

BREAKING THE MIRROR

Hausu and Bad Love Objects

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ABSTRACT

The 1977 Japanese horror movie *Hausu* has become infamous for its exaggerated, cartoonish representations of teenage death: of girls being eaten by pianos, submerged in bleeding clocks, smothered by a torrent of pillows, or dismembered in kaleidoscopes of swirling, two-dimensional objects. When writers care to analyze the film at all, it becomes an emblem of atomic destruction or an excursus on the need to educate a less informed, consumer-oriented audience; its wild aesthetic flourishes solely as a cipher for its political critique. Making use of queer area scholarship, cultural studies work on *shōjo* manga, and historical investigations into the gendered qualities of the Japanese nation, this article seeks to refocus this often-disregarded film from being understood solely as either a kitschy cult artifact or an allegory for Japan's wounded postwar nationality. Rather than cultivating a coherent political project, *Hausu* aligns homoerotic bonds between women both with the capacity to inflict injury and as a potential escape from injurious bonds. To view the film in this light is thus to reconfigure this "bad object" (as in, trashy midnight movie) through the lens of queer theory's bad object: a portrait of same-gender intimacies without nonnormative guarantee.

The thing I like about love as a concept for the possibility of the social, is that love always means non-sovereignty. Love is always about violating your own attachment to your intentionality, without being anti-intentional.

—Lauren Berlant, interview in *No More Potlucks* 18

ABOUT HALFWAY THROUGH *HAUSU* (DIR. NOBUHIKO ÔBAYASHI, JAPAN, 1977), THE FILM'S TEEN protagonist, Gorgeous (Kimiko Ikegami), stumbles upon her aunt's bedroom, luxurious long shots elaborating both the glamour of the furnishings (including an unused wedding kimono hanging on the wall) and the encroaching decay of leaves and ivy—abjection and longing infused within each other. After Gorgeous seats herself at the vanity, camera fades in and out begin to capture her perusal of the older woman's selection of *kanzashi* (ornamental hairpins), the temporal ellipses suggesting a kind of sensuous foreplay. "I've been so lonely," Auntie (Yōko Minamida) whispers over the film's music box theme, a mutual seduction murmuring between them as Gorgeous delicately applies a tube of lipstick, which is presented in extreme, consumerist (in more than one sense) close-up. Her reflection soon begins to shift, oscillating between images of herself (sometimes with cartoonish vampire teeth) and her aunt, a mutation that culminates in the bloody shattering of the glass, Auntie's face fixed in a gasp locatable somewhere between orgasm and sublime terror.

On its most obvious level, the scene suggests a kind of transhistorical identification, a literalized mirroring of two generations, pre- and postwar, with the distance between them often figured as a lacuna in Japanese history. But to remain at this allegorical level ignores the specificities of the relation: that it suggests nonmaternal connections between women, that it occurs through an interface particularly associated with presentationality, and that it thematizes the breaking of the image over a perfect transposition. As Gorgeous looks into the mirror, her face begins to break off like glass shards, revealing her body to be a frozen silhouette of fire, her feminine form a container for immolation. The artist Kogonada suggests that the flames are indicative of atomic destruction,¹ thus elaborating a nationalized mirror latent in the film concerning the transference of violent loss onto the consumer innocence of 1970s adolescents. Speaking of the split in the film that occurs surrounding the mirror scene, he proposes that “the first half establishes the lightness of the new generation born after the bomb,” while “the second half of the film is primarily dedicated to the nonsensical destruction of the girls”—Gorgeous’s friends who have been invited to the titular house by Auntie so that she can eat them. In a way, Kogonada’s narrative of *Hausu* permits it to become a “good object,” not only in the fact that it bestows depth upon a seemingly artificial film, but also in that it clearly demarcates innocence and corruption, divided upon generational lines. Absenting the particularly feminized and eroticized version of horror on display thus also elides another version of “bad object”: the complicity of nonsovereignty, the slippage between progressive and reactionary politics, or the binding together of desire and destruction.

In this sense, this article seeks to consider *Hausu* within a queer discourse of object relations that interrogates heteronormative attachments, but that also works to question the moral evaluations that are attached to particular forms of critique. How, in essence, is *Hausu* rescued in an interpretation like Kogonada’s, and how might a desire to create perfect mirrors between its thematic concerns and macrohistorical concerns deny the gendered and sexual slipperiness of its aesthetic means? The context of queer area studies will be particularly relevant to this first aim, explicating the centrality of gendered erotic histories to the film’s aesthetic project, and thereby provide a means of investigating its portrait of nonnormative sexuality without

