

Sweet & Bitter
Contemporary "Girl Photography" from Japan

Hammer Museum, UCLA
April 15th 2008

Introduction by ADRIAN FAVELL
Presentation by HIROMI NAKAMURA

Full texts by Hiromi Nakamura and Adrian Favell, plus exhibition catalogue
available online at:

<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/favell/jwave6.pdf>

Panel Discussion

**With panelists CHARLOTTE COTTON, LAURA MILLER, SHARON KINSELLA
and YOSHITAKA MOURI**



CHARLOTTE COTTON is department head and curator of photography at Los Angeles County Museum. Previously she was curator of photography at the Victoria and Albert Museum and head of programming at The Photographers Gallery, in London. She was visiting professor at Yale University, and currently at the University College for the Creative Arts in the UK. She has also been visiting critic, including at SVA, Bard College, USC, and Cranbrook. Charlotte curated the exhibitions *Out of Japan* (2002) and *Guy Bourdin* (2003), and her books include *Imperfect Beauty* (2000) and *The Photograph as Contemporary Art* (2004).



LAURA MILLER is Professor of Anthropology at Loyola University Chicago. Recent publications include *Beauty Up: Exploring Contemporary Japanese Body Aesthetics*

(2006), 'Those naughty teenage girls: Japanese *kogals*, slang, and media assessments' (2004), and 'Graffiti photos: Expressive art in Japanese girls' culture' (2003). With Jan Bardsley, she edited *Bad Girls of Japan* (2005); the two are now finishing *Manners and Mischief: Gender and Power in Japanese Conduct Literature*. Her new book in progress is *Girl Power Japan: Gendered Domains of Cultural and Linguistic Vigor*.



SHARON KINSELLA does research on contemporary Japanese media processes and cultural production and the interaction of cultural formations with governance, youth policy and law. She has published on cute, otaku, men's comic magazines, lolita complex, girls' in-street fashion, journalism and visual cultural representations. Sharon previously worked in Cambridge University, Yale, and MIT, is currently based at Oxford University. She is completing a book called *girls as energy: fantasies of rejuvenation*, and has a chapter on girls' art from Japan in global circulation called 'Who's That Girl?', forthcoming in a compilation edited by Mary Steggle.



YOSHITAKA MOURI is Associate Professor of Sociology and Cultural studies at Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, Japan ('GEIDAI'). His research interests are postmodern culture, media, art, and urban culture. His publications include *Bunka=Seiji* and *Popyura Ongaku to Shihonshugi*, as well as recent articles in English, 'Culture=Politics: The emergence of new cultural forms of protest in the age of freeter' and 'Subcultural unconsciousness in Japan: the war and Japanese contemporary artists' in the collection *Popular Culture, Globalization and Japan*. In 2007, he worked as a director of Kitakyushu Art Biannual.

CHARLOTTE COTTON

Thank you, Hiromi, that was a really fantastic talk, it has triggered lots of ideas for me. I wanted to start by thinking about the differences as well as the synergies of what was happening in Japan in the early 1990s, alongside what was happening internationally with contemporary art photography.

The character of photography in Japan from the very outset – which was in the mid 1850s when Westerners beyond diplomats could start traveling in Japan – produced a very different form of photography than what you saw in the West. There were photographs of Japanese topography and architecture, of course, but more significantly for our discussion here there were portraits made by Westerners of Japanese women, created for an export market. The idea of Japanese female identity being consumed and constructed, was thus developed in a profound sense from the earliest days.

But probably more significantly, in terms of the genuine innovation and contribution of Japanese art photography, is the fact that in the 1850s, the medium of photography came to Japan without the already contentious baggage that photography had in the West by the mid 1850s. Whereas photography in Europe principally was from its conception part of a very lively debate about picture making – what was art, what would art making become – that wasn't the case in Japan. To over-generalize, photography was photography. It was not really set against the traditional crafts, and it was not aligned with what were becoming contemporary international art values of the mid 19th century. So really I think it is no surprise that in talking about contemporary Japanese photography, you are talking about something that is much more commonly a part of daily interaction in Japan, as well as being very significantly experimental as a vehicle of expression within contemporary art. I really loved the Mikiko Hara quote you mentioned: “Without getting frenzied, without getting loud...” and so on. You could reverse all of those and you'd get the perspective of a European photographer in the 1850s: “Getting frenzied, getting loud...”.

