattoos (*irezumi*), originally used to mark criminals, have become synonymous with *yakuza* members (Virk 2019). Furthermore, Mishima's sword-bearing image aestheticises suicide, evoking a *samurai*-like sense of national honour, particularly considering his political beliefs and views regarding the honour of *seppuku*. This association is reinforced by the banner behind him, which reads 'Let's die' (translation by the author).[30] In this way, death is as the central theme of the poster (Figure 41), conveyed through text, imagery, and connotations such as blood, *irezumi* (tattoos) Mishima himself, and the *yakuza* practice of *yubitsume* (pinkie-cutting).

Another person driven to commit *seppuku* is Yuhi Shōsetsu (1605–1651), whom Yokoo illustrates in a poster for an opera performance of the same name (Figure 42). Yuhi led a rebellion in 1651 in which he aimed to overthrow the Tokugawa Shogunate. His coup failed, and he committed suicide after being discovered and cornered (Ian 1970:91; Sansom 1963).[31] The poster (Figure 42) repeats two images of Yuhi committing *seppuku* on top of a Mitsubishi A6M Zero aircraft, effectively putting a historical persona in a modern (at the time) context. Mitsubishi A6M Zeros were the most iconic aircraft models used in *kamikaze* missions (X). In this way, Yuhi's image can be read either as a *samurai* committing *seppuku*, or as representative of a *kamikaze* self-sacrifice (Goodman 1999:62). In this poster too, images of death are juxtaposed with beauty: roses, waves and Yokoo's signature beautiful yet ominous red sky.

Yokoo's humour is brought in with the yellow banners, reminiscent of *manga* comic books' onomatopoeia, which have sinister laughing sounds written on them. Female figures with warplane wings fly above, reminiscent of a squadron of Japanese planes from World War II. The winged figures suggest grotesque, uncanny hybridity between human and non-human forms (Goodman 1999:62; Mackie 2006:100).[32] Perhaps this is Yokoo's way of humanising the Japanese military's actions during the war. By juxtaposing the images of the hybrid figures with

[30] Interestingly, the vertical text on the left reads '*Yakuza* aren't the only real men' (Yakuza *bakari ga otoko janee* やくざばかりが男じゃねえ) (translation by author). The use of *janee* (じゃねえ), a rough slang variant of the grammatically correct *janai* (じゃない), conveys a strong, rebellious tone, suggesting that masculinity is not confined to the *yakuza*. This reflects Mishima's personal pursuit of masculinity through bodily discipline and its preservation in death, rather than through gang affiliation. This interpretation stands in contrast to the overt *yakuza* imagery that Yokoo integrates into the poster.
[31] After his death, authorities mutilated his corpse and crucified his parents and other family members. Despite his political schemes being unsuccessful, Yuhi came to symbolise the increasing political turmoil during the early Edo period owing to strict law enforcement.
[32] Also seen in other posters and plays, gravity-defying figures and the crossing of bodily and fantasy boundaries are major themes in the *angura* plays and posters that promoted them (Mackie 2006:100).

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World War II era bombers and Yuhi killing himself on top of them, the human aspect of war and the inevitability of death as a result thereof is emphasised.

Figure 41: Yokoo Tadanori, *Tadanori Yokoo, having reached a climax at 29, I was dead*, 1965.
Screen print, 109,2 x 79,1 cm.
Museum of Modern Art, New York. (MoMA).

Yokoo's (1965) 'self-obituary' announcement (Figure 43) is another poster depicting suicide, wherein he illustrates his own death by hanging.[33] The title of the work is at the bottom and reads 'Having reached a climax at the age of 29, I was dead'. In his hand, he holds a single rose, a symbol of beauty and life that creates a striking juxtaposition against the overarching themes of death and finality. The rose, a recurring motif in Yokoo's work (consider the rose

[33] The work was made for the graphic design exhibition *Persona* in November 1965, which helped position graphic design as a respected medium worthy of being showcased in art galleries. While most of the work exhibited was practical, such as calendars, magazine covers, and posters advertisements, Yokoo's work stood out as the only work in a design format that did not advertise a product or event (Lynam 2022). The subsequent fame of this poster helped secure the role of posters in the Japanese avant-garde as works of art as well as advertisements.

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hanafuda card in Figure 41 and the roses in Figure 42), suggests an interplay between beauty, life and death.

His poster is not only a nod to his inevitable death – which he claims to constantly ponder – but also to the death of wartime Japanese imperialism and Modernism (Lynam 2022:[sp]). To this end, the body and the sun rays are used as political commentary, as they are reminiscent of the imperial Japanese flag, and thus an expression of dark humour as Yokoo juxtaposes his death onto the flag of a 'dead' empire. Yokoo ironically employs the sun rays motif as a nod to the Japanese imperial dream and military power that no longer exists, much like the figure of him being hung. The red radiating rays, seen five times in the work, not only symbolise Japanese imperialism but also suggest a nostalgia for historic Japanese packaging design – sun rays were seen on matchboxes produced in the early 1900s (Lynam 2022:[sp]). Reinforcing the nostalgic theme is the label 'MADE IN JAPAN' at the top of the work.

Lastly, the depiction of his own suicide is an attempt to challenge the post-war Japanese acceptance of Western modernism (Reyes 2021:[sp]). He metaphorically kills the ideals of Western Modernism through adopting a busy, pop and ornamental style that differs from the Bauhaus-inspired Modernist styles that other (non-avant garde) Japanese designers adopted (Lynam 2022:[sp]; Yoshiaki 1983:39).

Considering further details of the work, a photograph of Yokoo at one and a half years old is in the bottom left. At the bottom right, a rectangle holds one of his school photos. These hint at a sense of nostalgia that Yokoo may have felt as he ponders his life and death. His school photo is juxtaposed with a pink hand making a sexually suggestive gesture (Rawlings 2011:104). In the top left, a *shinkansen* bullet train – the ultimate symbol of Japanese progress and modernity – passes in front of an ominous Mount Fuji spewing smoke. The explosive potential of the volcano in the top right corner is usurped by a greater power: an atomic bomb's mushroom cloud. Yokoo's tongue-in-cheek poster is intended also to be an allusion to his pessimism about Japan after World War II. His use of dark comedy and nostalgia soften his fear of death, which stemmed from an early childhood awareness that one day, his parents would vanish.[34] For

[34] At age two, he watched his foster father cross a fragile, makeshift bridge during a typhoon. As his mother carried him on her back, he felt both warmth and an unsettling fear of death. Yokoo lost both his foster parents years later. As he continued exploring death in his works, his fear eventually began subsiding (Sougiya 2017:[sp].

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Yokoo, contemplating death was never a grim obligation but rather an endless source of creative and philosophical inquiry (Sougia 2017:[sp]).

The above posters (Figures 41 to 43) accordingly fall into the following categories: ①B (fantasy), ①C (World War II defeat), ①D (aestheticisation of suicide) and ③A (the uncanny, by referencing dead bodies that evoke both fear and wonder). Finally, slight hints of nostalgia appear (4C) from the *ukiyo-e* waves and flat colours, Yokoo's baby picture (Figure 44) and a harkening back to pre-war Japanese times (of Yuhi Shosetsu and Yokoo's childhood).

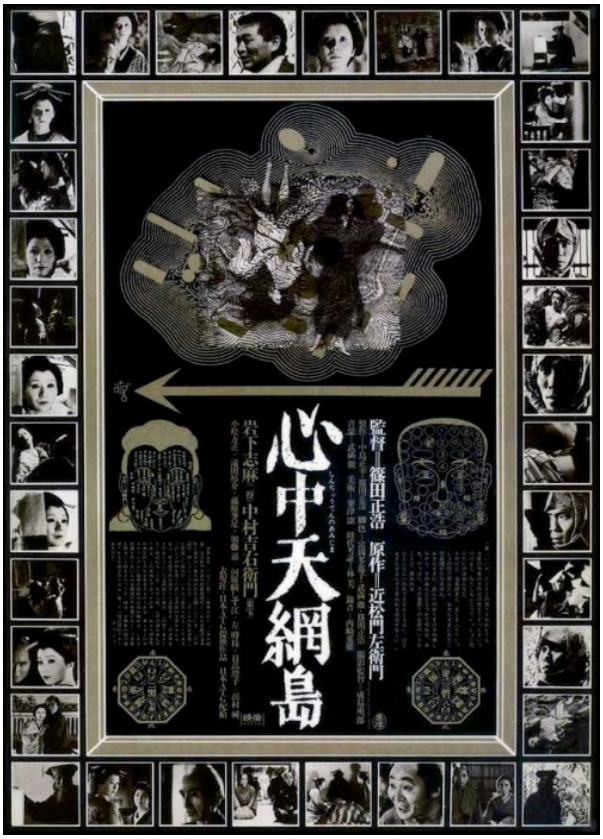

Figure 42: Awazu Kiyoshi, *Double Suicide* (monochrome), 1969.
Silkscreen, 101.6 x 71.12 cm.
21st Century Museum of Modern Art, Kanagawa. (Gurafiku).

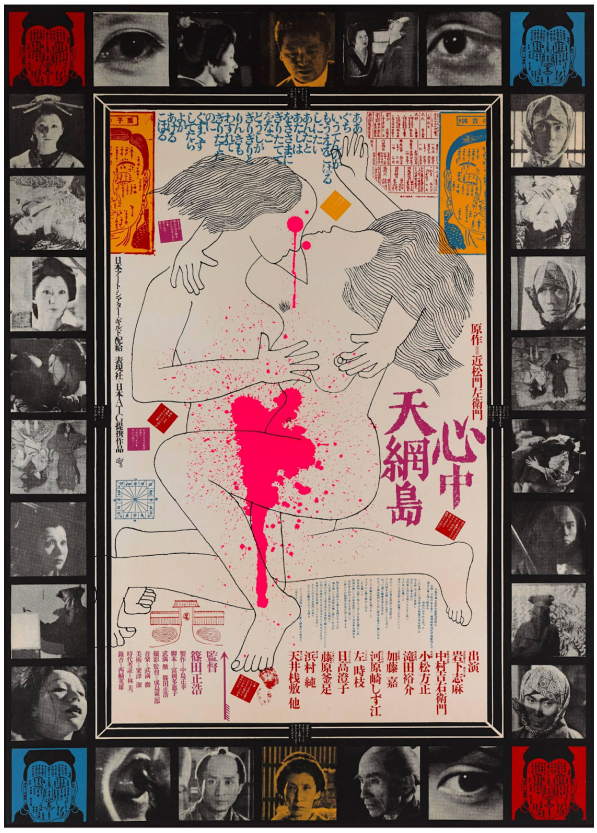

Figure 43: Awazu Kiyoshi, *Double Suicide* (colour), 1969.
Silkscreen, 101.6 x 71.12 cm.
21st Century Museum of Modern Art, Kanagawa. (Vinterior).

Similarly, Awazu's posters for Shinoda Masahiro's film *Double Suicide* (1969) (Figures 44 and 45) as well as the film itself, aestheticise suicide by portraying it as a visually pleasing and

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romantic event.[35] *Double Suicide* (1969) is a historical drama directed by Shinoda Masahiro. The plot follows Jihei, a married paper merchant from Osaka, who has an affair with a prostitute, Koharu. Jihei promises to free Koharu from her brothel's contract but cannot afford it. Desperate to leave the brothel, Koharu begs Jihei to kill her. Instead, because of his love for her, Jihei decides on a double suicide so that their love may continue in the afterlife. Together, they go to a graveyard at dawn, make love and proceed with *shinju*. After Jihei cuts Koharu's throat, he hangs himself with her *obi* (kimono sash) on a Shinto *torii* gate (Johnston 2001:[sp]).

The works present religious and otherworldly concepts: in the centre of the monochrome poster is a still from the suicide scene showing Jihei and Kowaru lying lifeless on a mat. In the colour version, they are stylised as linework cartoon figures. Both posters include Buddhist physiognomy and *hakken* charts, often repeated across Awazu's work (see *Inugami* in Figures 52 and 53). In addition, the reference to *shinju* suggests a romantic continuation of the lovers' lives in the otherworld (*anoyo)*.

Figure 44: Film still from *Double Suicide* (1969), directed by Shinoda Masahiro. (Harvard Film Archive 2005).

[35] Double Suicide (1969) is based on a *bunraku* puppet play by Monzaemon called *The Love Suicides at Ten no Amijima* (1721) (Johnston 2001:[sp]). A number of unorthodox visual techniques contribute to the aestheticisation of suicide in the film. Cavanaugh (2007:205) suggests that *Double Suicide* follows an emerging trend in post-war Japanese media called 'homeland eroticism'. The film's setting in nature and in the past romanticises the ancient past and presents a sense of *furusato* nostalgia. The suicide scene (Figure 46) where Jihei and Kowaru lie on a mat in a field is powerful and visually compelling in its symmetry and contrast.

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Uli Linke (2010:80) maintains that depictions of dead bodies are intentionally distributed in the media by those who capitalise on the awe and shock value of death. Despite some (Cavanaugh 2007:205; Miller 2022:71) positing that the film beautifies and romanticises suicide, it is interesting to note that this was not the director's intention. In the opening scene, Masahiro's voice is heard in a call to the art director instructing him to not make the ending profound: "the suicides must not be beautiful" (in Miller 2022:71).[36] Even as the film romanticises the suicides, in some cases, the trauma of suicide may overpower its potential aesthetic quality (Miller 2022:71).

On the other hand, Mara Miller (2022:67) proposes that *Double Suicide* (Shinoda 1969) is a devastating perspective on how suicide affects those left behind, like Jihei's wife. The tragedy of suicide is further emphasised by blood-splatter-like ink blobs in the backdrop of the film (which grow larger with each scene), and the blood shown in the colour poster. At the same time, the aestheticisation of the suicides is arguably socially 'valuable' in that it negates the abject horror that is triggered by death, potentially revealing reasons for the death and evoking empathy (Miller 2022:72).

Considering the analysis above, the posters (Figures 39 and 40) are classified under: ①B (fantasy and fiction), ①D (romanticisation and aestheticisation of death suicide), ②A (religion) *shinju* is believed to bring lovers together in the Buddhist afterlife, ③B (uncanny) on the basis that the uncanny is evoked through imagery of the corpses and ③C (nostalgia and *furusato*) for the traditional Japanese landscape.

Contrary to aestheticising death, designer Akasegawa Genpei chooses to represent the horrors of death, relying on uncanny, gruesome and metaphoric visuals of crude sexuality. Graphic images of death can be disturbing, yet they draw the viewer's attention in an unsettling yet captivating way (Linke 2010:80). Akasegawa illustrates this in the poster for Kara's *Virgin City* (1969) (Figure 47). The poster intends to show post-war Japan as overburdened by corruption, which overwhelms its political landscape and isolates its citizens (Goodman 1999:63). To emphasise this, in the upper right corner is the Japanese Diet (parliamentary building), submerged in a black sea, suggesting the 'death' of a stable political system.

[36] However, Miller (2022:71) describes *Double Suicide* as the 'most beautiful' film she has seen. I agree.

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Whereas Goodman (1999:63) posits that the poster (Figure 47) is more representative of Akasegawa's signature cartoon style than the content of the play, McArtor (2022:18) suggests that Kara hired Akasegawa for the latter's confrontational graphic style, which matches the performance's direct and provocative tone. It is interesting to note that the poster was not reproduced for advertisement but was displayed outside the theatre tent as a 'sort of medal' (McArtor 2022:18). The cult status of the poster reflects the fact that Kara's Situation Theatre troupe had warranted the collaboration and attention of such a notable designer as Akasegawa. If indeed only one poster was printed, it certainly has aura and worship value.