assimilating it to either Western queerness or spectacularized Orientalism. The figure of *shōjo* will be important in this work, illustrating how homoerotic bonds between women were constructed throughout the twentieth century, while also providing a cultural foundation for the film’s stylistic choices and political situatedness. Rather than presuming that the film can be easily categorized as radical or conservative, the following discussion grapples with the ambiguous political position of Japan during and after World War II, considering not just the discourses of postwar memorialization or imperial reckoning, but also these discourses’ legacies in 1970s Japanese feminism. Moreover, considering that *Hausu* has been recuperated in English-speaking contexts almost solely as a bizarre cult novelty, I wish to question a masculinized version of nationhood that has elided any discussion of gender in relation to the film and has permitted its redemption (as in Kogonada’s video essay) only through recourse to an allegory of atomic destruction. For example, in Kogonada’s interpretation, the film aligns Japan with the teenage girls—wounded and destroyed by the persistent memory of wartime loss—a narrative that fortifies the nation’s sense of itself as solely a victim in the Pacific conflict and elides its own imperialist aggression. In this sense, rather than reevaluating the status of a lesser cultural object that has been bestowed upon *Hausu*, this article considers the “bad object” through the lens of erotic politics, the idea that love interrupts political intentionality, one that questions the proposition that putatively nonnormative sexualities (like lesbianism) can be simply evaluated along the binaries of oppositional or reactionary.

QUEER OBJECTS

As mentioned before, reception of *Hausu* in a Western context either simplifies or exaggerates the qualities that render it nationally specific. For example, in Chuck Stephens’s essay for the Criterion DVD, or in the many videos on YouTube proclaiming the film’s strangeness, *Hausu* becomes a quasi-Orientalist symbol of midnight movie Japanophilia—the ultimate embodiment of what Stephens cheekily calls “le cinéma du WTF?!”—illustrating it as a work that is incomprehensibly demented in a way that (implicitly) only Japanese objects can be. Stephens’s repeated emphasis on the film’s vaguely prurient eroticism (“a bevy of tender beauties, most of whom appear in increasing stages of undress as the

film progresses”³) also suggests a male *otaku*,⁴ or cult viewer,⁵ scopophilia that Stephens himself contradicts at the start of his piece. Noting that *Hausu* was originally envisioned as the B-movie counterpart to a teen-idol romance called *Pure Hearts in Mud* (and as an attempt by the leading studio Tōhō to capitalize on the post-*Jaws* horror craze), he states that it was originally “marketed to a matinee audience of adolescents and ‘office ladies.’”⁶ And yet, he never considers how the film’s eroticism of girls’ bodies would have signified for this audience, or what kinds of aesthetic traditions its surface orientations and overt ornamentation might have been referencing. Even Manohla Dargis, reviewing a retrospective screening of the film in the *New York Times*, praises *Hausu*’s visual invention but also suggests that it is “difficult to grasp why Mr. Obayashi tells the story the way he does,”⁷ referring to the film’s mixture of old-fashioned aesthetic techniques (such as painted backdrops), elements of the avant-garde, and cult-film schlock.

In both Stephens’s and Dargis’s perspectives, the exaggerated quality of the girls’ deaths becomes central to emphasize either postatomic gravity or a Westernized preoccupation with East Asian perversity and cultural parochialism. In this sense, the film is weighted by associations that either invest it with pan-national consequence or divest it of any meaning whatsoever; in either case, it becomes a classical “bad object” that is superficial or suspect until a matter of geopolitical import can be imposed upon it. But neither route follows the kind of relational ambivalence described by Lauren Berlant in the epigraph that opened this article; inspired by her definition of love, I would argue that the formal incongruity of the film illustrates a version of queer intimacy (and its accompanying aesthetics) that is predicated upon the interrogation of purposeful, agentic attachment and the sovereignty of categories of knowledge. This requires stable figurations of nation, aesthetics, and even queerness to be contested alongside each other, never assimilating any of these elements to a process of obvious, parallel reading.

In essence, Berlant implies a double meaning latent in “attachment”: love describes both an intimate bond between people and critical linkages between theorists and texts. In a way, such a methodology recalls Judith Butler’s statement, in her essay “Against Proper Objects,” that gender and sexuality cannot be understood as separate academic aims, the former describing what one “is” and the latter describing what one “does.” Butler proposes that these disciplinary divisions make

gay and lesbian studies nonconversant with feminism, presuming in such an arbitrary bisection that sexual difference poses no relevance to an individual’s erotic practices, and neglecting the legacies of (predominantly woman of color) contestations to a queer politics based solely in sexuality.⁸ Therefore, “proper object” to Butler has a doubled form: it simultaneously describes the process by which scholarly fields constitute themselves (an object of critical study) and the locus of an erotic aim (an object one desires). Butler states,

The institution of the “proper object” takes place, as usual, through a mundane sort of violence. Indeed, we might read moments of methodological founding as pervasively anti-historical acts, beginnings which fabricate their legitimating histories through a retroactive narrative, burying complicity and division in and through the funereal figure of the “ground.”⁹

This quotation could be taken to mean either the refusal of interdisciplinary relationality or the imposition of compulsory heterosexuality; in either case, an instance of concretization entails a forgetting of stranger (queer?) intimacies. At the same time, what is “buried” by such solidifications is not just alterity but also “complicity and division”; queerness, in her words, is not an ahistorical outside to all systems but a site for examining historical conflicts between forms of embodiment. Instead of illustrating “queer” as the good academic alternative to bad heteronormativity, Butler associates it with a lack of consensus that is truly illegitimate and troubling: implicit in her formulation is the idea (originating with feminists of color) that nonheteronormative eroticism remains coextensive with other experiential optics.