Let's just leapfrog a hundred and fifty years to the early 1990s. It was really around 1992 that photography as an international contemporary art form becomes a really definite prospect. It was the year that both Nobuyoshi Araki and Nan Goldin – the high priest and priestess of diaristic photography – had their first international touring exhibitions. It was also the period when, as in Japan, the West was developing this idea of having a career as a contemporary art photographer. It was the first time that this was a really serious prospect. I like the fact that you mentioned that the girl photographers in Japan weren't really from colleges, but had trained as assistants and had been models. That was really the last generation to do it in that way. You had parallels in England at the time when young photographers were wanting to show their work in magazines because there were no galleries and there was very little institutional and college support of their identity as an art photographer. Also, alongside of that you had, as you mentioned in your lecture, this real cultural desire – which continues unabated – to create “hot” young art stars, so that there were internationally a lot of competitions and surveys of what had become known as “emerging” art stars. That's, I think, somewhat different from the generation of male artists who were brought into fame in the 1980s, where I don't think they were being classed as being emerging or kind of prospective, they were just art stars. If you are feeling a little cynical, you would say that the media constructed these kinds of groups of young artists, especially young women artists, and so it tended to be the prettier they were, the better the media liked them. So in America you had the Yale girls, in England you had the Royal College of Art girls, in Japan it's the “girly photographers”.

I also want to raise another contemporary difference with Japan and the rest of the world, which is that the dynamic of photography in Japan has not been played out on the white walls of galleries, so much as in the book and the magazine market (and “mooks”). The adage is currently that if a relatively well known American photographer convinced a book publisher to publish the book of his next body of work, the publisher might print 5000 copies for the American and European market. But if that same photographer was lucky enough to attract a Japanese publisher you could add a zero and multiply by two or three to reach the projected book sales. The Japanese buy books in a way that you don’t see in the West. So whereas everyone else in the world looks to America to show photography, with its vast network of commercial and institutional galleries – and are extremely jealous! – Japan has circumvented that level of jealousy and kept its highly innovative and unique way of practicing photography—namely, by publishing photographs as a printed image.

The privileging of the gallery space system as the Western locus for contemporary art photography explains why there has been such a deluge of what we call constructed or tableau photography. It has been a very dominant form of contemporary art photography for over ten years. It usually means producing work in very small numbers; in the main it doesn’t use the aesthetic of the casual snap; it’s much more considered, and has high production values. On top of this, the meaning of creating photographs where photographs become as important or as large as paintings, really doesn’t carry the same significance in Japan as it does in Europe. Remember from the outset in Europe, photography has suffered from an insecurity that it wasn’t as valued as other forms of art making.

Books are about sequence and lay out, and the relationship between pictures. It suits and it predicts a much more prolific style of photographic practice. That’s not to say that photographers like Mika Ninagawa and Mikiko Hara were two average Japanese girls who lucked out and had their social use of photography recontextualized for the publishing market. Absolutely far from it. Their photographs, although there are many, are very consciously composed. Their camera is actively not casually directed. But it looks unfettered for a number of reasons. Partly because it does have a conscious affinity to the social uses of photography in Japan, but also I think within the international stage, because it is up against a much more considered and conservative version of contemporary art photography. It is, as Hiromi pointed out, only after the artworld dust of the 1990s has settled that these women are no longer considered “girls”, and that the proof of their contribution to contemporary art photography is really felt. Like much of the best Japanese photography, from a Western perspective, it confronts and opens up international discourses about art photography.

LAURA MILLER

I’d like to extend gratitude to Hiromi Nakamura for the opportunity to learn about the work of Ninagawa and Hara. I was impressed by the way she was able to intertwine the story of girl photography with both changes in camera technology as well as shifts in the

social and cultural landscape. Both have contributed to this new art. Nakamura draws, I think, a very warm portrait of women as creators of artistic cultural products. She had many insightful and provocative ideas in her paper, but the one that I especially appreciated was her understanding that the camera has, with this movement in Japan, moved from the hands of men to the hands of women. A famous Meiji era photographer name Hikoma Ueno is said to have had a daughter who was Japan's first female photographer. We don't have very much information about her, however, although we have a lot about him. For the 1990s crop of girl photographers, perhaps we have too much information. For example, Maki Miyashita created a series of photos of Tokyo women in their messy rooms wearing their favorite underwear.