Figure 45: Akasegawa Genpei, *Virgin City*, 1969.
Silkscreen, 72,8 x 51,4 cm.
Bunkamura Gallery, Tokyo. (Quotation Tokyo).

There is a sense of otherworldliness in the poster as a symbol of collaboration between *angura* groups and as an artwork rather than an advertisement. Moreover, ideals of death and the abject are elicited by the floodwaters engulfing Tokyo, the dead fish at the bottom right and the figure on the left hanging by the foot from a saddle and bleeding from the vagina. In the play,

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Kara (in Poulton 1996:198) states, “Whenever I see a menstruating virgin, I think of the [Japanese] state”. The play and poster are evocative of Kara’s preoccupation with feminine purity and defilement and comments on Japan’s imperialist undertakings in Manchuria. A part of the play takes place in Manchuria, a ‘virgin territory’ that Japan infiltrated and violated during World War II (Poulton 1996:198). These themes are further illustrated by a vagina floating on a boat to the right of the young girl’s face (this is also a nod to the incorporation of a big glass vagina prop that shatters during the play) (Poulton 1996:198).

Kara lost his sister because of malnutrition in the war. Perhaps the girl in the poster with the youthful hair bows is a reflection of her. The play’s protagonist is operated on by doctors and is revealed to have a lock of black hair in his stomach, belonging to his unborn sister. Cody Poulton (1996:198) suggests that the play thus has an autobiographical undertone.

A peculiar juxtaposition appears in the contrast of the presumably virginal, big-eyed cartoon girl[37] with the gory and sexual elements of the remainder of the work. The poster is thus also uncanny, as the imagery may elicit feelings of repulsion, horror and unpleasantness from the viewer (Freer 2013:332; Freud 1919:241). The categories applicable from the framework are, therefore, ①B (a fantasy, fictional world), ①C (the governmental corruption in the aftermath of World War II), ③A (the uncanny and abject) and ③B (aura and worship value).

4.1.3 Traditional culture and fantasy

The following works are examples of the ‘energetic flow of signifiers’ in the production of visual culture in the late 1960s. These posters align with the narrative of what Hayashi (2012a:299) and Eväsoja (2007:434) describe as fantasy worlds. Hayashi (2012a) refers to fantasy in the realm of visual culture in post-war Japan, whereas Eväsoja (2007:434) attributes it to Japanese aesthetic appreciation.

An evocation of fantasy worlds and fictional realities is seen in some posters that use *noh* masks. The designers of the examples below (Figures 48 to 50) reimagine traditional masks in a new, fantastical manner, combining colour and shape to bring them to life. *Noh* masks are traditionally white, but in Figure 48, Awazu reimagines them in black, evoking an otherworldly,

[37] The girl is below the large banner in the water, and her eyes are used for the play’s title typography.

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yugen quality. A surrealist influence is seen in Yokoo's poster in Figure 49 in what appears to be an ocean and the sky in the background with a floating mask. In Figure 50, Tanaka uses the most high-contrast areas of the mask, such as eyebrows, eyes and lips, and superimposes them on modern geometric shapes.

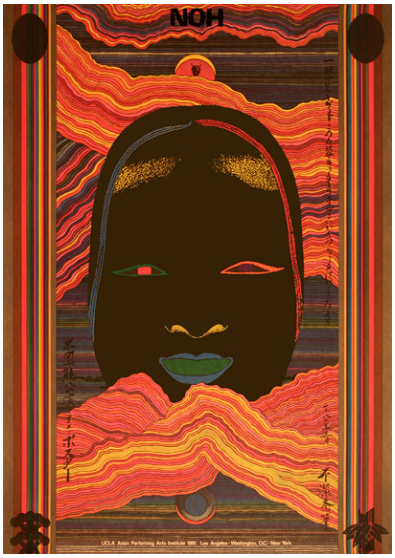

Figure 46: Awazu Kiyoshi, *Noh*, 1981.
Silkscreen, 72 x 103 cm.
Omnibus Gallery, Aspen.
(Omnibus).

Figure 47: Yokoo Tadanori, *A Noh Play*, 1969.
Silkscreen, 72 x 103 cm.
Poster Auctions International Inc., New York.
(Invaluable).

Figure 48: Tanaka Ikko, *Noh Performance*, 1958.
Silkscreen, 72 x 103 cm.
Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Amsterdam. (Tank Magazine).

Steven Ridgely (in Marotti 2013:216) brings up an interesting dichotomy, which indicates that during the late post-war years, traditional Japanese activities such as *noh* and *kabuki* theatre were newly perceived as exotic, not just by Westerners but also by young Japanese who grew up exposed to American culture. In this way, the traditional becomes otherworldly: in a post-war Japanese context of American advertisements, Pop Art, theatre and music, traditional Japanese theatre and its elements (such as *noh* masks) are positioned as otherworldly and fantastical.

The posters bear significant semiotic value, particularly during the post-war era when the American occupation brought with it new technology and practices that appeared to detract from traditional Japanese culture and landscape. The influence of the U.S. military was not only physical, with the establishment of their military bases, but also carried the memory of their perceived demonic nature. While leftist student unions vocally expressed their anti-American sentiments, alternative theatrical movements and *noh* plays had the potential to enrich people

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with impactful and profound experiences that real life could not (Holborn 1983:52). In this context, *noh* theatre, its masks and its posters serve as a form of fantasy, offering an otherworldly escape from the impact of the presence of U.S. forces during the occupation and the consequences of Japan's surrender.

Moreover, the fascination with Japanese traditional arts lies in the capacity of the art form to suggest a fantasy world and fictive reality, whether it be a *haiku*, *noh* play or work of calligraphy (*shōdo*) (Eväsoja 2007:434). In doing so, *noh* theatre serves as a way to escape the realities of this world. It is important to consider again, as discussed in Chapter Three, that *noh* theatre and its *yugen* quality emphasises otherworldliness with stylised movements, which only hint at meaning and feelings. This allows the viewer to create meaning with their imagination and participate in the fantasy experience (Eväsoja 2007:434).

Noh plays are not only illusions of reality, but their masks are also illusions of facial expressions (Sorgenfrei & Terayama 1994). Intended to be expressionless, the masks allow the viewer to project any expression onto it that they like (Holborn 1983:53). In this way, the masks act like mirrors that reflect the subjective experiences of the viewer. Owing to *noh's* interplay between reality and fantasy, emotion and non-emotion, it is characteristically sublime (Holborn 1983:53). Thus, masks are potent tools for invoking a sense of mystery (*yugen*) and ambiguity (*ma*) because they conceal the true identities of the actors. The viewer is invited to engage deeply with the symbolic implications of the characters and their masks (Sorgenfrei & Terayama 1994). This allows the viewer to question the margins between reality and unreality as well as truth and falsehood.

Following Buddhist attitudes, *noh* is the sense of the 'illusion of life' as it rejects empirical reality. As *noh* often references Buddhist doctrines (Miller 2022:68; Yamamoto 2008:163), it may be argued that the posters above cannot be read as separate from the religious meanings of *noh*. Hence, owing to the *noh* mask's dual nature as a religious (Buddhist) artefact and a theatrical tool, it is essential to examine the posters with the masks in the realms of religion, art and theatre. Still, as the designers disembody the masks from their wearers and plays, the masks not only inherently refer to religion and tradition, but also contribute to creating a new, avant-garde, modern language of Japanese graphic design. This is visible in Awazu's *noh* poster that includes his signature topographic lines, referring to the traditional Japanese mountainous landscapes and his perpetual goal to create a new Japanese graphic language (Chong

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2012:37). In this way, the works also refer to the aesthetic appreciation of fantasy (Eväsoja 2007:434).

In the above posters, it may be argued that owing to the ambiguous and mystical nature of *noh* masks, a sense of *yugen* is evoked. Similarly, the posters allow the viewer to project a subjective meaning onto the work as the mask is designed to be expressionless. As such, these posters can be assigned the following categories: ①A regarding *yugen* and Japanese aesthetics, ①B for the fantasy and fictional world of *noh* and its rejection of realism, ②A for religious references and ③B regarding aura and worship value.

Tradition and fantasy are further depicted in Awazu's poster for *Himiko* (1974) (Figure 51). *Himiko* is director Masahiro's dramatisation of the Japanese origin myth of Himiko, a third century shaman queen and sorceress (Curry 2017:80; Bartnes 2014). The poster and the film combine three worlds: the mythical world of Himiko and traditional Japan, surreal, pop-art-like graphics and references to modernity from the film's minimal set design and plot (Appendix Figure 8).[38]

The film is a dramatised and modernised tale of Himiko, a Shinto *kami* (goddess) who is believed to be part of the mythical family that founded Japanese society.[39] Himiko assumes the role of queen following the king's death. Eventually, she is killed in the mountains, owing to her desire for her half-brother. The film starts in an unnamed forest, where Himiko performs a ritual with a mirror, symbolising the Sun God penetrating her. Near the film's end, the forest (from the opening scene and Himiko's death site) is revealed to be on a *kofun*, an ancient keyhole-shaped burial mound. The scene then reveals that offices, factories, homes and a highway surround the forest, indicating that it is the present day. The film thus juxtaposes contemporary perspectives of the city with the story of one of the earliest Japanese myths.[40]

[38] Awazu also acted as the art director and set designer for the film (Moreno 2021).
[39] Himiko's identity is heavily debated in Japanese mythology and history. Some believe that she is based on the sun goddess Amaterasu, who is believed to have founded the Japanese nation. Others see Himiko as the human form of Amaterasu. In either case, she is recognised as a powerful shamaness and goddess who embodies themes of mysticism and the connection between the human and spiritual realms (Barnes 2014:19; Brett 1962).
[40] The Japanese Imperial family embraced the sun god myth as a means to legitimise their authority and the divinity of the emperor (World's Cinema 2015). Devout Shinto followers still regard the emperor as a deity in the twenty-first century. A crucial issue revolves around the *daijosai* ritual, the spiritual component of the emperor's traditional inauguration. Part of this ceremony requires the crown prince to enter a private tent. It is said that at a certain time he is visited by the sun goddess, Amaterasu. In the spiritual realm, the two become one, and he is then elevated to emperor status (Botes 2019:127).

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Figure 49: Awazu Kiyoshi, movie poster for *Himiko*, 1974.
Silkscreen, 101.6 x 71.12 cm
21st Century Museum of Modern Art, Kanazawa. (Gurafiku).

The poster communicates otherworldliness by referring to Himiko and the Japanese founding myth and by means of Awazu's signature topographic lines. The layout allows for minimal typography to take up a small proportion of the design so that the viewer is immersed in the mesmerising concentric circles that represent the Sun God. Awazu also frequently used concentric circles, which he called 'meteorological contour lines' and parallel lines in his posters to represent the myth of the traditional Japanese landscape and *furusato* (Curry 2017:80). In this way, an otherworldly world before the war is depicted, transporting the viewer back to the mythical origin of Japan.

By the above analysis, the poster may be categorised in the following ways: ③A (the uncanny). ③C (nostalgia and *furusato)*, ②A (religion, referencing Himiko the Shinto goddess) and ①D (the aestheticisation of death).

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4.2 Posters in category two: Religion

Although religious elements have been identified in posters in the previous categories, the posters in this section depict religion more overtly with the intertextuality of death and otherworldliness. The first example to illustrate this is Awazu's poster for Terayama's mask play, *Inugami (The Dog God)* (1969) (Figures 46 and 47).[41] Carol Sorgenfrei and Terayama Shuji (1994:3) suggest that the ideas of falsehood and reality created by masks are key characteristics in Terayama's plays. His avant-garde troupe, *Tenjo Sajiki,* sought liberation from theatrical conventions and denied the 'theatre of realism' (Sorgenfrei & Terayama 1994:3). *Inugami* is a dog spirit in Japanese folklore associated with possession and the supernatural. In the play, a pregnant woman hears that her child will be possessed by the *Inugami* (Sorgenfrei & Terayama 1994). The performance ends with death when the protagonist's bride-to-be is found with her throat slit (The Japanese Foundation [sa]:[sp]).

By referencing the mythical spirit of *Inugami* (as a form of anti-realism) and using masks to blur the lines between fantasy and reality, Terayama contributes to the creation of a new world of avant-garde Japanese theatre and protests against *shingeki*'s realism. Even though the production is a mask play, Awazu does not show masks on the posters (apart from the German *maskenspiel,* kept from a poster version for an overseas production). Instead, he uses creative liberty and presents a multitude of religious and cultural imagery. Much of the imagery, such as hands, *hanko* name stamps, and Buddhist face maps (seen in the centre of both posters) is repeated in his other works.[42]

Awazu's montage-like compilations embody Hayashi's (2014b:297) 'semiotic scramble' wherein various textual and visual sources, motifs and media are juxtaposed, often without a particular narrative order. Goodman (1999:52) maintains that the numerous juxtaposed religious and otherworldly symbols are used to suggest a sense of Japanese exotica and otherness since the play was performed for a European audience overseas. Similar to Barthes' *Empire of Signs* (1982), where various Japanese cultural practices and signifiers combine to form a new world in

[41] As a summary, the play *Inugami* serves as a metaphor for Japan"s involvement in World War II, portraying the passing of sins from one generation to the next. It also reflects themes such as the impact of racial complexities within Japan, a sense of contamination from the atomic bomb, conflicting desires, isolation and confusion, as well as the notion of Japan being scapegoated by the West (Sorgenfrei & Terayama 1994:166). This is not necessary to discuss in the poster analysis as the poster rather illustrates religious concepts instead of references to World War II.
[42] None of these elements actually appear in the play, apart from references to *Inugami* itself (in the poster, the two large Chinese characters are *inu* [犬 dog] and *kami* [神 god]).

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his imagination, Awazu's poster becomes his own empire of signs which he too creates in his mind and shares with others. Furthermore, akin to how Barthes (1982) observes a subjective and personal viewpoint of Japanese traditions, the viewer of the posters is invited to create their own interpretations of the symbols.

Figure 50: Awazu Kiyoshi, *Inugami* (red), 1969.
Offset lithograph, 101.4 x 73.2 cm.
21st Century Museum of Art, Kanazawa.
(Gurafiku).

Figure 51: Awazu Kiyoshi, *Inugami* (colour), 1969
Offset lithograph, 101.4 x 73.2 cm.
21st Century Museum of Art, Kanazawa.
(Gurafiku).

Though minor differences exist, both versions of the poster (Figures 52 and 53) show strong religious imagery such as a fortune-telling physiognomy diagram, a Shinto priest and four *hakke* (八卦 eight trigrams) divination charts in the corners.[43] Buddhist and Taoist physiognomy charts are ancient methods of predicting the ages at which one will be lucky or unlucky.[44] In addition, a Buddhist altar is a key prop and Buddhist chants are invoked in the play; therefore, the reference to Buddhist symbols in the posters is not entirely random. Although the posters do not

[43] *Hakke* are eight symbols in Taoist cosmology that represent the fundamental principles of reality (Hayek 2011:329).
[44] The physiognomy diagram may refer to the bad luck of the main character in the play.