In this sense, her doubled reading of object echoes a rejoinder by Cathy J. Cohen, who argues that queer politics oversimplifies structural antagonisms by illustrating sexuality purely against the axis of heteronormativity. As Cohen suggests, “in many instances, instead of destabilizing the assumed categories and binaries of sexual identity, queer politics has served to reinforce simple dichotomies between heterosexual and everything ‘queer.’”¹⁰ According to Cohen, a sexual politics that is evaluated only through the mechanism of gay versus straight will be fundamentally insufficient in illustrating the historical contexts that render forms of eroticism permissible, and will avoid tangling with aspects of putatively “queer” relationality that enforce social norms. Moreover, while Cohen explicates how sexuality is

inherently inflected by *American* racial and class dynamics—and, therefore, how figures like the “welfare queen” are erotically policed despite being putatively heterosexual—her theory is useful in exploring the translation of “queer” across national borders, precisely because she asks us to be cautious concerning the political circulation of the term. In other words, how does “queer” sometimes become a good political object, a marker of nonsystematic thought or erotic revolt, in a manner that can preclude analysis of the ways in which sexual nonnormativity is historicized? And how do the nuances and contradictions of such acts emerge when their political status is not taken to be self-evident?

In regard to *Hausu*, I wish to use all of these theorists’ questioning of queerness in order to illustrate how the film explicates a “bad object” as it pertains to both nonsanctioned intimacies (between women) and politically dubious aesthetic contexts. Following from Cohen, *Hausu* will not be considered as an inherently radical text simply because it narratively foregrounds sexual relationships between women and features aesthetic devices heavily associated with these relationships. This article will take into account complications related to both feminist politics and feminized representation at the time of the film’s production, seeking to acknowledge and address normative complicities rather than solely redeeming or legitimating these strategies. At the same time, this piece will mobilize a series of historical factors that keep the political positionality of these bonds in suspense; in the spirit of Berlant’s loving nonsovereignty, I illustrate through *Hausu* the uncertain status of feminine bodies in 1970s Japan, and an interpretational slipperiness that interrupts analogical critique.

Hausu has a fairly simple plot: a troop of teen girls (led by Gorgeous) are killed in exaggerated and outlandish fashion by Gorgeous’s cannibalistic witch aunt and her magical house, an act of gleeful revenge for the aunt’s lover, who perished during the war. Each girl is given a basic, kitschy moniker—Kung Fu (Miki Jinbo) does martial arts, Mac (Mieko Satō) is a big eater, Sweet (Masayo Miyako) is a cutesy homemaker, Gorgeous is conventionally beautiful, Fantasy (Kumiko Oba) is imaginative, Melody (Eriko Tanaka) plays music, and Prof (Ai Matsubara) is a bookworm—and each is destroyed in a manner reflective of their single character trait (Kung Fu’s athletic legs are dismembered, Melody is eaten by a piano, and Prof begins to drown while reading a book). Throughout these increasingly extreme violent events,

the girls wait for a rescuer—their male teacher, Mr. Tōgō (Kiyohiko Ozaki), who never arrives, abandoning them to an orgy of cinematic and murderous discombobulation. Yet there is also another, less patriarchal way of rendering the film’s narrative—one that tells the story of the homoerotic bond between Gorgeous and her best friend, Fantasy, one that recontextualizes Auntie’s actions as eroticized consumption rather than heteronationalistic retaliation, and one that disregards father figures completely in favor of Gorgeous’s fascination with her stepmother, Ryōko (Haruko Wanibuchi).

For example, Auntie’s first murder—of the ravenous Mac—is followed by a playful sequence wherein she dances with a skeleton, her cat Blanche wanders in forward and backward motion over a piano, she feasts on the girl’s arm, and she looks—*directly at the audience*—with a wide smile. This scene is an excellent encapsulation of everything that is pleasurable and disturbing about *Hausu*: the use of bizarre practical effects, the uncertain tone (hovering somewhere between laughter and horror), the unabashed joy in incongruous consumption, and—perhaps above all—the ambiguity of its dynamics of identification. Rather than demonizing Auntie or setting her up as an antagonist to be destroyed, the film dares its audience to share in her cannibalistic excess, to delight in her satisfaction, and to question their attachment to the horde of friends. Interestingly enough, Kogonada dismisses this sequence as one that audiences think of when they neglect deeper consideration of the film, an instance of frivolity and silliness (he calls it “the skeleton dance sequence”).¹¹ Yet here we are again at the disavowal of the “bad object”; the film’s digressions or contradictions are relevant only to the extent that they can become situated into nationalized historical narratives, which often entails separating them from structural conditions less likely to be addressed in official memorialization. What would it mean, instead, to think of Auntie’s direct address as central, not peripheral, to *Hausu*, and to consider the film’s project as being premised in the nonsovereignty of love, not the sovereignty of allegorical critique?