The work of girl photographers like Ninagawa and Hara compels our interest for various reasons. For one thing, they have seized control of the commodified image. Ninagawa and Hara's own mothers never would have taken such blunt, intense, irreverent, and pushy photos. Japanese women's relationship to the physical worlds they live in is often unavailable to outsiders – and this means to outsiders in Japan as well, especially older men – except through literature. But with the technology of the camera, we are able to peak in through a visual idiom. These girl photographers reflect an entirely new stance about female relationship towards public space. We see in their images a display of ownership of the terrain, and an apparent prerogative in viewing and appreciating all that the outside world has to offer. There is almost a bratty insistence in either being noticed, or in intrusively poking the camera lens into any and every public space. No-one, not even your dog or you cat, are immune from their assertive, prying lens. So that there are all these photographs of poor dogs licking themselves and so on.

There is also a rather manic quality to the work of both photographers, as they scan the universe for flowers, goldfish, models and suburban sidewalks to add to their visual collection. Constantly documenting these spaces is their birthright: reminiscent of 18th century European explorers and gentlemen naturalists, who made detailed records of their exotic encounters in foreign lands. There is, in both contexts, an underlying imperialistic assumption that the universe exists for their personal entertainment, scrutiny, and collection. Although in her own words, Ninagawa envisages herself as a modern day recluse, a Heisei version of Kamo Chomei and his Ten Foot Square Hut retreat, she does not at all share that famous hermit's disenchantment with the world. On the contrary, she is fully engaged with its colors and textures, even if it is mediated through the lens of the camera.

Japanese women have been the object of the male photographer's interest from the beginning of the camera's presence in Japan, as Charlotte discusses. During the Meiji period, prostitutes and geisha were often forced to pose for photographers – both Japanese and foreign photographers – and their commodified images were quite popular both domestically and internationally. In one sense, Shoichi Aoki's photos of Harajuku teens (in *Fruits* and *Fresh Fruits*) and Masanori Yoshinaga's Lolita-chan pics (in *Gothic & Lolita*) are not so different from Kazuma Ogawa's famous photo exhibition and published album of 100 celebrated geishas of 1891.

Hara and Ninagawa, however, have reclaimed the photo as a strategy of cultural critique, taking a familiar form of gender commodification, and using it for their own purposes. Unlike the subjects of older commercial images of women – images that once taken were controlled mainly by male persons – this generation of female photographers, that Nakamura has introduced us to, have claimed the camera as a tool of their own. The fact that the subject of their photos often overlaps with that of male photographers does not diminish the importance of their work.

Finally, listening to Charlotte, another idea occurred to me. For someone who is not a professional photographer or curator, I think it's important to point out that girls' photography or girls taking photos is not a separate enterprise from other kinds of activities. It's the curators that make it into "art making". For most of the women and girls involved, except for the ones that make a career and become famous, it isn't art making. It is one of a spectrum of activities, very much tied to the social context, and part of their relationship with a group of friends. So from the outside, we sometimes see them as art products, but in doing so we can lose track of what it means to the girls themselves.

SHARON KINSELLA

Thank you very much for your comments. For me, what is becoming more and more clear listening to Hiromi Nakamura, and then Charlotte and Laura, is that there seems to be two very interesting phenomena going on here.

The first is: How far does the girl photography draw from the richness of a specifically girls' aesthetic heritage? There is a very long tradition in Japan, right through the twentieth century and of course very strongly so in the twenty first century, of a quite specific and often secluded area of literature, comics, fashion, diaries, letters of exchange, and various media, which carry between them a specific sensibility and a specific response to the world, that reflects the experience of both middle class educated girls and also more working class girls. It has very recognizable smells and traits: a certain sort of naturalism, a certain presence of flowers, often fantasy, often escapism, sometimes a kind of infantilism, a great interest in babies, in motherhood, baby animals... "Cute" [*kawaii*], of course, is sometimes what this aesthetic is referred to, and it is seated very deeply in what is a very specific girls' created, girls' imaginary world. So, when looking at contemporary girl artists and contemporary girl photographers, I'm very interested to see how this aesthetic continues and develops, maybe reifying and bringing to a more sophisticated level, the logic and the meaning of an aesthetic that has existed for a very long period of time.