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directly reference Japan's war history, which the plot does, the works still convey themes of religion, cosmology and otherworldliness, which do appear in the play. Thus, the posters are classified under the following categories: ②A (Buddhism and Shintoism) and ①B (fantasy; regarding the imaginary world created by the posters' layouts, and the references to the *Inugami* spirit).[45]

In the 1970s, Yokoo's later works demonstrated a deep engagement with Eastern mysticism and religions as a result of his travels.[46] While visiting India in 1974, he actively sought ways to confront his fear of death and explore spiritual solace (Sato 1983:40). Through a shift in the subject matter in his poster designs, influenced by his encounters with Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism, Yokoo moved away from the Pop Art and psychedelic imagery of the 1960s, focusing instead on spiritual and utopian themes. This shift marked a departure from the earlier presence of what Tonō (1983:41) describes as 'vulgar this-worldliness' in Yokoo's works. In place of this, his works began to feature depictions of Buddhas, Indian deities, Tantric scenes and *mandalas* in bright colours. This transformation in subject matter indicates his desire to transcend the material world, engage in spirituality and otherworldliness through design, and reflect his urge to overcome the fear of death. Yokoo aims to attain spiritual enlightenment beyond the bounds of time and space, according to Tonō (1983:41).

Figures 54 and 55 present various layers of meanings in the realms of cultures, spirituality and religion. Figure 54 depicts a fantasy world where water becomes sky, creating the illusion of defied gravity. In front of a neon-pink sunset, a couple is depicted in a Tantric sex position. Then, in the exhibition poster (Figure 55), brightly coloured symbols of the Tibetan Vajravarahi *mandala*[47] and Garuda *mudra* (eagle seal gesture) float against a backdrop of darkness. The Garuda *mudra* is a yogic hand position imitating bird wings that symbolises inner freedom. The *mudra*, looking like a road sign, suggests that Yokoo's portrait is of him embarking on a spiritual voyage. The Buddhist *Jibo Kannon* (Goddess of Mercy; the most venerated deity at Buddhist

[45] Whereas the *Inugami* play suggests themes of death and destruction post-World War II, the posters do not make such indications. Therefore ①C (World War II defeat) applies to the play, but not the posters themselves.
[46] During a trip to New York amid the hippie culture of the 1960s, Yokoo rediscovered Japanese and Indian Zen (Gavin 2016:[sp]). A decade later, after the shock of Mishima's suicide, he visited India at an earlier suggestion from Mishima.
[47] The *mandala* of the goddess Vajravarahi, which Yokoo has reduced to a few simple shapes without her image, is used by monks newly initiated into Tantric meditation practices. Originally, her adornments suggest death: she wears a tiara of skulls and a necklace made of severed heads while she tramples a body below her (Metropolitan Museum of Art 1999).

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temples) gazes down at Yokoo while he looks back, as if to wonder if the viewer will accompany his journey into an inexplicable, sacred other world (Fu 2020:[sp]).

Figure 52: Yokoo Tadanori, *Shambala (AP-DEVALOKA) Water that is Heaven*, 1974.
Silkscreen, 97.8 x 67.9 cm.
Nantenshi Gallery, Tokyo. (MFABoston).

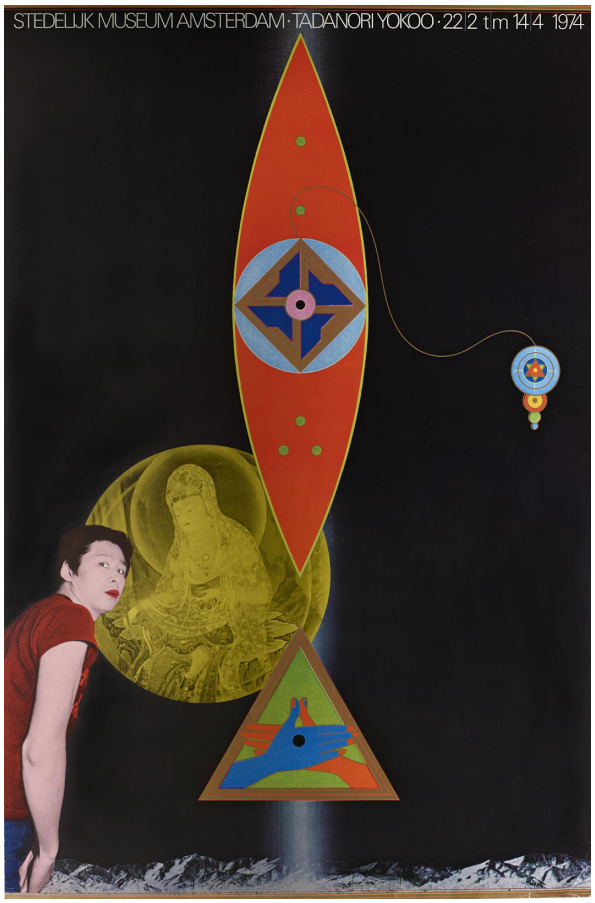

Figure 53: Yokoo Tadanori. *Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam*, 1974.
Silkscreen, 63.5 x 94 cm.
Poster Auctions International Inc., New York. (Invaluable).

In the same vein, regarding otherworldliness and nostalgia, the rapid urbanisation of the Japanese countryside since the post-war period resulted in the feeling that the Japanese 'cannot go home again' (Robinson 1988). Thus, without a metaphoric place to go home to, there is no place to feel nostalgic toward. By creating a new mythical location in his posters referencing his travels and spirituality, Yokoo's work is both symbolically nostalgic and an imagined home towards which nostalgia may also be felt.

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Tonō (1983:41) introduces the idea that Yokoo's work may be seen as a type of spiritual tourism. He draws attention to a Japanese wordplay, where the word for sightseeing, *kankō* (観光), is translated as 'light-viewing'. Yokoo's later works emphasise the significance of 'light' that emanates from the spiritual universe. For instance, many of his works portray beams of light emerging from deep, black backgrounds, encouraging viewers to meditate on the work (Tonō 1983:41). Yokoo (in Tonō 1983:51) says, "One of my motives for becoming a graphic designer was to make tourist posters. As a result, all my pieces end up looking like tourist posters. The only thing is that these posters are about places that don't exist on earth. They may be about a lost paradise".

As seen in the samples above, Yokoo's shift towards religious imagery is marked by a new genre of posters with unique levels of intertextuality, becoming entirely new 'other' worlds in themselves. Thus, the posters (Figures 54 and 55) fall under the categories ②A (religion) and ①B (fantasy).

Figure 54: Sugiura Kohei, *exhibition poster for* Tradition et Nouvelles Techniques: 12 Graphistes Japonais, 1984. Silkscreen, 59,4 x 84,1 cm.
(Reproduced in Nguyen 2010).

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In the domain of religious representations in design, Sugiura stands out as a prominent designer who incorporates themes of Buddhism and pan-Asian cosmology[48] into his work, as demonstrated in Figure 56. Departing from the Western design styles he was educated in, such as Bauhaus, Sugiura actively pursued the development of an Asian design aesthetic free from European influence (Nguyen 2020:82; Rajguru & Suga 2017:6). To achieve this, he drew inspiration from Buddhism, Taoism and various pan-Asian cosmologies and imagery such as Tibetan *mandalas* and the Chinese principle of *ch'i* (the vital energy and life force in the universe) (Nguyen 2020 & 2010).

Sugiura's posters exhibit religious symbolism and reference esoteric, otherworldly concepts imbued with *ma* (Nguyen 2010). The aesthetic principle of *ma* is sometimes referred to as the 'metaphysics of Shinto' (Kaneko in Graham 2007:42) or that which embodies themes of ambiguity, mystery and interconnectedness (Nguyen 2020:2).[49] Nguyen (2020) argues that the poster in Figure 56 profoundly illustrates Shinto and Buddhist aesthetics and metaphysics by means of the spiritually charged aesthetic of *ma* in the form of empty space. Negative space is essential for the balance of a picture (Blaine 2015:9). In his spiritualisation of the negative space and balance (for example, representing negative space as a place for the divine spirit *kami* to inhibit), Sugiura's work demonstrates how *ma* (invisible elements and negative space) is equally important as positive space (the visible elements). In this way, the invisible becomes visible.

To illustrate this more clearly, there is a glowing, sitting Buddha with a floating temple pagoda overlayed in the poster. On the sides are several types of *mandalas* suggesting that the poster, or at least its *mandalas*, is something of spiritual value to be meditated on. If a *mandala* is a work of religious art that presents an opportunity for meditation, then it can be argued that Nguyen's posters, too, can be seen as a sort of *mandala*. Nguyen (2020:3) suggests that the entire poster (Figure 56) is akin to a *mandala* in that it communicates spiritual concepts through artistic imagery, inviting viewers to experience its dynamism and spiritual aesthetics.

[48] Chinese, Indian and Buddhist cosmology emphasise interconnectedness, cyclical patterns of life, death and rebirth and the intrinsic metaphysics of being. Chinese cosmology in particular focuses on *ch'i* (or *qi*) as the fundamental substance of the universe. Indian cosmology and its mythologies regard the universe as a constant cycle of life. As the literature review identifies, Buddhism in particular emphasises the impermanence of life (Mak & Huntington 2022).
[49] To avoid confusion, it is necessary to note that *ma* is also a tenet of Buddhist aesthetic theory. It is easier to view *ma* as not solely a Buddhist or Shinto aesthetic, but rather a concept that draws from both and reflects the complex spiritual landscape of Japan (Nguyen 2020:1).

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Sugiura's objective with this poster is to capture the viewer's imagination by showing *ma* (empty space and ambiguity) embodied as a vivid and spiritual union of form and spirit (Sugiura in Nguyen 2020:83). Hence, through the lack of details such as the Buddha's face, the viewer is invited to escape and engage in the work in the sense of having the freedom to visualise facial expressions of their choice.

The poster belongs overall within category ③ (philosophy and metaphysics) but does not align to a specific subcategory (the uncanny, aura, nostalgia and *furusato* or nihilism and detachment). However, the work may also be categorised under ②A (religion) owing to its reference to Asian cosmology and spirituality and ①A (Japanese aesthetics).

Figure 55: Awazu Kiyoshi, *Mano-dharma Concert*, 1973.
Poster, 102,5 x 72,5 cm.
21st Century Museum of Modern Art, Kanazawa.
(Muzeum Plakatu).

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Pan-Asian imagery, colours and cosmology also appear in Awazu's poster for the 1973 *Mano-dharma* concert (Figure 57). The symbolism in the work, namely the turtle and the *mandalas,* take inspiration from the concept of *dharma* in Hindu-Buddhist traditions. *Dharma* embodies ambiguity (*ma*). In traditional *dharma* iconography, the turtle carries the cosmic mount Meru (the *axis mundi*) and the universe on its back (Nguyen 2010:14; Szelegejd 2013). Although the representation is not straightforward, Awazu references the mythical turtle but combines it with his recurring motif of a sea turtle.[50] Still, the poster displays a certain freedom, evident in the use of colours that are reminiscent of Pop Art (Szelegejd 2013).

The formal arrangement of the composition distinctly reflects the classical Buddhist designs and *mandalas* that make up the border. The beauty of the work is crucial to drawing viewers in so that they consider its complex meanings (O'Neal in Miller 2022:68). Awazu's *mandalas* draw attention to their messages about ultimate realities and the viewers' relationships to them (Miller 2022:68). Observing *mandalas* is a Buddhist practice that is believed to lead to enlightenment. Japanese monk Kūkai (in Odin 2016:25) instructs followers to meditate especially on *mandalas*. The *mandala* continues to serve as a religious symbol in Japanese design and art in the twenty-first century.[51] Awazu intends for the viewer to also observe the *mandalas* in detail so that the poster viewing experience becomes as spiritual as the concert is intended to be. ①A (Japanese aesthetics) and ②A (religion) are therefore the most applicable categories for this poster.

Intertextuality and religious elements remain key characteristics of Awazu's work. The 21st Century Museum of Modern Art at Kanazawa (2008:2) describes his repetition of signifiers like Sada Abe, turtles, fingerprints, palm lines, *hanko* seals, maps and topographic lines as a pilgrimage through a collection of distinctive popular culture icons. At times, Awazu simply enjoyed exploring certain symbols and the process of duplicating them.[52] Yet, it may be argued that these signifiers are not simply references to popular culture or his interests: examined deeply, some elements portray otherworldliness and death. One way this is often visible in his work is the use of religious imagery, imbuing posters with an otherworldly presence, as can be seen in Figure 58.

[50] This linework sea turtle motif, facing the same direction, appears on numerous Awazu posters in the 1970s. The turtle also reflects Awazu's interest in environmental issues.
[51] Havens (2006:92) provides the post-war art example of Tanaka Atsuko, a member of the avant-garde collective *Gutai* (1954–1972), who created modern paintings of circles indicative of Buddhist *mandalas* (Appendix Figure 2). In this way, she bridges religion, aesthetics and painting.
[52] His son Ken (in Shift 2008:[sp]) recalls that his father "[painted] to the finish for things he was attracted to. He was once attracted to Hokusai's *ukiyo-e*, and when he was attracted to lines he only drew lines. [Ken does] not know why [Awazu] was attracted to these particular things but he [painted] to the end by studying it and [continued] to paint it".

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Figure 56: Awazu Kiyoshi, *Flower Hall*, 1970.
Offset lithograph, 103 x 73 cm.
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles.
(LACMA).

The poster for Ryotaro Shiba's play *Flower Hall* (1970) (Figure 58) expresses Awazu's interest in symbols of religion, folklore and death. *Flower Hall* is a play that dramatises the Ōnin War.[53] In it, a military general and his wife are only concerned with preserving their own lives as the Ōnin war approaches. The pink text on the vertical pillars of the red *torii* gate reads: "On the eve of the Ōnin war, with dark clouds swirling around, people wander in search of love and salvation, tormented by desire and resentment, killing each other with passion" (translation by author).

The poster is heavy with intertextual religious imagery. In Japan, it is common for one to be adherent to both Shintoism and Buddhism, embracing syncretism (Brett 1962:19, 24). The

[53] The Ōnin war was a nationwide Japanese civil war from 1467 to 1477, which set off an era of warring states, lasting until 1573.

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recognition of both faiths coexisting may explain why Awazu includes a Shinto *torii* gate with a Hindu-Buddhist demon head positioned inside it within the context of a Buddhist hell realm. The poster is a pop-art style rendition of the late twelfth-century Hell scroll (*jigoku-zoshi* 地獄草紙*)*, in particular, the Hell of Excrement section[54] (Figure 59) (Merritt 2017:[sp]). In the Excrement Pit, sinners are boiled in sewerage while their bones are crushed by iron-beaked worms (Nara National Museum 2021).

Figure 57: Cropped detail from the Hell of Excrement *Jigoku-zoshi* (Hell scroll), circa 12th century.
Colour on silk, entire scroll: 26,5 x 454,7 cm.
Nara National Museum, Nara. (Nara National Museum Database).

Hell imagery is widespread in classical Japanese literature, art and performance. Gruesome depictions aimed to caution people to live good lives and warn them that justice awaits in the other world (Hirasawa 2008:1). Works like the *Jigoku-zoshi* scroll highlight demons and other creatures that devour and torture sinners in abject detail. The impact of retribution as a law of nature in Buddhism is reinforced by the immediacy and proximity of the agony in images of hell (Hirasawa 2008:8). Therefore, it may be argued that Awazu's depiction of hell in the poster suggests what awaits for the play's selfish protagonist and his wife.

Instead of directly depicting the protagonist or the setting, Awazu illustrates death and greed with reference to hell and a demon. Inside the demon's mouth is written *asura*. In Buddhism, *asura* refers to a titan, demigod or anti-god. Originally of Hindu origin, *asura*s are often depicted as power-seeking enemies of the gods (Beer 2003:246). It may be that Awazu uses the *asura*

[54] The scroll portrays the various levels of Buddhist hell (Merritt 2017).