SPECTRALITY AND SPACES OF WOMEN

While the legacy of World War II certainly reverberates throughout *Hausu*, available interpretations neglect the gendered specificity of the film’s domestic setting and its concomitant emphasis on surface. For instance, in the

scene with Gorgeous at the mirror, the bedroom—the site of feminine adornment, personal privacy, and erotic exchange—is positioned as itself a stage for historical trauma. Matters of national consequence are being questioned in the home, in the “spaces of women,” not in the public arenas of institutional politics and commerce. Narratively, there are only three male characters in the film—Gorgeous’s father, a watermelon seller, and Mr. Tōgō (the rescuer who never arrives)—and all are barely present, goofily inept, or entirely desexualized. In contrast, the arrival of Gorgeous’s stepmother, Ryōko, is accompanied by wind machines, soft lighting, gauzy curtains, and romantic music; rather than solely Oedipal jealousy, her figure suggests a clearly homoerotic vision of desire. Moreover, much like the later scene at the mirror, Ryōko’s image is divided in this sequence between a series of windows, simultaneously transfiguring her as a scopophilic object (of a piece with the home’s Westernized furnishings) and rendering her inassimilable; like all of the film’s characters, she is less a person than an apparition, a remnant of conflicting political affects and stylistic registers, a series of broken mirrors.

Terry Castle has written on how lesbianism in cinema has often functioned as a kind of ghostliness: “elusive, vaporous, difficult to spot—even when she is there, in plain view, mortal and magnificent, at the center of the screen. Some may even deny that she exists at all.”¹² Castle’s counterhegemonic strategy is therefore to rematerialize the cinematic lesbian, to “bring [her] back into focus, as it were, in all her worldliness, comedy, and humanity.”¹³ While never wishing to nostalgically render periods of systematic derealization or invisibility, there is a way in which Castle’s project sets up ghostliness as *the* bad object of lesbian representation. In doing so, she neglects the productive valence of spectrality, insisting upon a self-evident quality to sexual identifications that can be excavated without historical context, or—perhaps more contentiously—suggests that such slipperiness may be part of erotic circuits between women. When Ryōko returns into Gorgeous’s life at the film’s conclusion, she is accompanied by a melancholic song called “Love Theme,” whose lyrics describe a bucolic, conjugal bliss that two people (presumably her and her stepdaughter) will come to share: “Why don’t you move into this house as my wife? / Let’s start a new life / Together, you and me.” Crucially, this scene also involves an exchange of national registers, with Ryōko adorned in a pink chiffon blouse and Gorgeous

associated with Japanese signifiers—kimono, shoji (sliding doors), and tatami (straw mats)—an inversion of generational categories accompanying an inversion of heteropatriarchy. Moreover, the song’s sincere emotionalism coupled with the introduction of Ryōko through obvious rear-projection effects invites parody, and the ambiguous affective articulations continue from there. Seated on the mat together—mirrored figures on both sides of the screen—these two very feminine women (one marked with signs of the West, the other with Japanese-ness) regard each other with a heavily gendered affection and piety, in a scene that lacks obvious political grounding. Is this a conservative image of obedient and sentimental femininity, or a radical image of lesbian love? This confusion of registers is only exacerbated when Gorgeous is revealed to be possessed by Auntie, a handshake between the two women resulting in Ryōko’s immolation, a cry of Gorgeous’s name echoing through the void in a fade to black. Love and destruction, Japan and the West, reactionary and progressive femininities violently encounter each other and in the resulting confrontation invite questions as to whether “queer” is a politically sufficient term to describe what has just occurred. What initially appeared to be a mirrored relationality is suddenly, disturbingly interrupted.

As Anjali Arondekar and Geeta Patel note, sexual epistemologies are typically either performed through the self-evident application of Western categories (wherein “lesbian,” for instance, can be freely applied regardless of its specific historical situatedness) or presume a kind of ethnographic difference, one that combines salaciousness and speculation (of both the scientific and economic variety). In this latter form, academia’s investment in a particular part of the world is inextricable from foreign policy interests (especially for the United States) or geopolitical money flows; yet even so, the rejection of what they call “area studies” can work to elide local contestation and to recenter Western knowledges in the absolute. For Arondekar and Patel, “the challenge [of combining area studies and queer theory] is to configure a queer form that attends to congealments, failures, and translations of knowledge through an understanding of area as both incommensurable and quotidian, recalcitrant and ordinary.”¹⁴ In other words, attention to “area” provides queer theory with an opportunity to examine linkages between sexual relationality and the nation without recourse to homo-nationalistic inevitability

or an anachronistic mythologization of vernacular forms. To recenter locality in Arondekar and Patel's terms is not to more rigorously secure knowledge of a place (the writer acting as a kind of tourist guide), nor to reproduce the uneven juxtaposition of "area" and "generality" common to conventional geopolitics, but rather to render these distinctions as strange while also critiquing the presumptions undergirding translation: namely, that local queer formations are not themselves sites for contestation, dissensus, or messy vitalization.