Then there is another second, also very interesting phenomenon, which is a longer, or equally long lived tradition: that of an extremely intense form of male voyeur fascination with what's going on in girls' culture, from the outside and within Japan. That is, the male fascination of imagining, for example, lying beside a sleeping teenage and just imbibing her aura: a great interest in their physicality, their presence, their libido, what they do with their teenage friends... At various points during the twentieth century, there

have been certain sorts of invasion into this girls' culture; sometimes attempts to mine it, sometimes attempts to mimic it, sometimes attempts to stage it. I think this tradition has continued and very much developed and mushroomed, in a quite complicated way, during the 1990s and into the 2000s, alongside the emergence of these very visible and very strong performative girl street cultures, such as *kogyaru* and *ganguro gyaru*.

At the same time as these girl cultures were pushing forward, and becoming as Laura says, more assertive – and in some ways more demanding, more cocky, holding the camera for themselves – at the same time, we get an almost equivalently excited level of new energy in the male voyeurism and the male interest in perhaps curating, framing or offering great awards to these girl photographers and artists. Perhaps this is a desire to be part of this girls' movement, or to shape it in some way.

How these two longstanding gender based structures in Japanese culture interact, and how they balance off, can be seen in the work of each individual girl photographer or girl artist. For me, this is the point of greatest interest. Understanding how this person, faced with this enormous amount of cultural knowledge and pre-history, is going to negotiate presenting images: perhaps of themselves; maybe wanting to use their own interest in girls culture, or maybe not wanting to use it. How they negotiate that, and how they develop that aesthetic, is of great interest.

I had one other thought, which continues from Charlotte's introduction of a more international context for their art. How precisely does the specific Japanese situation, and its gendered structures of culture, relate to the international structure? It does seem quite clear there that there are parallels in the UK, for example with the girl artist boom, which was also during the 1990s. Similar kinds of questions were being raised especially around one particular figure, Tracey Emin, who was celebrated and positively encouraged to be the debauched, drunken, out of control female artist. Like in Japan, her art was essentially her, very much in the manner of some of the girl photographers here. They were present as well in their own art: the moment they go on stage and the moment they get their awards, actually is their art product, so to speak. Consuming them is part of their art, and in a similar way, Tracey Emin was consumed as a person: as an artist struggling on the media stage, as much as her, actually rather interesting, nice and very feminine pieces of artwork using quilted patchwork, and various other female arts and crafts. But what she had in her trajectory through the early 1990s, was actually quite painful.

For example, at a certain moment, she appeared on the *Late Show* [a high brow BBC arts program], among serious art critics, really drunk and completely failing to perform in any way adequate to the television camera. Eventually, she stumbled off the stage, swearing at everybody and telling them she was far too drunk to perform anything intellectual, so that she might as well go now, with the camera trailing after her... All of this was consumed lavishly, and it was rather painful because there was a sense that at one level, she herself might feel that she was in control of this persona, that she was selling this persona. She definitely did allow photographers into her bathroom – while she was clipping her nails and other things like that – to consume her image as this debauched new kind of woman, quite able to be as ballsy as the men. But, on the other hand, there

was a kind of painful sense that they had the last laugh; that in the end, she wasn't quite able to determine how she was going to be presented on the *Late Show*, or why she'd been invited in to that situation. She's disappeared from view in the 2000s...

So I think that despite the specificity of the situation in which the girl photographers in Japan became visible, there are nevertheless clear parallels to other countries in their positionality, which are very interesting. Of course, this raises enormous questions both about the international focus on these girl figures, and also on their subjectivity: who, in each individual artist's case, is controlling their trajectory and its development?