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as a metaphor for the power-hungry nature of the play's protagonists. As presented in the literature review, Högman (2012:4) posits that images of 'terrifying monsters' elicit the uncanny. This demon, its association with sin and death and the backdrop of hell conjure up feelings of the uncanny and contribute to the fearsome narrative of the poster.

Therefore, themes of otherworldliness and death are evident with references to ①B (fantasy and the other world) relating to the *asura* demon and hell, ① (Japanese history: the Ōnin war), ②A (religion – Buddhism, Hinduism and Shinto) and ③A (the uncanny, grotesque and abject).

4.3 Posters in category three: Philosophy and metaphysics

The study of metaphysics concerns reality, ontology, possibility, space, and time. Leah Kalmanson's (2022) work particularly considers Japanese aesthetics as a metaphysical concept, focusing on the philosophical concepts that underscore the Japanese perception of beauty and aesthetic experience. Using the Chinese concept of *ch'i* (*ki* 氣 in Japanese), which Nguyen (2020) identifies as a critical aspect of Sugiura's work (Figures 56 and 65), Kalmanson (2022:47) suggests that *ch'i* can be used as a framework for understanding aesthetics, spiritual practices and artistic techniques (such as *haiku* and *noh*). Kalamanson's (2022) *ch'i* framework can thus also be applied to the analyses of posters that employ Japanese aesthetics. Moreover, metaphysics also seeks to understand existence and the human condition, and this is often done by considering aspects of religion and the universe. This section hence discusses posters that reflect the metaphysics of Zen Buddhism, sexuality, aesthetics and cosmology. In addition, two design philosophies by Awazu and Sugiura – *graphism* and an 'Asian grammar of design' – are presented in light of their relationship to otherworldliness and death within philosophy and metaphysics. Finally, the philosophy of 'de-advertising', a late post-war form of advertising that became popular in Japan, is introduced as a harbinger of the Japanese avant-garde era.

4.3.1 Metaphysics of death and eroticism

Corpse Vine on Ossa Famine Ridge (*Honegamitōge shininkazura* 骨餓身峠死人葛; 1969) is a book and play by prolific post-war writer Nosaka Akiyuki.[55] Set in the coal mine of a mountain pass in Kitakyushu, the *milieu* is World War II. Among sparse woods lies a graveyard (seen in

[55] Hijikata performed a *butoh* rendition of the story, assuming the meaning of the play into his obsession with death, disability and decay (Hijikata 1969:58).

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the poster in Figure 60) with wooden Buddhist grave markers (*sotoba* 卒塔婆)[56] and overrun by a creeping plant known as *shibukazura* (corpse vine). In the story, it wraps its thin stems around the markers, feeding off the decaying corpses. In the summer, delicate white flowers bloom. Awazu's explicitly sexual and arguably pornographic poster depicts the protagonist, a young girl, who falls in love with the vine and engages in sexual acts with it.

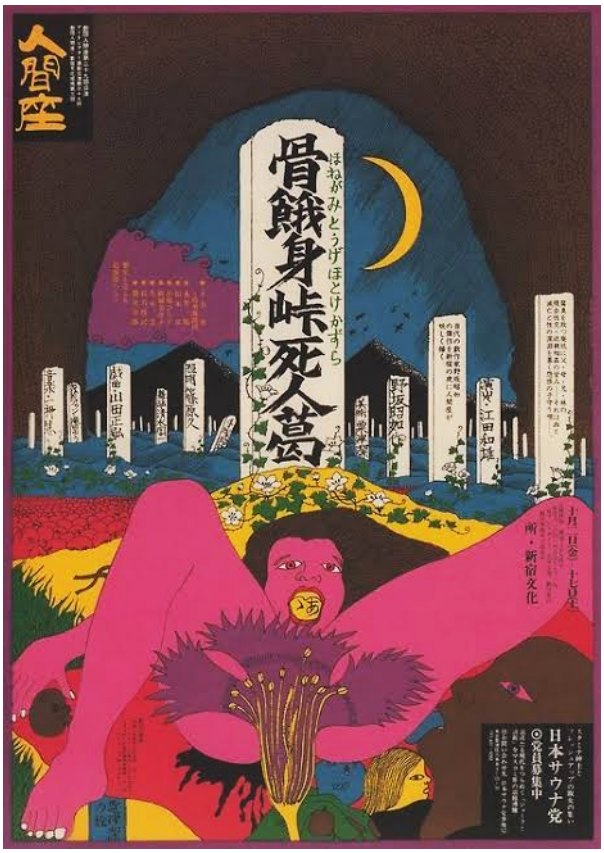

Figure 58: Awazu Kiyoshi, *Corpse Vine on Ossa Famine Ridge*, 1970.
Silkscreen, 73 x 52 cm.
Keio University Archive, Minato. (Keio University).

What is not visible in the poster is that the story highlights the physical and psychological toll of war on individuals. It emphasises the fragility of life (*mono no aware*) and the omnipresence of death in war. However, the plot centres around taboo sexual relations between a young woman, a graveyard's creeping vine and her family. The complexities of these relationships are amplified by the pressures of war, leading to decisions that further complicate the characters' lives and their confrontations with death. This exploration highlights how war can distort human relationships and lead to tragic outcomes.

[56] *Sotoba* are strips of wood in Buddhist graveyards that contain the names of the deceased and prayers for them.

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While the *shibukazura* vine can be a metaphor of the sexual desires of men,[57] others view the chaotic vine as a shadow of death, turning life and death upside down and "creating a paradise of cyclical sexuality that reproduces death" (Kyandashi in Bookmeter 2021:[sp]). Life and death are inverted in the sense that the corpses provide life to the plant, and the plant, in turn, is a living thing in a graveyard that exists for death and the ancestral veneration of people's lives. The unnatural behaviour of the plant and the taboo sexual relationship between the protagonist and the vine elicit feelings of otherworldliness. There can be no reality to the story. It exists only in the mind of the author, a questioning war survivor in search of meaning.

Finally, the story behind the poster's subject matter raises questions about the meaning of life, sexuality and death in the face of war. In the plot, there is a clear underlying theme pertaining to the purpose, nature and consequences of sex and the role of death. The poster therefore falls in the section of philosophy and metaphysics as it is suggested that the story is an inquiry into the metaphysics of death and sex. Of note in this regard is Bill Benzon's (2010:[sp]) observation that the sexual feelings of adolescents can feel foreign and uncontrollable but brings forth philosophical reflections on the nature of desire. Furthermore, the complexity of sexuality links primitive biological urges with higher cognitive processes, making it a rich subject for metaphysical inquiry (Benzon 2010:[sp]). It may be argued that the novel, and by implication also the poster for its play, explores philosophical questions of desire, taboos and death.

Considering the above, the poster refers to death and an 'other' world (in which life and death are blurred). Then, as the story's metaphorical reading represents World War II, the poster represents numerous meanings, bringing together the worlds of death, sexuality, war and life. The categories that this poster belongs to are: ③ (philosophy and aesthetics, particularly Benzon's metaphysics of sex [2010]), ①C (World War II) and ①D (the romanticisation and sexualisation of death).

4.3.2 Aesthetics, the sublime and pan-Asian cosmology

Since his debut in the 1970s, Sato has become one of the leading avant-garde Japanese designers. Unlike his contemporaries, a distinctive style emerged in his work; he worked in an

[57] As one book reviewer states, men are merely creatures driven by their heightened sexual desires, offering their 'seed' to women and then not taking responsibility for their part by saying something like, "Well then, I'll leave the rest to you" (Mirror in Bookmeter 2021:[sp]). The rest of the story is one of incest and the blurring of boundaries between normal and taboo, life and death, and rape and consent.

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otherworldly, metaphysical design manner (Meggs 2005:[sp]). He employs softly glowing mixtures of colour and delicate calligraphy to create a sense of quiet, poetic visuals (Meggs 2005:[sp]). The aesthetics of *yugen* mystery and *ma* ambiguity and charged emptiness are particularly prominent in Sato's posters. His works embody spirituality and tension through his printing techniques, abstraction, *yugen*, vibrant colours and gradients (Ginza Graphic Gallery 2011:[sp]).

Women's Memorial Service (1979) (Figure 61) elicits the mystery of *yugen* by the ghostly female apparition (see enhancement in Figure 63). Unlike in the West, Japanese ghosts are often depicted as women with long, black hair. The disembodied, ghostly head in Sato's poster evokes the uncanny, allowing viewers to reflect on their own inevitable death or experiences of death they have had around them.

Figure 59: Sato Koichi, *Women's Memorial Service*, 1979.
Offset lithograph. (Gurafiku).

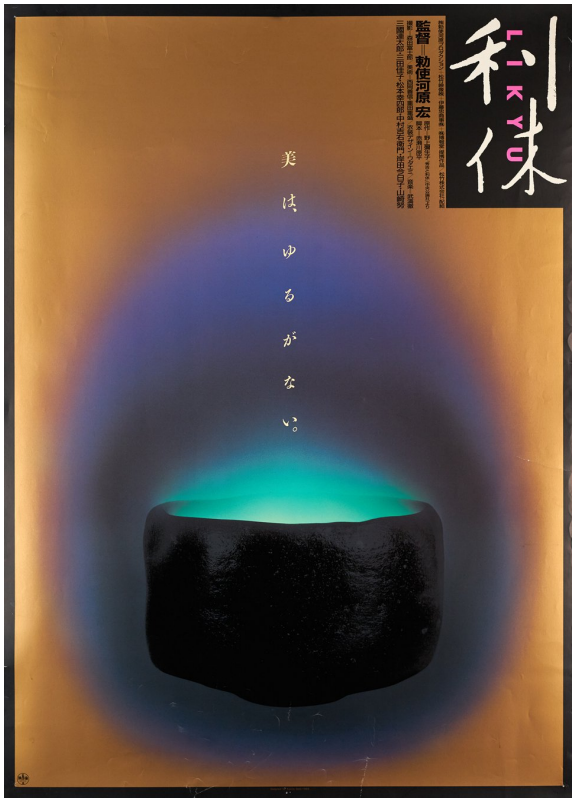

Figure 60: Sato Koichi, *Likyu*, 1988.
Offset lithograph, 104.5 x 79.3 cm.
Galerie 123, Switzerland. (Galerie123).

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Figure 61: Enhanced detail from *Women's Memorial Service* (1979).
(Image edited by author).

Figure 62 is a poster for Hiroshi Teshigahara's film *Likyu* (利休 1988) about the sixteenth-century Zen tea ceremony master Sen no Rikyū (1522–1591). Sen was one of the first proponents of the Zen-Buddhist-rooted *wabi-sabi* aesthetic quality, proposing that austere, old and imperfect objects should be preferred over those that are perfect and gaudy (Murphy 2014:58; Prusinski 2012:33).[58] The sensibility of beauty in imperfection comes through in Sato's work in the way that he emphasises the imperfect shape of the tea bowl, highlighting the simplicity of *wabi-sabi*. The poster hence expresses the Buddhist philosophy of Zen[59] through its beauty, suggesting the imperfect and aesthetics of *wabi-sabi* (Bartal 2020:52].

The rustic tea bowl emits a neon-turquoise glow as it floats in a dark blue void, evoking an evanescent atmospheric space. This suggests that the tea ceremony experience is mythical and not of this world, as if the tea itself emits a halo or otherworldly aura (though not in the Benjaminian sense of aura). Sato, heavily influenced by Zen Buddhism, understands and attempts to communicate the spiritual importance of the tea ceremony (*chadō* 茶道). In the literature review, it is established that the tea ceremony is a pathway art. In Buddhist philosophy, the art of the tea ceremony is a form of meditation and a method of enlightenment achieved through conscious repetition and mastery (Flowers 2008:44).

Sato's posters depict the interrelationship between modernity and tradition, assuming the quiet, distanced and elegant softness of Zen Buddhist ideals and aesthetics. The silence and glow of

[58] Sen no Rikyū lamented that the tea ceremony had become too ostentatious and glitzy after his master, regent Lord Toyotomi Hideyoshi, ordered the construction of a personal, portable tea room made of gold (which he took with him to battles) (The golden tea room [sa]:[sp]). Sen's work redefined the entire tea ceremony experience, from the procedure to the utensils and the tea-house architecture. His influence lasts to the present day where the Japanese tea house and tea ceremony are the epitome of *wabi-sabi* minimalism (Sen Rikyu 2024:[sp]).
[59]Zen is a Buddhist school that uses the practice of meditation as a means to achieve compassion and wisdom (Nagatomo 2024:1).

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his colours and their gradient transitions are arguably close to the nothingness of Zen Buddhism, especially as his usage of contrasting colours may come across as garish or childish (LA Times 2021:[sp]). It may be argued that contemplating the 'charged emptiness' of *ma* (Blaine 2015) or the nothingness of *mujō* evoke the sublime. According to Kant (1987:255), the mathematical sublime refers to a profound aesthetic experience associated with the vastness and complexity of mathematical concepts, particularly those involving infinity.

Furthermore, there is debate in the literature whether Zen Buddhism has metaphysical roots or not. For the sake of this analysis, it is not necessary to consider both sides. A brief explanation of why Zen may be seen as metaphysical should suffice. Zen philosophy values directness and simplicity in understanding reality and responding to it mindfully. Stated differently according to Nagamoto (2024:1), the thing-event that one should be mindfully aware of reveals its basic form of existence as 'it is as it is'. The theoretical standpoint defines a human being as one who observes nature from the outside, or as 'being-outside-of-nature' (Yuasa 2003 in Nagamoto 2004:3). In contrast, Zen metaphysics maintains that the human being must be understood as a being rooted in nature, or as a 'being-in-nature' (Yuasa 2003 in Nagamoto 2004:3).[60]

Lastly, it is necessary to note that the Kantian mathematical sublime itself is not necessarily an otherworldly experience; it is intricately connected to experiences of being in nature. The sublime is experienced when sensing the limitations of one's mind to comprehend that which is unimaginably great (such as infinity or the universe). Hence, in the same way that the aesthetic of *ma* allows for a connection with the natural world and a sense of harmony with the environment (Andrijauskas 2011:201; Prusinski 2012:27), Sato's posters evoke mathematical subliminality in that the work prompts the viewer to contemplate finitude, infinity, life, utter darkness[61] or death. Moreover, it is not just the subject matter that evokes the sublime but also the link to Buddhist aesthetics. Religious experiences may also evoke the sublime (Murphy 2015:52). Therefore, Sato's posters are not sublime or otherworldly *in themselves*, but may

[60] This point is well portrayed in Zen's landscape paintings wherein a human figure occupies the space of a mere dot in a vast natural scenery (Yuasa 2003 in Nagamoto 2004:3).
[61] Gaston Bachelard's *The poetics of space* (1958) is suggested by Murphy (2015:7) as presenting an apt example of the sublime, where a scuba diver experiences 'absolute depth'. When the diver reaches a certain depth, he is completely surrounded by utter darkness. He states that it is extraordinary that one can experience something absolute at all and that "there is a place where it does not matter if one goes up or down, because [of] the totality of the experience of complete and immense darkness". This incomprehensible experience with something that is both threatening and incalculably large epitomises the mathematical sublime (Murphy 2015:7). In a similar way, Sato's use of darkness, shadow and depth illustrate infinite darkness and voids that are unmeasurable.

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evoke a sense of the sublime owing to their subject matter, whether it be a reference to the afterlife (Figure 61) or a sense of depth and infinity by light and colour usage (Figure 62).