In their work on illustrations of queer worlding in non-Western cinematic contexts, Karl Schoonover and Rosalind Galt describe queer cinema as instantiating "a process that is active, incomplete, and contestatory and that does not presuppose a settled cartography."¹⁵ In this framework, queerness works to trouble the modes of affiliation that govern national belonging and cinematic legibility, interrogating the neoliberal impetus of globalization and the presumed heterosexuality of postcolonial or diasporic studies. While this is certainly an inventive means of juxtaposing a utopian project of queer world making with the sideways internationalism of queer cinematic production, distribution, and aesthetics, Schoonover and Galt mostly seem to define queerness through dispersal: the authors are careful to avoid a missionary impulse formulated through imperial "grabbiness,"¹⁶ but their queer cinema is one that is so capacious as to be not just productively slippery but somewhat politically incoherent. If queer cinema can encompass several aesthetic modes (experimental, popular, art house), positionalities (LGBT, anti-identitarian, positive representations, negative representations), and viewing platforms (theaters, television, online), then does it possess any capacity to intervene in the homogenizing tendencies of globalization? And if that is not its purpose, has the descriptor been exhausted as a criterion for analysis, especially for the subjects it seeks to describe? Moreover, when discussing a nation like Japan, one that has no consistent relationship to global hegemony, what are the appropriate measures for elaborating queer structures of interpretation? Perhaps what is required is a different figure than the semiotically and historically loaded "queer" in order to elaborate political specificity without lapsing into a form of ethnographic fetishism, one whose aesthetics and relational modes are particular to the blend of feminized radicality and consumerist violence that provides *Hausu* with its political parameters.

In his work on anime, Thomas Lamarre takes up these feminized aesthetic concerns through his discussion of how the "animetic interval" of limited animation¹⁷—the effect anime creates by disrupting the smooth, continuous frame movements of Western aesthetics—questions the subjectivizing effect of Cartesian perspective, encouraging a less normative relationship to time and preventing the gaze from settling upon a single object. At the same time, Lamarre is careful to posit that these stylistic elements can possess both subversive qualities (undermining coherent representation), as well as properties that benefit consumer capitalism, through the fetishistic parsing and recycling of texts. Along these lines, Lamarre makes use of the term *shōjo*—referring both to a girl and to a specific genre of manga and anime that is hyperfeminine and decorative (the former being the target audience of the latter)¹⁸—to elaborate a gendered version of limited animation, one that simultaneously draws upon familiar notions of queer temporality,¹⁹ and iterates their concerns through a form that relies upon liminality, interruption, and a lack of subjective coherency. Lamarre states that

what gives shojo its power in manga, anime, and games stems from the presentation of the shojo as neither girl nor woman, while maybe both at once. . . . Manga and anime thus encourage us to see shojo as a *metaphysical* construct with cosmological implications, precisely because she/it is a woman that is not one.²⁰

From Lamarre's perspective, *shōjo* embodies the animetic interval: the space between concrete actions, the gap that Japanese animation produces in the midst of delineated, rationalized images. Therefore, "image" in this context refers not only to the literal pictures that make up a film (iterating all projection as animation) but also to social types, the coalescing of a body into an interpellated structure; *shōjo* therefore both stands in for a girl (or a kind of feminized expression) and also suggests a lack of developmental logic, its potency elaborated through the bending of teleological progression, and the use of feminized aesthetics to interrogate narrative continuity.

While *Hausu* is mostly composed of live-action photography, it includes several moments of mixed-media presentationality that reflect Lamarre's conceptualization of *shōjo*. For instance, Melody's orgiastic death at the hands of a piano

is illustrated through a combination of stop-motion effects, green-screen cutouts—at one point showcasing parts of her nude, dismembered body gleefully dancing—and postphotographic animation. While her demise includes a fair amount of obviously fake blood, it does not necessarily emphasize gore (or even the traditionally horrifying) as much as visual phantasmagoria and the defiance of cinematic naturalism; in this sense, the film works to discombobulate realistic techniques as much as the bodies of the girls at its center. The film therefore centers shōjo concerns not just in the fact that it is about teen girls (and made for them), but in that it positions itself against the adult concretization of representation. Yet, it does this through a form that has politically ambiguous origins: shōjo is not easily recuperable as an academically friendly, modernist object, and its complexities quickly begin to emerge when it is examined through the historical phenomenon of Japanese girls' culture.