YOSHITAKA MOURI

Yes, thank you very much for the presentation. I really enjoyed your talk. Actually, I had been wondering why the girl photographers came out in the 1990s, and so I learned a lot of things from the talk. There were a lot of suggestions here. But, honestly speaking, I became very nervous hearing your talk and the comments from the panel, because I feel here I'm a kind of marginalized person! One of the reasons is: how can a Japanese guy – a middle aged guy – talk about girl culture? I have a daughter, a teenager, and I always try to understand what she is thinking—and I never understand! That's a big question. Having said that, I'll will try to do my best to bring some new information to the discussion...

One thing is that the photographer in Japan, particularly in the Japanese context, was not considered a real “artist” until recently. Maybe the most famous photographer in Japan is Kishin Shinoyama. He is a good photographer, taking picture of idols and so on, but he was successful because he is a good businessman too. And in Japan, good businessmen have to be men—that's the mindset of the Japanese media industry. You know... The photographer has to carry around lots of heavy mechanical stuff, so they've got to have big strong arms, that kind of thing... The thing is, this kind of landscape has changed, maybe since the 1980s. That's why the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography [where Hiromi Nakamura is a curator] was established for one thing.

You suggested there were a couple of important events to create this girl movement. One is the “Three point three square meters exhibition”, organized by Recruit in 1992. Now, this is quite interesting, because Recruit is a magazine company, and the magazine *Recruit* is all about job hunting: it's for someone looking for a part time job. The thing is, *Recruit* was important sociologically, because they invented the term “freeter” in Japanese in 1987 or 1988. *Freeter* is a kind of Japanese English: “free” + “arbeiter” from German: that is, those who are looking for a job but also those who Recruit suggested can be free as well. The idea of *freeters* is that they can lived outside the corporate world, be anything they want to be; they can whatever they want as long as they only get a part time job. So the term freeter became a kind of slogan for a particularly lifestyle in the late 1980s, although in the 1990s *freeters* became a kind of social problem, because after the bubble economy, the Japanese economy was not so good, and the number of *freeter* dramatically increased.

So we can call the 1990s in Japan, the age of the freeter. It's kind of time when young people could not find a proper job, so during that time there was as a strong ideological turn particularly concerning the term "creativity". To be a *freeter* also means you can be creative [a *kuriaita*], as long as you don't have to work full time. A kind of ideology of creativity was born. Creativity is not the same thing as "talent"; anyone can be creative. [...] All this is happening in the context of a shift to a neo-liberal economy, and in a way the ideology of creativity is the perfect idea for a neo-liberal economy. Neo-liberalism needs this idea of creativity to exploit young people, it puts this kind of ideological idea in their minds...

On the other hand, this idea is not necessarily all bad. Maybe becoming a creator, or the ideology of creativity, is also an egalitarian idea. It can be very democratic too. For example, as Joseph Beuys once said "anyone can be an artist". So maybe we can appropriate this message to understand the kind of creativity we are talking about here. One of the things I find with these girls' movements, particularly the photography movement, is that it is a kind of response to the new ideology of creativity. The girls try to reappropriate the idea of creativity, and they want to use that kind of idea for themselves to create something new. I'm impressed by this aspect of your talk. It must be a very radical challenge against the dominant ideology, to use the same terms of creativity against it.

The question is then, if this is so, I don't know whether the museum is the appropriate place for this kind of photographer. Maybe this kind of photographer could actually change our concept of art or of the museum itself, very dramatically, in a radical way. But still, if you put these kinds of pictures in a museum in the traditional way, maybe you end up turning it back into traditional art, which depends on "talent" or the "genius" of an artist or something understood in a modernist way. I'd like to know what you think about this risk, when you put these radical young artists back into the institution of the museum?

HIROMI NAKAMURA

I'll try to answer Mouri's question. Yes, as you suggested, of course the museum is too late to catch up with these waves. That's why I needed ten years before I could talk about the state of girl photography! Of course, there is a risk. On the other hand, I think that other places are better for catching up with new waves. Maybe it's better that Canon or Recruit company do this. As you can see, Canon is a photography company, and so they are always looking for new users, hence new artists, and so on, and they have a big budget for searching for new creators. And it's not only the professionals they are looking for, it's also people like the girl photographers. Still, there was in 1999, the first exhibition of girl photography, *Private Room* at Art Tower Mito. The curator of this exhibition was Toshihiro Asai, and his major specialism is not photography, but he has much interest in the phenomenon of girls' photography, so that is why at that time he could catch up with the waves. Our museum [The Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of

Photography] has never had such an exhibition, it is only focusing on girl photography now...