Sato's posters combine futuristic imagery and neon colours, the sublime, traditional Japanese aesthetics and Zen Buddhism. The posters are therefore categorised as such: ③ (philosophy and metaphysics), ②A (Buddhism and its aesthetic principles), ③C (the uncanny of the ghostly apparition) and ③D (nihilism and detachment for the evocation of detachment from this world that the ghost represents).

4.3.3 Sugiura's Asian grammar of design

As a response to the European stylistic influences that were expected of professionally educated post-war Japanese designers at the time, Awazu and Sugiura each developed distinct design philosophies and styles.[62] Whereas Awazu and Yokoo sometimes drew inspiration from European and American modernism while offering critical perspectives, Sugiura moved away from Western styles and ultimately chose to research and reproduce Asian religious images (such as the Buddha and pagodas) and illustrations from cultural artefacts (such as Tibetan *mandalas*). The result is a pan-Asian, otherworldly visual language with references to religion and Asian cosmography. His work is therefore explored under the themes of aesthetics, the Kantian sublime, Asian cosmology and religion. This is because the sublime, cosmology, *mandalas*, the concept of *kami* and Japanese aesthetics may all be grouped broadly under metaphysics and philosophy.

Sugiura explores graphic design through a different lens: whereas Yokoo and Awazu sought to reflect the changing status of the post-war landscape and the modernisation of the city by bringing their surroundings into their designs, Sugiura's work focuses on creating a 'grammar of Asian design' (Nguyen 2020:82). This encompasses his role in developing a fresh visual language specific to Japanese and Asian design (Nguyen 2020:83). Shifting from the rigorous and mathematical Bauhaus influence in Sugiura's work in the 1960s, his work in the 1970s became filled with concepts of *ch'i* (vital force or spirit) (Matsuoka 1986:17). His later work hence takes inspiration from the philosophies of Buddhism and Taoism, integrating symbolism

[62] It is interesting to note that Awazu did not receive a professional education in design while Sugiura was a lecturer at the Ulm School in Germany.

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and esoteric allusions into his work (such as the Buddha, the pagoda and *mandalas* in Figure 56 and the god Susanoo in Figure 64).

Figure 64 depicts the storm and sea *kami* Susanoo (Sugiura 1982). Susanoo is the younger brother of the sun goddess Amaterasu (Toyoaki 1983:187). As a central deity in Shinto mythology, he is worshipped in several shrines across Japan. Susanoo, being an important mythical figure, is thus used in the poster to represent something uniquely Japanese and spiritual.

Figure 62: Sugiura Kohei, *Susanoo*, 1982.
Flyer for Hibiya Public hall. Size unknown. (Stage Natalie).

Regarding the interrelation between religion and aesthetics, Suigura's work mainly explores religion and otherworldliness through his usage of *ma,* which he employs as a spiritually charged space and nothingness (Nguyen 2020; Prusinski 2012:25). Sugiura's posters intend to captivate the viewer's imagination by portraying *ma* as a seamless fusion of form and spirit, infused with an ethereal quality. His posters fit into the following categories: ③ (philosophy and metaphysics through aesthetics), as well as ②A (religion and spirituality) and ①A (Japanese aesthetics).

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4.3.4 Awazu's graphism *as a design philosophy*

As introduced in Chapter Two, Awazu is well known for his *graphism* philosophy and his subsequent proclivity to mass-producing posters by embracing duplication (21st Century Museum of Modern Art Kanazawa). Design critic Yamagata Toshio (2018:7) describes *graphism* as the process of 'graphing' – that is, drawing – an image with any kind of tool and turning it into a medium that can be reproduced, such as lithography. In embracing this process, *graphism* became Awazu's widely used term for the repeated use of symbols[63] seen across his work (*Awazu Kiyoshi makuri hirogeru* 浄粟津マクリヒロゲル 2012:2). For Awazu, *graphism* refers to his visually repetitive work produced by new reproduction techniques and often-repeated symbols (21st Century Museum of Modern Art Kanazawa 2008:2). Awazu rallied for graphic design to grow in Japan, urging other designers to "take the path of duplication!" (*Gendai Kikakushitsu & Kanazawa 21-seiki Bijutsukan* 2012).

Awazu (in Furuhata 2014:187) reframes Benjamin's work in his own way: he writes: "The age of technological reproduction is called *graphism*". Whereas Benjamin maintains that there can only exist *one* original, Awazu maintains that technologically reproduced images 'without originals' became 'second nature' by the 1970s in Japan (Furuhata 2014:187). In this way, the imitation replaces the real – yet there can be no original, as a poster, by nature, is a duplication. Awazu (in Furuhata 2014:187) states that "in the past, a reproduction was an imitation, copy, or miniature model of the original, but today the reproduction is reality, that is to say, another kind of original in its own right".

A particularly anti-Benjamanian view that Awazu has is that combining elements from earlier works in a new poster shares the same level of quality and artistic standards as a work produced from scratch (Nomiyama 2016).[64] An example of this mindset, expressed through *graphism* and duplication, is *A New Spirit of Japan* (1984) (Figure 65), a collaboration between Awazu and the *kimono* company Juraku (Nomiyama 2016). Many of Awazu's posters, including this one, contain elements from his earlier works. The topographic, mountainous lines are from a painting he made in 1976 (and can be seen in numerous other works). On the right are Japanese flora and fauna illustrations from a woodblock series Awazu produced in 1981. At the

[63] Regularly repeated symbols in Awazu's posters include fingerprints, maps, topographic lines, palm lines, Mona Lisa and ink seals (stamps) (*Gendai Kikakushitsu, and Kanazawa 21-seiki Bijutsukan* 2012:2).
[64] In this way, Awazu sought to eliminate traces of his own identity as he regularly repeated symbols. On the contrary, however, this practice made him recognisable and established his style and identity as a designer.

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core of Awazu's *graphism* is his striving to create a uniquely Japanese graphic language by combining and duplicating multiple images (Furuhata 2014:187). Awazu has a precise eye for viewing traditional aesthetics through contemporary lenses, utilising colour and iconography: for instance, the *hanafuda* woodcut illustrations use completely different colours than traditional cards but are still recognisable as Japanese.[65]

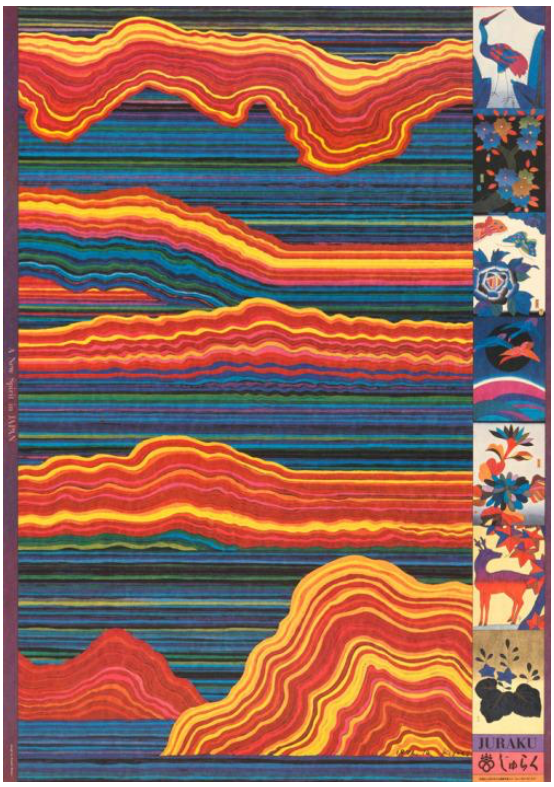

Figure 63: Awazu Kiyoshi, *A New Spirit of Japan*, 1984.
Lithograph, 103.3 x 72.8 cm.
Smithsonian Design Museum, New York. (Cooper Hewitt).

In this indirect reference to 'Japaneseness', Awazu offers a new perspective on Japanese aesthetics. The prominent lines in the poster play a key role in emphasising this aspect. Dynamic and vibrant, the layers of curving lines evoke a sense of movement that stands in stark contrast to the traditional stillness associated with 'non-avant-garde' Japanese design and the pathway arts in Buddhist practices (Nomiyama 2016).

Furthermore, Awazu's utilisation of religious imagery, ideals of *furusato* or visual invention of fantasy worlds in his other works elicit a sense of otherworldliness. In the above work, instead of

[65] *Hanafuda* cards are unique to Japan and contain images of endemic Japanese fauna and flora.

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illustrating a conflict or contrast between old and new, the poster combines them seamlessly to produce an otherworldly, new harmony that epitomises *graphism*. Considering this work, it may be argued that *graphism* overall is highly suggestive of *furusato* and nostalgia. Since *furusato* is driven by a yearning for an authentic other world (Robertson 1988:495), Awazu's use of design may be a visual representation of his search for a 'spiritual homeland', a concept that he often brought up as the purpose of his work (*Gendai Kikakushitsu & Kanazawa 21-seiki Bijutsukan* 2012:70). Put differently, a 'spiritual homeland' may be akin to a nostalgic, *furusato* homeland, and Awazu expresses this visually through the act of poster design.

Kalmanson (2022) suggests that artworks can be viewed as intentional transformations of the metaphysical concept of *ch'i* into a dynamic physical structure. This perspective highlights the continuous process through which an artist's thoughts, mind and emotions (*kokoro*) translate into a physical medium. Although Awazu's work may not contain much negative space visually, religious symbolism elicits a metaphysical sense of *ma* and *ch'i* in his works. Jonathan Flowers (2008:3) discusses the relationship between aesthetics and *kami* spirits, proposing that in the context of Shinto beliefs, aesthetic experiences are a form of communication between the creative individual's heart or mind (*kokoro*), the emotional and cognitive sensibilities of humanity and the heart (*kokoro*) of the work itself.

In essence, *ch'i* manifests through *ma* in a work, not as an isolated concept, but as part of the dynamic relationship between the designer, poster and viewer. This is facilitated through techniques that resonate with the essence of *ch'i* (such as *ma* and the use of other aesthetics or spiritual concepts such as *kami*). Hence, using the ambiguity of *ma* (specifically a work's openness to receiving spiritual meaning), the spiritually 'charged emptiness' (as a result of *ma*) allows for the *kami* spirit to inhabit the work[66] (Blaine 2015; Nguyen 2010), essentially transforming the poster into something spiritual and otherworldly. Therefore, the designer's objective is not only to express their own emotional heart but also to convey the essential emotive essence of the phenomenal world employing the metaphysical structure of a *kami*.[67]

[66] As J. W. T Mason posits in *The meaning of Shinto* (1962:62), "there are many ways for the *kami* creative spirit to express itself".
[67] According to Flowers (2008:3), this connection underscores the separation between the distinctness of Japanese aesthetics from Western notions of beauty and aesthetic theory.

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Thus, with regard to Figure 65, as the divine *kami* spirit is believed to live in everything,[68] it may be argued that a sense of spirituality is found in each element of the work: the mountains that are transposed visually onto the paper, the poster itself, Awazu's own *kokoro* and the heart/mind/cognitive capacity (*kokoro*) of the viewer. In this way, Awazu achieves his goal of creating a uniquely Japanese visual language, for it is rooted in Shinto thought and becomes a spiritual artefact. Moreover, he also visually demonstrates his search for a 'spiritual homeland', as it may be argued that religion, aesthetics and *furusato* nostalgia are inextricably linked in the idea of *graphism*. Therefore, the poster falls under the following categories: ③ (philosophy and metaphysics), ①A (Japanese aesthetics) and ② (religion).

4.3.5 The philosophy of de-advertising

According to Bartal (2020:35), in the 1970s, capitalism and the 'consumer revolution'[69] introduced by Prime Minister Ikeda increased consumption and leisure culture in Japanese daily life. The middle class thus started to buy branded products, services and technological appliances, such as speaker systems and televisions (Figures 67 and 68, seen later). At the same time, the course of Japanese design shifted with the embrace of the American dream in Japan as the ideal of an affluent society, as well as the consumption of products as a display of a new lifestyle (Bartal 2020:54).

This economic shift changed the Japanese advertising world, marking the start of a new trend of emotion and ideas over products (Bartal 2013:53). Japanese advertisements in the 1980s that emphasise the design and brand ethos rather than the product employed a trend called de-advertising (*datsukoukoku* 脱広告) (Marilyn in Bartal 2013:53). The transition to a new consumer culture led to competition among companies and stores, spurring a new strategy focusing on advertising the corporate image of the brand rather than just the products. Seeking new branding to reshape their corporate image, companies hired young graphic designers who used their innovation and aesthetics to mirror the new marketing and de-advertising trends of the time. With each shift in design trends and technologies, design mediates between products, services and culture (Poggenpohl 1988:144). Advertisements such as those in Figures 66, 67

[68] Motoori Norinaga (quoted in Kenji 1972:38) articulates *kami* in the following way: "in principle human beings, birds, animals, trees, plants, mountains, oceans – all may be *kami*. According to ancient usage, whatever seemed strikingly impressive, possessed the quality of excellence or inspired a feeling of awe was called a *kami*".
[69] Ikeda's -income--doubling- plan- (*shotoku baizō keikaku*) was introduced in the early 1960s and resulted in an economic revolution in the following two decades as Japan entered the bubble economy (Bartal 2020:34, 37).

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and 68 embody the identity of Japan as the first modern Asian consumer society (Bartal 2020:54).

Within de-advertising, the underlying role and nature (metaphysics) of an advertisement as something that sells a product is ambiguous. In a society with a focus on consumer spending, the focus of design shifted from a specific object to the entirety of its surroundings and the context wherein it is located (Moles in Poggenpohl 1988:144). As an emerging design trend, de-advertising is not the death of the product; rather, it signifies the end of pre-war and early post-war advertising trends that emphasised products themselves. What is rather communicated with de-advertising is that the product's perceived value and brand association are displayed more prominently to the consumer than the product itself. This trend continues in Japan to the present day, where advertisements, more often than not, show the emotion resulting from the product or brand rather than the product itself.

Figure 64: Yokoo Tadanori, *Are you ready for fresh air?* 1989.
Offset lithograph, 102,8 x 72,7 cm.
Museum of Modern Art, New York. (MoMA).

The advertisement in Figure 66, created for the paint company Vitar, appears more like a work of art than a product advertisement. Superimposed over a nature photomontage, the mirrored,

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pixel-style type cleverly draws the viewer to engage with the picture more intentionally. Spending time deciphering the message, then realising its meaning and the impact of the invitation, the viewer is surreptitiously drawn into an otherworldly scene that promises fresh air – something the advertiser hopes may come to life for viewers when they buy and use Vitar's paint. There is no direct mention of paint in the advertisement; instead, Yokoo suggests that the paint can give life in a manner like a breath of fresh air and flowers. This association imbues Vitar's brand identity with an otherworldly quality, as the paint is portrayed as having the power to be a 'breath of fresh air'.

His work challenges the perception of reality by inviting the viewer to contemplate space and place. Art critic Yasushi Kurabashi (in Fu 2020:[sp]) suggests that Yokoo's work is extreme in his disregard of conventional reference points to evoke an infinite and weightless otherworldly feeling. In this way, Yokoo's work creates the illusion of an otherworldly, distant and unfamiliar place. In an interview with Eric Shiner (2016:[sp]), Yokoo states his hope that "the age of material civilisation will soon come to an end, being replaced by the spiritual civilisation". It can be argued that Yokoo attempts to bring forth the spiritual realm in works like Figure 66, where something as 'this-worldly' as a paint company is transformed into a spiritual experience through his *trompe l'œil* technique. Moreover, the poster intersects two worlds: a steadfast blue mountain range and a fleetingly blossoming garden (*mono no aware*) (Fu 2020:[sp]). The two worlds are only divided by the golden frame. While frames are used in traditional art to give a glimpse into another world, Yokoo's use of a flat-frame image introduces a new, unimagined experience (Fu 2020:[sp]). Consequently, this poster is categorised in the following categories: ③ (philosophy of de-advertising) as well as ①A and ①B (aesthetics and fantasy respectively).