Originally developed through illustrations in girls' magazines starting around 1910, early shōjo narratives, Mizuki Takahashi suggests, "were highly formulaic and didactic, inculcating the cardinal virtues of girlhood while utilizing a lyrical style that favored elegant rhetorical flourishes over narrative progression."²¹ Later shōjo works, such as those authored by the primarily female collective Showa 24 in the early 1970s, mostly abandoned this moralistic framework, combining elements of 1950s *jojo-ga* (lyrical illustration), featuring flowered backgrounds and full-body layouts with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European motifs and stories centered upon intimate struggles. This emphasis on romantic aesthetics and emotionality entailed an effemino-phobic hostility or neglect by male critics, but also ensured a kind of demographic-specific marketability that mobilized shōjo's ornamentality and lack of narrative propulsion to produce images akin to store mannequins, cute collectibles, or fashion advertisements. In this sense, much like *Hausu*, shōjo manga has always straddled a line between aesthetic modernism and a conservative appeal to traditional femininity. In regard to the former, Takahashi suggests that shōjo manga (beginning with Shōtarō Ishinomori) split traditional comic spatialization "into decorative grids that break up the temporal flow of the panels . . . [which] allowed for a layering and juxtaposing of various images,"²² deliberately interrogating any linear imperatives or principles of pragmatic design. Crucially, then, while shōjo was (and is) a site for exchanging commodities, one that has gradually been disseminated to

such a degree that it stands in as an emblem for Japanese globalization, it is also (in both Lamarre's and Takahashi's perspectives) a means of conceptualizing space—suggesting not just a series of radical aesthetic gestures, but also a less deterministic approach to sexual identity or bodily coherence. At the same time, it is necessary to give pause to any inherent collapse of shōjo and antinormativity; as Frenchy Lunning suggests, "the shōjo body offers a substrate upon which is inscribed the tension between a desire to do away with gender and the inability to express gender conflict without gender."²³ Shōjo figures—reflecting the indeterminate position between childhood and adulthood—are often androgynous and gender undifferentiated, but they are also elaborated through a separate-spheres logic that retains an attachment to feminine specificity and (perhaps more troublingly) a cult of classed and racialized innocence. Sexuality is therefore both shōjo's subject and the object it must constantly work to elide, making it difficult for it to be politically graphed in an analogous form to queer or other explicitly radical formations.

While *Hausu* is neither an anime nor a manga adaptation, many of its stylistic features share affinities with the forms described here, and its narrative begins with a romance between two such archetypal shōjo, as Gorgeous's best friend, Fantasy, takes pictures of her dressed up as a glamorous witch. This opening scene (which is presented in tinted green, like a silent film) establishes a number of the film's crucial premises—primary among them, an attention to the intimacy of masquerade-based image making, displaying a homoerotic bond that is temporally suspended through an investment in decorative visuality. In this sense, the first image of the protagonist is framed as an invention, as part of a secret, eroticized world that is literally nested inside of the film's diegetic universe. Later in this sequence, an image of Gorgeous and Fantasy smiling together is suspended briefly on screen after they move out of the frame; as the film will reiterate frequently, girlhood's impermanence is the framework through which it understands national identification. Nobuko Anan suggests that schools—both literally and in the realm of teen fiction—existed throughout the interwar era as liminal spaces, wherein girls both were intensely surveyed for sexual and nationalistic development (into wives and mothers) and were also somewhat permitted to indulge in romantic relationalities with each other.²⁴ Deborah Shamoan proposes that these bonds (contemporaneously called

dōseiai, or same-sex love) were permissible under a logic of feminine similitude and evanescent fantasy, whereas more differentiated intimacies (such as the conventional butch/femme arrangement) were understood as concrete threats to heterosexual formation. Quite simply, *dōseiai* “was seen as a transitory relationship that teenage girls would eventually outgrow.”²⁵ Homoeroticism was thus not a means of articulating a public—or even traditionally politicized—identity, but persisted ephemerally, often with a melancholic affect of inevitability or gradual disappearance.

Describing a series of girl/girl double suicides that occurred in the 1920s and 1930s, Anan writes that “these cases suggest that girls’ desire to freeze time and to discard their material bodies is closely linked to their rejection of adulthood-cum-heteronormativity,”²⁶ and therefore also to the fact that idealizations of the national body are never far away from impositions of erotic orderliness. It is doubtful that *Hausu* was constructed with an awareness of these incidents, and in fact, as Shamoon notes, these elements of girl love in *shōjo* culture were increasingly becoming anachronisms in the 1970s, with the American institution of heterosocial schooling and the rise of *bishonen* (beautiful boy) as projective figures in manga, both factors that effectively deemphasized the centrality of *dōseiai* intimacies.²⁷ Yet, even so, the relational bonds the film displays—intimacies that thematize the impermanence, decorative flourish, and already-past-ness of girl love—invite a similarly aged and gendered interrogation of the boundaries of the nation, and what it might mean to die for it.

Perhaps the most pertinent example of this occurs when the girls discover the dead Sweet imprisoned in a clock, which leaks blood and other green, viscous fluid. Kung Fu cries that she is sorry she could not save her, as if she is a lover who arrived too late; the grotesquerie of the visuals, however, is undercut by an apprehensive tracking shot toward Sweet that blares with pink and yellow light, creating a strangely romantic, melancholic atmosphere. There is no better symbolization of the *dōseiai* than this: a teenage girl materially contained by progressive time, her friends/lovers (represented by the other girls) unable to prevent her being taken from them, an image of menstruation aligned with decay and impossibility. There is no easy way to assimilate such a death under narrativizations of war; this is a portrait of specifically gendered bodily collapse, and of specifically gendered desire.