W. DAVID MARX [conference participant]

I was wondering about Yurie Nagashima, who came at the very end of the talk, because you mentioned she won the prize with Hiromix and Ninagawa. You never mentioned her until then, and in the list of ten or twelve photographers you mentioned, you didn't mention her, even though in Japan she is definitely part of the movement. I recently saw an issue from the 1990s of *Studio Voice*, which was about "girl power", and she was the first photographer on the page. I think she is very different, but I'm wondering if you could talk about why you didn't talk about her: if there's a reason, and how you feel about her work? I feel it is a little more difficult. Hiromix is very easy to consume, because it's all about very cute girls with celebrities and seeing her private life, whereas Nagashima's work is very confrontational. Her most famous photo is where she has her family all naked in a family portrait.

HIROMI NAKAMURA

Yes, you are correct. Yurie Nagashima did not emerge out of the Recruit and Canon competitions, that's why I could not expand on it more. As you say, she is a very special case. I remember her first book, *empty white room* in 1995. It has very good sales, not only for photographic lovers, but also ordinary people. But in fact we cannot really talk about her recent works, because I think she has been taking a rest. Her recent show was in a very small gallery, lammfromm. It's a very small gallery to have work in, and it was just snapshots of close family and friends, things like that.

MARIKO YABE [Geography, UCLA]

I'm interested in the question of public space, women in public space. I'm glad to see the new generation of younger people have started representing themselves as women. Although that's good, it seems to me that what they are doing is about consciousness, in their minds, bringing their own private space into the public space. But I don't see any impact that they could have on public space in the wider sense, other than commodification itself. In that sense, I'm more interested in how their social consciousness – which could bring good things for people, if it had more impact on the bigger context – is kind of lacking something, other than commodifying themselves and putting themselves in the market. It seems the only public dimension that they can relate to is to the corporation. Other than that, what else are they affecting, or if it's not possible for this generation, what can be possible for future generations of women?

LAURA MILLER

I actually do see young women using public space in new ways, and not just selfishly, exploiting resources. You see them sitting on the ground and eating, which their mothers would never have done, or spending hours with friends listening to music. I've seen young women – I'm not lying – walking into drugstores, picking deodorant off the shelf, putting it on, and then putting it back on the shelves! So they are doing amazing things in public space, and using public space for their own pleasure and uses in mind-boggling ways. Maybe it's driven by a selfish interest in using this space, but it is a good kind of use compared to the kind of timid use of this space I saw in the 1970s, when I first lived in Japan. But it isn't for the public good perhaps: it's for pleasure, for hedonistic exploitation of the space, but it's still different than in the past.

OLGA SOOUDI [conference participant]

I have a question about the girls' photography. It seems that a big theme is about seeing, about how these women or girls are able to go out to the store or be in their rooms at home and in a sense find meaning there, or discover interesting things to take pictures of, or get pleasure from everyday life, whether its of people or objects or themselves, in public or private space. Is there a sense in which this is gendered? That women are somehow more able to better see or understand or capture meanings in mundane everyday events than men. If so, how? Is it due to way they are raised, or the way that they live? We were talking about how the camera was being handed from men to women. So do they see differently and is there is a kind of discourse about this among these women photographers?

CHARLOTTE COTTON

I guess the question is: is there a male equivalent of using photography to document everyday life, in a way that has wonder and beauty in the same way? Are there male photographers who work in this way?

HIROMI NAKAMURA

Hmmm [pauses]... Actually, at the same time we do have a very similar male photographers, "boy photographers". They are independent photographers, and they also focus on everyday life, like kids' faces or their ordinary life, place and timing. But the big difference with the girl photographers is that the media has no interest in these boys! They only have interesting in grouping photographers – making a story out of these girl photographers together. That is the big difference. But we do have in Japan several male photographers that are taking images like them.