In 1978, Sato was already embracing de-advertising in his corporate work. In the brand poster for Onkyo (Figure 67), a Hi-Fi speaker company, no products are shown. Instead, a glowing stone floating on a dark background takes centre stage. The text in the middle reads, "There is nature at the extreme of technology". The stone becomes an empty signifier on which the viewer can project a meaning as if the stone is representative of Onkyo's technology or authentic, 'natural' brand ethos.

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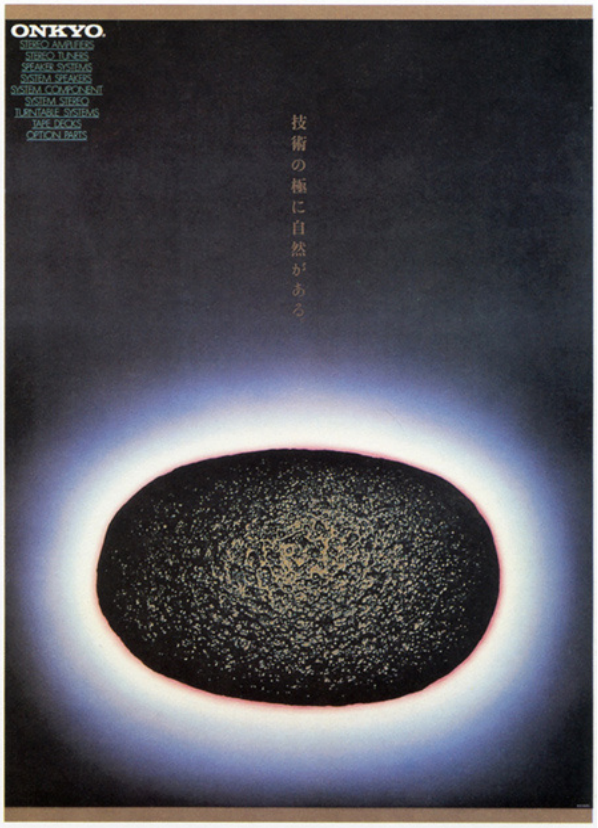

Figure 65: Sato Koichi, *poster for Onkyo*, 1978.
Offset lithograph, 103,0 x 72,8 cm.
Takasaki Museum of Art, Gunma. (Lai Times).

Sato's poster (Figure 67) embodies Hara's (2007:243) position that "communication becomes effective only when an advertisement is offered as an empty vessel and viewers freely deposit into it their ideas and wishes". Similarly, this echoes Nguyen's (2010) explanation of *ma*'s role in graphic design: through ambiguity (*ma*), the work is open to multiple meanings. The advertisement is thus remarkably 'Japanese' in its embracing of the Zen aesthetic principles of profound subtlety and suggestion (Bouso 2022:18). Employing the Japanese aesthetics of unobtrusive subtlety and suggestion (Prusinski 2012:27; Yanagi 2012[1933]:98), Sato embraces *wabi-sabi* simplicity and *yugen* mystery. Hence, the posters become somewhat mysterious, both in meaning and style (the neon glows on dark backgrounds). Moreover, Sato often employs white space to demonstrate the beauty of Zen *yin* (from *yin* and *yang*), where the negative space is not necessarily white in colour, but representative of emptiness (*mujō* and *ma*) and evocative of a certain sense of silence (Lai Times 2021:[sp]).

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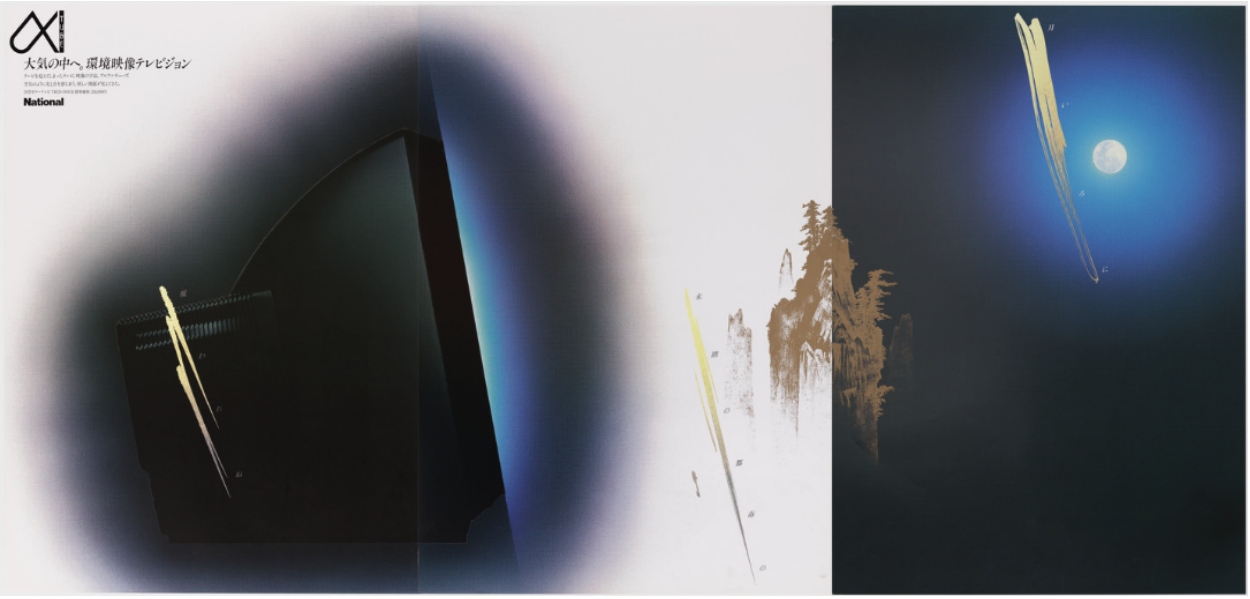

Figure 66: Sato Koichi, *poster for large screen television*, 1986.
Offset lithograph, 102.9 × 218.4 cm.
Museum of Modern Art, New York. (MoMA).

References to nature are similarly prominent in Figure 68, an advertisement for the television manufacturer National (Sato 1986).[70] Interestingly, only the side of the television shows in the poster, further reducing the importance of the product. In this way, the beauty of 'de-advertisement' as an artwork is emphasised. Although the poster does show the product, unlike the Onkyo advertisement in Figure 67, the primary focus is on the glowing moon scene and the golden brush-painted mountaintop.[71] The mountain, indicative of traditional Zen painting styles, is juxtaposed with the television which indicates a sense of post-war technological modernity.

Sato's above posters are therefore also a type of de-advertising (Bartal 2013:53), as the atmosphere of his works, in their use of nature and traditional Zen aesthetics, suggests the brands' personalities rather than their products. The posters become otherworldly in their ability to evoke a quiet, subtle mood through aesthetics and tradition. Accordingly, they may be classified within ③ philosophy and metaphysics (philosophy of de-advertising and the metaphysics of Zen) and ①A and ①B (aesthetics and fantasy).

[70] The copy at the top left reads, "Into the atmosphere. Environmental video television".
[71] The focus on nature may be owing to the differing worldviews in the 1980s between the post-war generation, who grew up with television from the 1960s, and the wartime generation before them (Bartal 2020:49). The younger generation, influenced by television and not rooted in traditional Japanese culture, developed a collective ethos that "turned its back on traditional Japanese roots" (Bartal 2020:49). It may be argued that Sato understood this and either knew that both the television and the mountains would appeal to their respective audiences, or he intended to mesh the mindsets and interests of two target markets into one poster.

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As seen from the above examples, avant-garde designers like Yokoo and Sato moved into commercial advertising as Japan entered the bubble economy of the 1980s, signalling a socio-political change in Japan (Bartal 2020:37). Since the mid-1950s, national gross domestic product had been growing steadily alongside the disposable income of the consumer (Bronson 2012:245, 249). By this time, the early post-war years' food shortages, riots and protests had become a thing of the past. As Japan evolved from a war-torn fledgling democracy to an economic powerhouse,[72] the imminent death of the subversive *angura* and other 'anti-art' collectives of the post-war Japanese avant-garde are not surprising.

To reiterate Heller's (2008:[sp]) earlier statement, over time, elements of avant-garde movements are reworked and adopted into the mainstream. That is to say that the visual styles of avant-garde designers are maintained but not their political or ideological commentaries. Evan Mauro (2011:119) agrees, indicating that the consensus in recent literature is that "the avant-garde 'crashed' on the reef of postmodernism sometime around 1972". He thus suggests that there is no longer a need for the ideological and intellectual preparation for social transformation at the core of the original avant-garde ethos (Mauro 2011). This can be seen in posters from the 1980s as post-war Japan entered a stage of post-modernism and stability.

To summarise, as Japan moved towards a postmodern era, the subversive avant-garde ethos of the 1960s and 1970s became watered down, its visuals adopted for their styles[73] and used for capitalist advertising purposes and financial gain. Both Yokoo and Sato were approached by companies recognising the value of creative and conceptual advertising, using the designers' visual styles and not always their ideologies. Yokoo admitted that he accepted the proposals not out of interest, but for financial reasons: "Commercial art was [his] job in order to survive" (in Tate 2015). Eventually, when it became financially feasible for him, he stopped making posters altogether and pursued painting full time (Tōno 1983:39). The economic and political climate of late 1970s Japan as well as Yokoo's departure as a prominent designer of the avant-garde ethos ushered in the inevitable end to the movement. During this time, the bubble economy and

[72] For the first time, 'Made in Japan' became a phrase indicating superior quality (and not subpar quality as it had in wartime and in the early post-war years. Japanese minister Monji Kenjirō comments on Japan's rapid economic growth (in White 2022:114): "We were afraid of colonisation, so we worked really hard to prevent it. It was said that millions would have died of starvation [in the post-war period]. No one thought Japan would become such an economic power in such a short time, but because we strived for that, we worked so hard".
[73]There is, of course, no universal visual style of the avant-garde. 'Style' in this context depends on the movement or the designer, whether it be pop art, Constructivism or Yokoo and Tanaami's psychedelic, bright photo-montages.

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increasingly stable democracy inadvertently removed the need for a subversive and politically charged design ethos.

4.4 Findings

Per the aim of the study, the theoretical framework (Table 2) employed for analysing the poster samples has provided a structured and systematic way to investigate how avant-garde posters demonstrate themes of otherworldliness and death. Overall, the interpretive and historical context analysis methods revealed that elements of otherworldliness and death are either metaphorically or directly visible in the posters. The case study has demonstrated that although these themes overlap, they are not always simultaneously present in each poster. Some, such as *Are you ready for fresh air?* (Figure 66) and *Onkyo* (Figure 67), depict only one theme (in these cases, only otherworldliness but not death). The works include themes of nature, the sublime, fantasy, aesthetics and metaphysics to communicate otherworldliness. Other posters illustrate a rich intertextual combination of otherworldliness and death (such as *Hiroshima Appeals,* Figure 30; *Virgin City*, Figure 47; *Himiko,* Figure 51 and *Women's Memorial Service*, Figure 61).

Furthermore, the case study has demonstrated that otherworldliness and death are nuanced and often metaphorically represented through numerous themes, including mythology, demonology, the sublime, sexuality and the body, religion and aesthetics. Moreover, the case study brings to light the intriguing relationship between death, otherworldliness, and the female body as metaphor or decoration in some avant-garde posters, especially in *angura* works (Figures 36–41 and Figure 47). As I have demonstrated, existing literature offers only a limited exploration of the symbolic implications of the female body in relation to death and wartime Japan.

Other themes that emerged from the case study include the role of sexuality, the female body, the abject, the threat of failed political revolutions, and castration and rape as metaphors for death and politics. On this note, Abe Sada serves as a noteworthy example of the relationship between death, sexuality and the female body in the avant-garde ethos. As Mackie (2006:104) suggests, the danger of excessive attachment to the female and maternal body is apparent in the 'castrating figure' of Abe. She argues that these male designers may have attempted to reject the family system of the recent wartime period, as well as the motherly figures they

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believed played a part in 'birthing' harmful nationalism and imperialism through the role of Japanese soldiers (Mackie 2006:104). Mackie's (2006:104) criticism of Awazu's Abe posters (Figure 37 in the case study and Figure 7 in the appendix), is that Abe's 'dangerous' persona and link to death (specifically, her crime of murder and castration) are likely underplayed in an attempt to reduce the male fear of castration and the threat of death. It is possible to argue, perhaps, that this is done in a manner akin to Andy Warhol's artwork of Marilyn Monroe reproduced *en masse*, whereby, like Monroe, Awazu's Abe is a muse and object for duplication. By repeating Abe's image so frequently in his works in this way, Abe's image does not suggest a threat. works do not suggest a threat. Thereby, in his toning down of Abe's danger, the threat of death and male castration is removed.

Similarly, the example of *Rose-Coulored Dance: To M. Shibusawa's House (À La Maison De M. Civeçawa)* (Yokoo 1965*;* Figure 35) suggests how the carnivalesque representations of the lactating breasts render the maternal body harmless and 'fun', rather than dangerous, according to Mackie (2006:104). The dichotomies of male versus female or sexual expression versus military revolution (in Hirano's *Abe Sada: A comedy* and Yokoo's *John Silver* series), real versus fantasy (the mask play of *Inugami and the noh mask posters in* Figures 48–50 and 52–53), and how these relate to topics of death, war, politics and imperial Japan has therefore been brought to light in this study and demonstrates the complex intertextuality between posters within the context of Japan's complex post-war era.

The case study has also thoroughly investigated posters that reject the idea that mechanical reproduction results in a loss of a work's aura and worship value (Benjamin 1970). Regarding poster designs that are inherently mediums that necessitate reproduction and duplication, the role of aura as an indicator of originality becomes ambiguous. The case study illustrates that the nature of a poster as a mass-produced item does not diminish its aura if the poster becomes 'worship worthy' by means of authentic, original or otherworldly elements like Hijikata's disembodied golden handprints, or Yokoo's personal apology note (in Figure 35 and 39, respectively).[74] In addition, Awazu's *graphism* works, particularly those with recurring topographic lines or those that have been created from previous imagery (such as *A Spirit of a*

[74] As indicated in the case study, *Kamaitachi* is a unique example in that it went through the cycle of initially being an aura-imbued work of worship value (when there was only one print) to something of exhibition value only (when duplicated), and then finally to a unique original which reclaimed aura when golden handprints were added.

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New Japan, Figure 65) and Yokoo's *John Silver* series (Figures 38 and 39) further support this argument as the *hanafuda* in them are reproductions of already-existing cards.

The insight provided by the case study regarding aura (Benjamin 1970), the above-mentioned posters symbolically overcome the 'death' (of aura via duplication) and are instead 'reborn', imbued with an otherworldly, worship-worthy sense of life. The case study has demonstrated that in the context of post-war Japan's poster-as-art culture, the 'aura', as Benjamin describes it, is not applicable since one cannot assign exhibition value to posters simply because they are mechanically reproduced in nature. The analyses contend that it is the context (consider *Virgin City*'s poster [in Figure 47] displayed as a 'trophy') and messaging of the poster, as well as personal details (seen in *Kamaitachi* and the *John Silver: continued* poster) that, (contrary to Benjamin's [1970:252] view of 'cult value' only being ascribed to an original) can render a poster as a work of art or 'magic' (Guffey 2015:138), worthy of cult value.