VIOLENCE IN THE HOUSE

In this sense, the film is not solely concerned with acts of memorialization (personal or historical), but also with gender’s political affects and the manner through which Japan’s nationally oriented masculinism sought to displace the contradictions of the postwar era by constituting Japan either as a potential global power or as a site of melancholic abdication.²⁸ While the obvious historical location for this loss is World War II, Anne McKnight suggests that the failure of the anti-American Japanese far left in the 1970s took on a similar form, albeit one that was also rigorously gendered. Noting both the continuance of a separate-spheres logic in Japanese households (with women acting as domestic managers or spectres of the international mergers that precipitated the 1960s economic boom) and the fact that the collapse of student radicalism was effectively blamed on Hiroko Nagata for her mismanaged leadership of the United Red Army, McKnight proposes that male intellectuals—not just militaristic conservatives—harbored attitudes coupling feminization and political despondency, a narrative that “sees woman at the heart of failed revolution.”²⁹ Moreover, while it is once again doubtful that the *Hausu* filmmakers had these political struggles in mind, it is significant that the language used to describe Nagata in the popular press—terms like hag and witch—are also those that could be assigned to the film’s central victim/antagonist, Auntie. To say, then, that *Hausu* suggests a feminized form of the nation is not just to allude to its usage of surface ornamentation or its exclusive emphasis on female bonds, but rather to say that it posits deferred adulthood and antiproduktive ambivalence as counters to sexist mythologies—of both the right and the left—that remain preoccupied with the nostalgia of past heroics or the final achievement of social upheaval. *Hausu*’s politics, which are negotiated through both girls’ pop culture and contemporaneous feminist interrogations of the nation, articulate a version of Japan that is both violent and wounded, that is presentational and yet deeply suspicious of images, that—like Auntie’s mirror—reflects transgenerational identification and complicity, and yet refuses to entirely consolidate subjectivity.

The film’s uncertain political arrangements are perhaps heralded by the fact that there are two sets of homoerotic intimacies in *Hausu*, and thus it is not a film that can be understood through an axis wherein good and bad objects

are easily delineated. The first set concerns relations between the girls, which can be understood through the paradigm of *shōjo*. But the other (equally crucial) occurs between the girls and Auntie, whose desire is explicitly cannibalistic and nostalgic. Although her eroticism is explicitly directed within the narrative toward a boyfriend lost during World War II, the ways in which she destroys the girls' bodies, the violence she inflicts upon them, are also sexualized. She renders one girl, Mac, as a floating head with an insatiable appetite; she smothers Sweet with pillows and strips her naked; and she drowns Prof (also nude) in her own blood. Many of the film's explicitly horrific sequences borrow techniques from collage art and two-dimensional animation, producing an aesthetic where the girls' bodily obliteration is accompanied by a rejection of Cartesian perspective and orderly composition. While such techniques are certainly associated with 1970s consumer culture—and its ties to teen girls—an attention toward depthlessness or to a lack of indexical transparency signifies differently in Japanese cultural politics than it does in a Western modernist context, particularly since these artistic tendencies typically collate around tradition rather than its collapse.

As Catherine Russell suggests, twentieth-century Japanese xenophobia was often simultaneously organized around the protection of women and resistance toward realistic representation, with “the rhetoric of nativism or ‘Japanism’ [insisting] on the purity of Japanese forms surviving in modern Japan as a kind of ethnographic subjectivity . . . [one] often symbolized by the figure of the mother.”³⁰ In this sense, an emphasis on surface or antipsychologism is not necessarily politically radical and may in fact consolidate cultural borders through imperial nostalgia. While this article has sought to contest allegorical structures, there is a way in which the political ambivalence of the film's style reflects the divided consciousness of 1970s Japanese feminist reactions to the above paradigm—simultaneously radical and conservative, suggesting new kinship formations but also collating itself around commercially beautiful bodies, positing the feminine simultaneously as terrorized and mutable (Gorgeous and the other girls) and omnipotently destructive (Auntie).

In her work on the Japanese feminism of the 1970s (known as *ūman ribu*, or woman liberation), Setsu Shigematsu suggests that the movement was similarly rife with contradictions—deeply invested in a critique of Japanese imperialism, yet dominated by ethnic Japanese women,³¹ intent on

deconstructing the constitution of the home, yet primarily heterosexual,³² polemically organized around the *onna* (a derogatory term translatable to whore) and other abject women, yet mostly defined by middle-class intellectuals. Shigematsu's book *Scream from the Shadows* is named for the nonlinguistic communication that both ennobles and confines women: the scream, in this instance, might be both the righteous cry of a newly empowered populace and the desubjectivized pain that is both assisted and damaged by selective empowerment. Against universalizing discourses of victimhood, Shigematsu suggests that *ūman ribu* “provides insights into an alternative feminist epistemology of violence that locates violence in the female body and the feminine subject,”³³ meaning both the capacity to unleash irrational, radical fury and the ability to harm other women.