ADRIAN FAVELL

I just wanted to add a point of clarification. The interesting phenomenon of Shoichi Aoki's *Fruits* was mentioned at one point, but it perhaps wasn't made clear that these books and the *Gothic & Lolita* book by Masayuki Yoshinaga are books that really appear in art museum stores absolutely everywhere in the world right now. In a sense, it is the most visible of the "Japanese" photography that is being taken, and this is, of course, the old story of male curated photography of girls being represented very successfully and commercially in the West. I wanted to pick up on Sharon's analysis, which was to ask whether or not there is a difference when we contrast some of these women photographers, when the images themselves may appeal for the same reasons as the popular street photography—and even if there is an issue about the seriousness of the street photography in relation to the artists we are talking about. But do the women artists transcend that because they are women, or are they part of the same phenomenon in terms of potential western consumption of this?

JOHN TAIN (Getty Research Institute)

I have a question related to Sharon's comments, which has to do with female photographers, and the male curators controlling the female photographers. Now, Araki Nobuyoshi it seems is someone who is a male photographer surrounded by a coterie of female curators and publishers who work with him, and there are obviously also female curators working with these girl photographers. I'm wondering if there is a similar female network of distribution for the books, and the way that works. Is there any semblance of a feminist movement in the way that the photo books are made or distributed?

HIROMI NAKAMURA

I'm sorry to say, but I can't remember any female editor's names. They are all male editors, I think

ADRIAN FAVELL

Yes, but it is maybe important to say that the big story in contemporary art today, in Tokyo at least, is the emergence of quite important female curators and a new generation of young female gallery owners. So it's not just in photography, but I think it is something that has changed.

RIKA HIRO (Getty Research Institute and LACMA)

My question is also similar to what Sharon has discussed. Today's topic, of course, is Japanese girl photography, but I think that the aesthetic of girl photography or cuteness in girl photography or in art generally is not unique to Japan. It is perhaps a more

generational thing. Sharon has mentioned the example of Tracey Emin, but perhaps her case is more comparable to Yurie Nagoshima's case, than, for example Elizabeth Peyton or Sophia Coppola, who is not a photographer, but who herself has had tight connection to Japanese girl photographers and shares their style. So I want to ask, what's your thought on that—that it's generational not geographical (i.e., limited to Japan), it's not a uniqueness of Japanese girl photography?

CHARLOTTE COTTON

I think you are absolutely right, and to go back to Adrian's question, can you tell the whether it makes any difference when it is taken by a man or a woman? I think this is a point of doubt for me. I think it's a question with the consumption of contemporary art generally. Isn't it about what exactly somebody's buying? I mean, do you buy a Cindy Sherman because it's Cindy Sherman, or because it's like having Marilyn Monroe on your walls? Ultimately, I think it's a big issue about contemporary art in general, particularly when it treads this tightrope with these saccharine subjects or embellished and pretty aesthetics, about whether it does maintain its criticality of intent, yes.

SHARON KINSELLA

It seems to me that everybody is wanting to search out a similar kind of question here, about how independent these photographers are able to be. What is the current structure in which they are working, and to what extent can you seek a certain independent meaning in those images? Or are you missing it perhaps if you are not sympathetic enough to find it?

I think the answer to this question is incredibly complicated and dense. There is an awful lot of visual cultural production and material being created and consumed, and an awful lot of people with different roles and functions in that. There is overlap, and interaction, simultaneity and a perhaps a sort of mutual exploitation. There are all kinds of complicated relations, on the one hand, between the male curatorial, voyeuristic aspect of framing images of girls and wanting consume those – not necessarily sexually, but maybe just for their aura, their life, their intimacy, their youth – and then, on the other, the extent to which within that framework, girl photographers, or young women generally who just like taking photographs a lot, *how* are they taking photographs, in this very complicated and very populated situation? To what extent are they able to create a new space for themselves, challenge or not challenge...? I think that is the question, but the answer is very difficult to reduce down and bring back to you, because there is such a degree of overlap in the productivity or creativity of these two groups of people, both in the present and historically.