I argue here that the posters in question are indeed original works, despite their nature of being duplicated *en masse*. Just as Awazu and Yokoo sought to dismantle Benjamin's (1970) critical view of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, the findings are that some (duplicated) posters render Benjamin's critiques invalid – Emison's (2021) view of the role of art, post-Benjamin, is of relevance, where she maintains that "it is not only aura that has been dismantled, but critical authority … The new aesthetics Benjamin tried to promote is no longer new enough. It had no place for that unaccustomed entity, a compelling artist (or critic) who freely relinquishes any claim to authority" (Emison 2021:8,13). The case study has inadvertently demonstrated Emison's (2021:13) view that Benjamin's critical views on the role of aura in the age of technical reproduction are not valid regarding the medium of posters, because, by nature, a poster is something intended for mass-production. I argue through the case study examples that some posters may indeed contain cult value (to use Benjamin's term in a way he did not intend for), and that posters as art and do not lose aura simply because they are reproduced – unlike Benjamin's (1970:229, 240) suggestion that a work immediately forgoes its unique aura when duplicated.

A secondary aim of the study was to examine how Japanese aesthetics in a work can elicit themes of otherworldliness and death. Accordingly, the in-depth analyses of posters elucidating aesthetics and religion (particularly in Category two) illustrate that aesthetics are integral to notions of beauty and death in Japan. This may be seen in works such as *Hiroshima Appeals*

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(Figure 30), *Likyu* (Figure 62) and *Tradition et Nouvelles Techniques* (Figure 56). *Hiroshima Appeals* illustrates the pathos of life, juxtaposing beauty with death; *Likyu* depicts a profound *yugen* mystery; and *Tradition et Nouvelles Techniques* the spiritual and otherworldly quality of *ma*. Particularly in light of the transience in the *Hiroshima Appeals* poster, Odin's (2019:388) position is apt. He proposes that as one becomes aware of the transient nature of aesthetic experiences and the ephemerality of art, the intensity of tragic beauty increases (Odin 2018:388).

On the same note, from a religious and philosophical perspective, by incorporating Buddhist and Shinto aesthetics and philosophies (such as *ma*, subtlety and suggestion, *yugen*, *mono no aware*, *mujō* and the belief that the *kami* can be spiritually present in 'anything'),[75] these posters also demonstrate how the medium can elicit otherworldliness and evoke feelings of the sublime (as indicated in Figures 61 and 62). For instance, Sugiura and Sato's works (Figures 56, 61, 62 and 64) exemplify how the aesthetic of *ma* provides a space for *kami* to reside (as originally proposed by Nguyen 2020). These examples highlight the ability of traditional aesthetics, which are usually applied to pathway arts only (Maraldo & Maraldo 2022), to come forth in posters as well. In light of this, I argue that the aim to interrogate whether Japanese aesthetics might reflect otherworldliness and death in graphic design, and not only the pathway arts, is achieved.

Furthermore, the case study underscores the significant roles that active nihilism (Nishitani 1990; Nietzsche 1968:17), historical amnesia and victim consciousness (Dower 2000:25; 178) play in posters to point to death and otherworldliness. The war-related themes in *Give Back Our Sea* (Awazu 1955), *Sheltered Weaklings* (Kono 1953), *No More* (Fukuda 1983), *No More War* (Tanaami 1967), and *Kamaitachi* (Yokoo 1968) illustrate how active nihilism is embodied through design. In this way, active nihilism becomes an antidote to pessimism and a loss of hope. The analysis of *Kamaitachi* particularly illustrates this, in that the poster is a visual way to channel widespread post-war nihilism into something of cathartic value. In doing so, the poster becomes an otherworldly tool that transforms the metaphysics of pessimism in the face of trauma into a new world – one that arose from the spirit of active nihilism.

A final finding is that, whereas historical amnesia and victim consciousness are minor themes in the theoretical framework, the case study delineates several posters that demonstrate these

[75] Norinaga (in Kenji 1972:38) maintains that *kami* can be in anything that is striking, impressive or awe-inducing.

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concepts. *Hiroshima Appeals* (Figure 30) and *Sheltered Weaklings* (Figure 28) present the narrative of the Japanese nation as one of a victim, by downplaying its role as the perpetrator of severe war crimes. The visual horror of death imagery is exchanged for the post-war myth of the Japanese nation as a victim: a victim of surrender, a victim of the destruction of the atomic bomb and a victim of the death of its formal imperial dreams. There is plenty criticism in the literature towards the prevalence of the 'atomic bomb narrative' that portrays Japan as solely a victim but ignores its own war crimes (Naono 2005; Dower 2000; Yoneyama 1999).[76]

This is not to say that Japan did not suffer defeat and a tremendous loss of life. The nation certainly experienced widespread death and destruction (Dower 2000:40–44). Rather, it is to demonstrate that Japan's post-war identity is complex and occupies the roles of both victim and perpetrator (Dower 2000:363), as expressed in several posters. For instance, the posters of the *John Silver* series (Figures 38 to 39) offer a visual commentary of imperial Japan as the perpetrator, 'raping' other nations during the Pacific War (Naono 2005;). The metaphor of John Silver as the aggressor suggests that Yokoo recognised the imperial Japanese army's role as the instigator of conflict during the war, moving beyond a single-sided portrayal of Japan solely as a defeated nation.

[76] Naono (2005) quotes a 1995 letter to the Washington Post wherein a War II veteran takes issue with Nagasaki's mayor focusing on the atomic bomb as a 'heinous' act while overlooking Japan's aggression in Asia. He argues that Japan's actions such as the rape of Nanking, the death march at Bataan, the pillage of Shanghai and much more ultimately led to the atomic bombings.

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CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This chapter begins with a summary of the study's chapters. Following the summary, the study's contribution to the understanding of otherworldliness and death in Japanese design studies is outlined, emphasising the theoretical perspectives and overarching themes. Thereafter, the limitations of the study highlight areas that may be worthwhile for further research. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the implications of these findings for contemporary Japanese design and the relevance of the study.

5.1 Summary of chapters

The introductory chapter established the context of the study, examining the events after World War II that led to stylistic and thematic transformations of Japanese graphic design. These transformative factors encompassed technological improvements in printing methods, American cultural influence during the Allied occupation period and Japan's participation in international design dialogues. Significant events in Japan's modern history, such the 1964 Olympics and Expo '70, were specifically identified as catalysts that redefined Japan's position in the global art design sphere (Dawood 2021; Pollock 2020:269). This contextual foundation facilitated the subsequent literature review regarding the emergence of the Japanese avant-garde ethos. The chapter proceeded to articulate the primary research aim: to determine the manifestations and significance of otherworldliness and death imagery in avant-garde Japanese poster design (1955-1989).[77] The qualitative methodologies and analytical methods used in assessing the poster samples was delineated, comprising historical context analysis, semiotic interpretation and interpretive approaches. These were then selected for their appropriateness to the research objectives. The chapter concluded with an overview of the subsequent chapters and their respective contributions to addressing the research question.

Building upon this foundational context, Chapter Two presented a comparative analysis of European and Japanese avant-garde philosophical principles through a literature review. This examination aimed to examine the interplay between Western and Japanese avant-garde approaches, primarily drawing upon works by Inaga (2010) and Ridgely (2010). A significant

[77] However, this is not to say that all designers *consciously* used the themes of otherworldliness and death in their posters. It is possible to argue that Kamekura, for instance, did not intend to imbue the *Hiroshima Appeals* poster with religious or political commentary (see analysis of Figure 30).

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observation emerged: while each manifestation of avant-garde creative expression in Japan—ranging from installations to performance art to poster design—exhibits distinct visual characteristics, they collectively embody a shared subversive mindset rather than a unified aesthetic. The literature revealed this shared ethos to be characterised by institutional dissent, collaborative practice, and, particularly within the Japanese context, engagement with controversial or taboo subject matter. This section identified multiple socio-historical factors in post-war Japan that fostered the avant-garde spirit, including the American occupation, Western cultural influx, the government-sponsored *shingeki* theatre. Regarding avant-garde 'trends' in post-war Japan, particular focus was given to the *angura* movement owing to the diversity of posters that were produced for underground theatre and film productions. Recognisable by its subversive, shocking, bold and playful designs, *angura* posters thus constituted majority of the the case study samples.

The section concluded by articulating the fundamental principles that define both European and Japanese avant-garde philosophies. Through this comparative analysis, the first section demonstrated how avant-garde artists in both European and Japanese contexts consistently challenged established norms, engaged in cross-disciplinary collaboration and contested prevailing conceptions of art, politics, and social issues through a methodology of protest and transformation. The second section of Chapter Two then examined four foundational Japanese aesthetic principles—*ma*, *yugen*, *mono no aware,* and *mujō*—clarifying their conceptual contributions to Japanese perspectives on beauty, impermanence, death and otherworldliness.

Chapter Three presented a second literature review focusing on Japanese conceptualisations of death and definitions of otherworldliness. The literature review began with a comparative examination of Western and Japanese perspectives on death, highlighting the integration of death within the *enso* circle of life in traditional Japanese thought, as informed by religious philosophies. This was examined with emphasis on the *obon* festival, ancestor veneration, the role of ritual suicide in Japanese history, funeral rights and beliefs surrounding the afterlife. Particular emphasis was placed on the representation of death in Japanese media forms, specifically death poetry and death prints (*shini-e*). Through analysis of seminal literature, historical texts and cultural practices related to death, this the first section of the literature review elucidated traditional Japanese societal attitudes toward death, addressing forms of suicide and the aestheticisation thereof.

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The next section of Chapter Three offered an investigation into the concept of otherworldliness by classifying it into four subcategories, namely fantasy and fiction (Eväsoja 2007), nostalgia and *furusato* (Hayashi 2014; Robertson 1988), the uncanny (Freud 1919; Högman 2015; Kaufinger 2021) and Benjamin's (2011) aura. The study put forth the argument that fantasy and fiction are fundamentally embedded in Japanese cultural expression, as evidenced by the traditional arts that frequently depict supernatural themes and 'other worlds'. This is exemplified in *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints, which blur the boundaries between fantasy and reality through their incorporation of monsters, skeletons, *kabuki* actors and traditional, realistic village scenes. The concepts of nostalgia and *furusato* reflect a collective longing for a bygone era or pre-industrialised past in response to Japan's rapid modernisation, demonstrating a cultural preoccupation with pre-war historical memory (Creighton 2023; Robertson 1988). Furthermore, the concepts of the uncanny and aura were introduced to inform the theoretical framework. The theoretical concept of the uncanny, as defined by Freud (1919), pertains to that which evokes simultaneous dread and confusion, frequently manifested through representations of death and supernatural phenomena. In addition, Benjamin's concept of 'aura' is intrinsically connected to the authenticity and perceived 'life' embedded within an original work of art. His theoretical position that artistic reproduction can simultaneously diminish an artwork's aura while transforming its value (from 'cult value' to 'exhibition value' [Benjamin, 2011]) serves as the grounds for the argument developed in Chapter Four: that poster designs can, indeed, acquire distinctive otherworldly qualities. Collectively, these subcategories illuminate the various ways in which otherworldliness is reflected and understood: culturally, religiously, nostalgically, psychologically, and artistically within the Japanese context.

Chapter Three's conclusion identified significant overlaps between the concepts of otherworldliness and death, which subsequently informed the theoretical framework for this research. Buddhist and Shinto traditions, in particular, demonstrate close connections between aesthetic principles, concepts of the afterlife, otherworldly cosmologies, and the philosophical understanding of death as impermanence (*mujō*). These conceptual overlaps were systematically organised into analytical categories: Japanese history and culture, religion, and philosophy and metaphysics. This theoretical framework subsequently provided the methodology whereby the posters in Chapter Four were analysed.

In Chapter Four, a case study methodology was employed to answer the research question, revealing several thematic elements that contribute to the representations of otherworldliness

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and death within the selected poster samples. The impact of Japan's wartime surrender and the subsequent cultural transformations in Japanese political and social spheres were exemplified in the case study examples.

Notable insights emerged regarding the influence of post-war pessimism, active nihilism, historical amnesia, and the use of the body and sexuality as metaphorical representations of war trauma in specific posters. These interpretations were derived through the application of interpretive analysis, historical context analysis and semiotic analysis on the posters. The use of these methods to analyse the posters has illustrated the religious, historical, thanatological, socio-political, aesthetic and philosophical underpinnings that inform the designers' and playwrights' perspectives on post-war Japanese society and the traumatic aftermath of the war.

The case study has furthermore demonstrated the multifaceted motivations behind designers' selection of subject matter that illustrate otherworldliness and death. As De Antoni and Centonze (in De Antoni & Raveri 2017:23) have observed, the visual and cultural expressions in post-war Japan are characterised by themes of 'death and desire'. The themes and iconic meanings identified in each poster seem substantiate De Antoni and Centonze's (2017:23) contention that death constituted a prominent subject of artistic exploration during Japan's post-war period. Examples within the posters include visual commentary on the American occupation, the Pacific War, censorship practices and reflections on the post-war avant-garde ethos of sexual liberation and creative exploration.

Motivated by the desire to achieve a distinct design language and to demonstrate Japanese sensibilities, some avant-garde poster designers expressed otherworldliness and death through peculiar metaphors, unusual compositions and use of colour and distinctive historical and contemporary (to their time) contexts (Nguyen 2020:85). Concerning composition, *angura* poster designers' playful approaches are often characterised by demonstrations of their creative freedoms, intuition and individuality (Nguyen 2020:85). For this reason, some representations of otherworldliness and death may seem random or nonsensical, especially if the poster's visuals do not immediately relate to the content of what it is promoting (consider, for instance, *Inugami* by Awazu in Figures 52 and 53). HHowever, through the application of the theoretical framework informed by theories of otherworldliness and death, the analyses have successfully decoded the iconic significations embedded within these designs, thereby revealing the depth of symbolic dimensions of certain posters.

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The diverse representations of death and otherworldliness evident in the posters demonstrate complex semantic layering and conceptual similarities between the post-war Japanese human condition, religion and spiritual traditions, escapism and the cultural romanticisation of death and suicide. The expressions of death and otherworldliness in the posters reflect the interplay between wartime destruction and post-war economic and social transformation, while simultaneously engaging with the deep-rooted cultural prevalence of death and the 'other world' (specifically, the world of *kami* and ancestral spirits) in Japanese society.

Chapter Four concluded with a comprehensive analysis of the case study findings, highlighting unanticipated thematic elements that emerged from the works and proposing potential explanations for the ubiquitousness of otherworldliness and death as themes in the posters.The outcome of this case study is a nuanced interpretation of how avant-garde Japanese posters function as reflective mechanisms for societal concerns and existential themes, thereby shedding light on the intricate narratives embedded in post-war Japanese visual culture. This study has explored the role of avant-garde posters in post-war Japanese visual culture, underscoring their significance as a medium for social commentary and visual expression during a period characterised by turmoil and transformation.

5.2 Contribution of the study

This study is positioned within the broader academic discourse on Japanese design studies. The investigations into the overlaps in poster design, avant-garde studies, post-war Japanese history and religious studies contribute to a richer, intertextual view of the Japanese avant-garde philosophy. Before commencing the study, an overview of the literature (in English, Japanese and French) ascertained that no single work has yet been published on the interconnectedness between Japanese avant-garde posters, aesthetics, otherworldliness and death. The study therefore contributes to a gap in the literature by applying theories on aesthetics, thanatology, European and Japanese avant-gardes, philosophy, history and otherworldliness to avant-garde Japanese posters. This study therefore serves as a bridge between multiple fields of research and has revealed notable overlaps. To this end, it contributes to the body of literature on the avant-garde, Japanese design and broader art and design history discourses.