One example, that I can try to illustrate this with it a little, which is slightly different but related, is that, as we know there is a rise in interest generally amongst young women in photography in the 1990s, which correlated to the *kogyaru* street fashion. In many ways

this street fashion was very much bound up with the idea of being framed in a photograph, and so some of its activities were tied up with photographing yourself and then annotating these photographs, or taking photographs in print club [*purikura*] machines and sending them in to magazines. Now, the girls magazines that were launched then, were launched by male publishers, of course, and usually with male editors at that time. To capture the interest of these young girls, they featured significantly huge numbers of photographs by these girls, that they'd volunteered into these magazines.

Already, there, you have a complicated structure. Because, of course, the girls themselves had the freedom of the photographs and the actual time in which they take the photograph, the moment, the fun, and also what they do with those photographs. This is something that Laura here has done an awful lot of work on: whether they pull silly faces, whether they use scatology, whether they do very unfeminine things; whether they are challenging, or whether they decide not to be. So they have that space, but then that space is being opened and created for them again possibly by another higher or lower agenda.

In the case of the girls' magazines, or *kogyaru mukuzasshi* (i.e., magazines for girls involved in *kogyaru* fashion and their photo imagery), nearly all of those magazines were launched originally by small porn publishers, who were looking for new "small talento" to make money from. That was the original goal of magazines like *Egg* that were launched by well known brand "lolita complex" porn producers—they wanted to find new lolitas on the streets, and that was their goal. But how much did they then control the flow of what then happened, with the invention of the print club machine, with the popularity of young girls taking photographs amongst themselves with their very tongue-in-cheek way, of their taking polaroid and mini polaroid cameras around with them to take photographs back of the male photographers?

So already we see just with that little example, a really complicated interaction, in which there is no very extreme, explicit printed or verbal confrontation of interest, but there is this visual negotiation of subjectivity and power going on through the creation of that visual culture. For me, although I don't know girl art photography very well, but I imagine it's probably a very equally complex and embedded picture.

ADRIAN FAVELL

Yes, I was wanting to broaden the frame of reference to the range of contemporary Japanese art that has been presented in the West—thinking here of Takashi Murakami's curatorship with *Tokyo Girls Bravo* and then *Little Boy*, which has similarly built itself off of the representation of a series of young teenage girl artists. I think that's the kind of question hanging here. The question of the difference or not of somebody like Ninagawa, who could obviously be seen in that context, but could also be seen as doing something very different through the way in which she operates and controls her business, controlling the whole process of what she is making

BRAD FARWELL [Cohen Amador Gallery, New York]

It seems like a lot of the discussion has been about the gendered female production of photography: photos by girl photographers, often with a female subjects. It seems that there's a implication or fear that it's being fetichized or reaching out only towards a male consumer; that it's images of women being consumed by men. I was curious if there is a niche or an area of photography that is being produced explicitly for female consumption?

LAURA MILLER

I disagree a little with Sharon on this, if I understand her correctly. My research on *purikura* argues that it is being produced by and for girls. Yes, it ends up in magazines and that is just another thing that is getting done, but even *Egg*, *Kawaii*, *Pop Teen*, and some of the other magazines, they have girls themselves curating or editing, you know, teenagers who critique the *purikura* of the other girls that send them in. So they actually write little reviews, and they print the *purikura* and they say this one is good because it has this or that, but the graffiti didn't work with the photograph, and so on. So they actually critique it, and then they have articles written by girls, giving you tips on how to do good *purikura*, and how you can jazz up your *purikura*. So yes, definitely, boys aren't reading those articles and they don't care because men won't go into *purikura* booths unless their girlfriends drag them in there. They are not reading these tips on how to create a good *purikura*. So yeah, that I believe that form of photography is produced by and for girls, and consumed mainly by girls, yeah

BRAD FARWELL

So there is also in addition to the social activity of the production, there is also a social activity of the consumption of these things?

LAURA MILLER

Yes, by now I mean there is a whole culture of it, so that there are all kinds of sub-categories, that I've written about: *ero-puri*, *yaba-puri*, *kimo-buri*. All these different types of *purikura*, that are liked named genres now, that have their own rules and things built up around them. Of course, you could ask some of these *oyaji* men what are these *kimo puri*, and they are going to go, "What!?". They don't even *know* these words. So yes, this is really *just* girl culture stuff.

[applause]