Furthermore, the study examined the roles of avant-garde Japanese posters as social commentaries, expressions of otherworldliness and death within post-war turmoil, as well as

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channels for expressions of active nihilism. The posters have been identified as reflections of philosophical inquiries into life, death, nihilism, war trauma, religion, the human experience, and the context of the post-war Japanese avant-garde ethos. Interpretivism and historical context analysis methods revealed intricate connections between design, the socio-political context of Japan and the themes of otherworldliness and death. It has thus been demonstrated that these themes are important aspects to consider when examining the role of posters in Japan in the context of the country's World War II surrender, the growth of the avant-garde ethos, the introduction and deepening of democracy as well as the growth of its economic power.

The study has also illustrated the multiplicity of styles and movements across Japanese and European avant-garde philosophies. As evidenced in the study, the style and ideologies of the Japanese avant-garde (which include theatre, film, art and design) are not monolithic. Instead, they encompass numerous perspectives and span various media, visual styles and stories. This is to say that even though otherworldliness and notions of mortality are certainly recurrent themes in avant-garde Japanese posters, they are expressed differently in terms of subject matter, style, and audience interpretation (connotations and metaphors) (Barthes in Tyler 2006:37). However, the focus of the study was not to argue *what* classifies the poster samples as avant-garde or not. Instead, the central argument concerned literature on how Japan's post-war context gave rise to a Japanese avant-garde spirit, as expressed in posters.

Furthermore, whereas Susan Sontag (1996:200) categorises posters as 'applied arts' on the basis that they convey the value of products or ideas rather than expressing the designer's individuality, the case study has demonstrated the importance of the designer's individuality as a crucial tenet of Japanese post-war avant-garde expression. This has been exemplified in numerous posters wherein artistic expression or the status of the designer is often more important than the advertised product, production or film being advertised (seen in *Virgin City*, Figure 47, and *Are you ready for fresh air?,* Figure 66).

The study has also contributed to decentring the predominance of Eurocentric academic viewpoints on the avant-garde ethos. It touched on debates in the literature that propose the need to examine the contributions from the 'periphery' of the avant-garde (including Japan) and not only Europe as its 'centre' (Hagener 2014; Inaga 2010; Isaeva 2017; Sell 2010). Examples in this study included pre- and post-war movements like the Futurist *MAVO* group, as well as brief mentions of the *butoh* and the *Gutai* collectives, and of course, *angura*. In doing so, the

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study has challenged the predominantly Eurocentric narratives of the avant-garde ethos in the literature. The study thus provided a more inclusive perspective of the avant-garde by showcasing Japan's contribution to the avant-garde ethos, specifically through posters.

5.3 Limitations of the study and opportunities for further research

While the research aim has been achieved, there are certainly limitations to the scope of the study. It is worthwhile to note these areas so that they may potentially be examined further in future research. Firstly, the case study relied on a specific sample of posters. Although I have endeavoured to present a robust analysis of a variety of posters, it is inevitably the case that this only partially represents the diversity of posters in post-war Japan. Nevertheless, this was not the aim of the study. Instead, I maintain that the selection was intentionally limited to demonstrate the most appropriate and convincing examples to illustrate the above-mentioned themes and objectives. Moreover, with regard to translation of Japanese text in posters, and owing to the scope of the study, I have translated selected examples where the text is more obviously linked to the connotative value of the imagery. Future research might examine, in more depth, the connotative weight of copywriting in Japanese poster design.

Moreover, it is clearly the case that as many documented designers at the time were male, the study is male-centric by default. The only documentation of female contributions to the Japanese avant-garde ethos concerns their short-lived[78] participation in avant-garde circles (*Gutai*, Fluxus, Neo-Dada, *Kyushu-ha* and the Sogetsu Art Centre). Even within these collectives, they were not given equitable exposure for their contributions, barring some recognition given to internationally active female artists.[79] As Ikegami (in Cotton 2015) states, Japanese design was male-dominated and "women artists were in general so marginalised that they were often invisible". Extant literature on the broader avant-garde ethos in Japan indicates that while women artists did contribute to other mediums, they did not engage in graphic design (Bartal 2020; Kee 2003; Munroe 1994; Yoshimoto 2006b). Furthermore, as is evident in some posters from the case study, women were, at best, accepted as muses and references for male designers, according to Ikegami (in Cotton 2015). This may suggest why it is only in recent

[78] Tanaka Atsuko (appendix Figure 2) was the only female member of *Gutai*, but was not treated well. The group disbanded only after six months (Ikegami in Cotton 2015).
[79] Women such as Yoko Ono, Kawakubo Rei, Tanaka Atsuko participated in fashion design, painting, installation art and public happenings but did not contribute to graphic design (Bartal 2020:96). Regarding lesser-known women, Tabe Mitsuko from the Kyushu-ha group did not receive equal treatment like men did (Bartal 2020:84; Yoshimoto 2006b:4).

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literature that Japanese female contributions to post-war art, installations, sculpture and painting began to receive attention (see Bartal 2020; Kee 2003; Munroe 1994; Yoshimoto 2006). Therefore, within the realm of the broader Japanese avant-garde, further studies on the role of women in the avant-garde may present a balanced view of their contributions outside being 'used' as muses and sex symbols in posters designed by men (Goodman 1999; Isaeva 2007; Mackie 2006).

Further research may also consider thematic differences in representations of otherworldliness and death across several Japanese eras (such as the Edo and Meiji periods, pre-World War II or post-modernism). Whether themes of otherworldliness and death are strictly pertinent to the post-war avant-garde or whether they also manifest in posters throughout various periods of Japanese history may prove interesting. Whether or not otherworldliness and death appear in other creative mediums in the same post-war Japanese context could prove interesting. Similarly, comparing the avant-garde *angura* and the traditional *shingeki* theatres and their posters could reveal notable differences in style, subject matter or underlying messaging, especially considering *shingeki*'s Western realism and government funding.

Moreover, as indicated in the case study findings, while analysing the poster samples, unforeseen themes such as the role of sexuality, the female body, eroticism and nihilism appeared more prominently than expected. Further research on eroticism and death in Japanese art, design and film may also be worthwhile. These studies may examine other controversial or subversive movements such as the *ero-guro-nansensu* trend in the Edo period (1603–1868)[80].

Exploring how the same theoretical framework of otherworldliness and death may be applied to poster design in countries outside of Japan, particularly those with similar religious views, may be worthwhile in helping piece together a more holistic perspective of Asian art and design practices. Sugiura's visual explorations of pan-Asian imagery and cosmology, as well as religious overlaps between Buddhism and Hinduism in China, Korea, Japan, Tibet and India are noteworthy here. Building on this, an analysis of posters from other Asian countries, whether avant-garde or not, might reveal notable similarities or differences.

[80] The *ero-guro-nansensu* (erotic, gruesome nonsense) genre portrayed unconventional and bizarre behaviour through literature, theatre, and art. It showcased erotic and grotesque themes of horror and sex alongside beheadings and murders, expressed in literature, entertainment and advertising (Bartal 2020:153).

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It may also be useful to approach similar studies from the basis of other philosophical and theoretical frameworks that have not been explored in this one. Examining the work of seminal Japanese philosophers such as Nishida and Kitarō, for instance, could further enrich studies of Japanese mindsets on aesthetics, death, nihilism and otherworldliness. By incorporating broader perspectives and theoretical frameworks, future studies may offer a more nuanced analysis of the philosophical underpinnings of Japanese graphic design.

Lastly, other avenues for further research may include how otherworldliness and death manifest in the broader scope of Japanese culture and art. Murakami Takashi (2005), Marco Olivier (2011) and Deborah Shamoon (2011) examine *anime*, *manga*, film, cosplay, literature and even toy design as avenues for constructing and disseminating identities for post-war (and post-modern) Japan. These mediums deal with themes of nihilism, the body, femininity versus masculinity, atomic bomb trauma and more. Building on theories from the above and applying theories of otherworldliness and death to these mediums may contribute to the literature regarding Japanese nation branding and soft power.[81]

5.4 Concluding remarks

The history of posters in Japan spans timelines and mediums from early *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints to wartime propaganda and *angura* posters and has left a notable mark on graphic design in Japan. A crucial turning point was the 1964 *Persona* design exhibition in which Yokoo's 'self-obituary' suicide poster was the first non-commercial poster to be exhibited in a gallery (see footnote at Figure 43) (Lynam 2021:[sp]). Since then, galleries dedicated to exhibiting and archiving posters have sprung up across Japan.[82] The legacy of the poster as an artwork capable of communicating history, death and a new identity for post-war Japan continues with the widely celebrated and disseminated *Hiroshima Appeals* poster campaign.[83] The campaign is also a testament to the artistic creativity, individuality, experimental and avant-garde spirit that characterises much of Japanese design (Oseko in Margolis 2023).

[81] Japanese soft power is characterised by cultural productions such as *anime* and *manga*, which are exported internationally to leverage Japan's economic and diplomatic influence (White 2022).
[82] These include but are not limited to Ginza Graphic Gallery, 21_21 Design Sight, Design Hub in Tokyo, and the 21st Century Museum of Modern art in Kanazawa (author's observation).
[83] The annual Hiroshima Appeals poster is shown yearly across Japanese galleries including Design Hub.

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The long-standing history of *Hiroshima Appeals* underscores the tremendous impact of the atomic bomb on collective Japanese memory. As the nation continues to disseminate an identity of a strong, (now) post-modern nation with economic strength, one may wonder if posters contribute to the visual exports of Japan's soft power. It may be argued that campaigns like *Hiroshima Appeals*, with its international recognition, paved the way for Japan's current soft power trajectory. Presently, the nation's soft power is widely propelled through visual culture such as *anime*, *manga*, and cartoons like Hello Kitty which help disseminate a distinct image of a stable, culturally rich and powerful Japan (Murakami 2005).

In unpacking some of the history of posters in Japan, it may be inferred that Japanese posters will continue to evolve with the cultural *milieu* wherein they are fabricated. As a country that still appreciates traditional values and functions as a largely paper-based society, posters remain an apt way of communicating ideas, events and identities in post-modern Japan.[84] Across Japanese train stations, inside trains, on billboards at street crossings and inside malls are bright, attention-grabbing advertisements for anything from *furusato* getaways to the latest *anime* release.[85] Thus the role of the poster in post-modern Japan and its growing soft power is strengthening, as designers continue to innovate in accordance with the *Zeitgeist*.

Yokoo (in Mount 2010:[sp]) reminds us of his desire to continue creating in light of his mortality: "Retirement will come only with death. I am already looking forward to my posthumous time". Designers and researchers may find inspiration from the likes of Yokoo, who continue producing work that questions established ideals (be it political, or even staid design conventions for example), bridges 'high' and 'low' art, and visualises moments from a time in war history that should not be repeated. Considering this, it is hoped that the heavy themes of war, death and otherworldliness in this study may serve as reminders of the *mono no aware* of life, the otherworld that awaits us all, and the tragic beauty found in the contemplation of these ideas.

[84] Japan's paper consumption and production is the largest in the world. Cash is preferred over card in most places, and the 'outdated' government administration still relies on paper and traditional *hanko* signature seals rather than digital documentation and digital signatures. The roll-out of plans to 'digitise' the nation has been noticeably slow (Kajimoto 2020).
[85] Author's observations from living in Japan.

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APPENDIX

Figure 1: Gustave Courbet, *Stonebreakers,* 1849.
Oil on canvas, 1.5 m x 2.6 m.
Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden. (Web Gallery of Art).

Figure 2: Tanaka Atsuko, *77Q-81,* 1981.
Acrylic lacquer on canvas, 164,5 x 133 cm.
Paula Cooper Gallery. (Paula Cooper Gallery).

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Figure 3: Photograph of the Sogetsu Art Centre in Tokyo, circa 1960. (Sumai interior).

Figure 4: *Discover Japan*, travel poster, 1970. Saitama Railway Museum. (Artscape).

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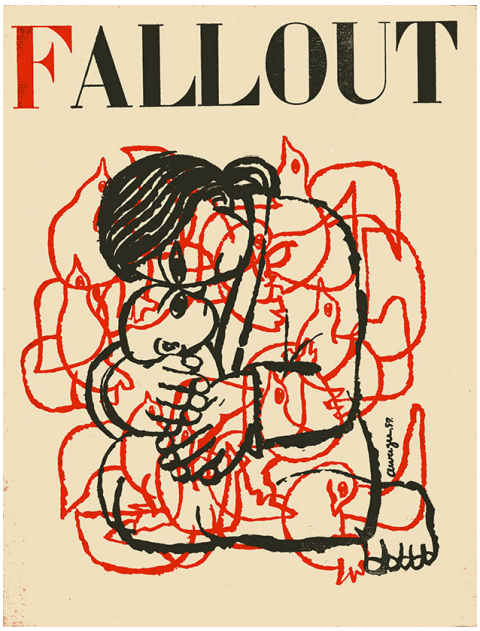

Figure 5: Awazu Kiyoshi, *Fallout* magazine cover, for The Japan Council Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs, 1957.
21st Century Museum of Modern Art, Kanazawa. (21st Century Museum of Modern Art).

Figure 6: Unknown designer, poster the Black Tent's performance of *Abe Sada's Dogs*, 1975. (Aihall).

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Figure 7: Awazu Kiyoshi, *Portrait of a woman* (ある女の肖像), 1977.
Silkscreen, 66,5 x 66,5 cm.
Private collection, Tagboat. (Tagboat).

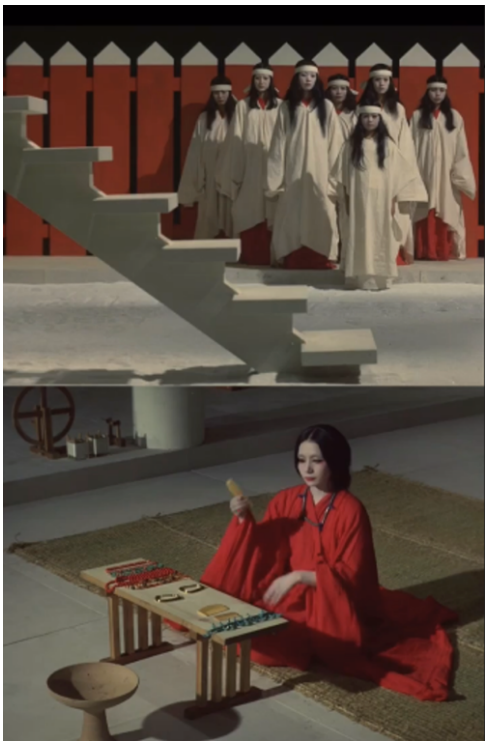

Figure 8: Stills from *Himiko*, directed by Shinoda Masahiro, 1974.
@interiorandfilms on Instagram.

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Figure 9: Katsushika Hokusai, *Red Fuji* (*Fine Wind, Clear Weather*), 1832.
Woodblock print, 24,4 x 38,1 cm.
MFA Boston Museum. (MFA Boston).

Figure 10: Katsushika Hokusai, *The Great Wave off the Coast of Kanagawa*, 1831.
Woodblock print, 25,4 x 35,5 cm.
Sumida Hokusai Museum. (Google Arts and Culture).

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