Although this is one of *Hausu*'s key narrative subjects, a sequence exemplary of these dynamics occurs after Gorgeous has been possessed by Auntie. While the girls have been passively murdered by the latter up until this point, Kung Fu (as befits her name) is the first to fight back, her now-disembodied legs kicking open a painting of Auntie's cat that proceeds to spurt a torrent of red liquid (here, as elsewhere, it is too watery and bright to be “realistic” blood). The film juxtaposes Kung Fu's victory with Gorgeous suddenly leaking the same fluid from an apparent stomach wound, crying in agony as it stains her wedding kimono. In effect, a silly, cartoonish representation of violence exists alongside a painful, seemingly consequential one—symbolized not only by performance cues but also by the contrasting of quick, kitschy edits and a barrage of ludicrous special effects in Kung Fu's fight with the slow pans down Gorgeous/Auntie's injured, oozing body. The film formally divides identification once again and provides no comfortable feminist means to negotiate horror; Auntie here could equally represent gender normativity and backwardness (exacting conservative revenge upon a youthful generation) and queer uproar, violently preventing these girls from “achieving” heteronormative intimacies. The placement of her wound seems crucial: it marks her childlessness, her lack of marriageability (“crazy cat lady”), her failure to attain the accoutrements of Japanese femininity, her spectral leeching off of a “desirable” body. As she bleeds, Fantasy and Prof read excerpts from her diary, which describes periods of intense loneliness and longing for young girls (to eat or to love?), while her leaking form creates a riverlike torrent that threatens to drown the

remaining friends. Who, in effect, is the victim here? And who is the aggressor?

These complications are totally absent from one of the only Western academic pieces on *Hausu*, Evan Calder Williams's "Sunset with Chainsaw." In this article, Williams laments horror criticism's emphasis on narrative, suggesting that *Hausu* provides a means of understanding the genre's politics through aesthetic concerns, rather than purely through content. Williams presents *Hausu* as a portrait of "radical flatness," wherein "the collapse of the sublime and the parodic" is enabled through an attention toward fakery in the visual effects and artificiality in the performance style,³⁴ both elements of which contrast with the pervasive, often grotesque forms of death on display. Ôbayashi³⁵—who had previously worked in both television commercials and experimental filmmaking—fosters an aesthetic informed equally by consumerist plenitude and avant-garde collage, seemingly using the latter to explode and render uncanny the former. *Hausu* was also made at a time of deep uncertainty for the Japanese film industry. The old studio system was going through a period of financial decline; the heyday of new wave figures (representing both aesthetic and political opposition), like Nagisa Ôshima and Shohei Imamura, was at its close; and the market was becoming increasingly dominated by soft-core exploitation movies called *pinku eiga* (pink film). Williams therefore suggests that *Hausu*'s aesthetic mirrors this industrial precariousness, presenting a critique of 1970s Japanese placidity, with bucolic advertising locales and Westernized home furnishings gradually being destroyed by archaic spiritual uprising. Williams's formal horror is thus embodied through a carnivalesque play of opposites as well as an emphasis on visual unintelligibility, both qualities that reinforce identitarian confusion.

While I agree that *Hausu* is invested in the potential negativity latent in consumer aesthetics (particularly the form of the cute) and that it is an almost aggressively anti-realist text, Williams's analysis does not attempt to draw a connection between these formal flights of fancy and any gendered ethical project. His perspective thus seems to reflect a larger tendency in Anglo-American film culture to understand *Hausu* solely as a zany bad object without considering its gendered or sexualized politics, or the manner through which its twinned preoccupations with ornamental scopophilia and cartoonish apocalypse might be productively dissonant rather than simply incoherent. One scene that

exemplifies this well is the sequence depicting Kung Fu's death: a dizzyingly kaleidoscopic array of the girl's severed limbs, Dada-esque rotating circles, girlish imagery of flowers and vines, and terrified, grotesque drawings of children's faces. On one level, this is a barrage of visual information that overwhelms the viewer and denarrativizes action in excessive spectacle, which, as Williams suggests, could be interpreted as a depiction of consumerist utopia turned sour. On another level, the juxtaposition of childlike and violent imagery could function to aid Kogonada's thesis that this is a film meant to remind an amnesiac, 1970s Japan about atomic horror. Yet, neither reading addresses gender at all, except in the (sexist) association of teen girls with accumulating material goods, or with advertising shorthand and the voyeuristic parsing out of women's bodies.

GIRLISH CONSUMPTION

Arguably, the same aesthetic elements that Evan Calder Williams describes are locatable in Rosalind Galt's paradigm of "the pretty," or the degraded category—neither sublime nor beautiful—that is linked to excessive flourish or ornamentation, a style most likely to be viewed as insubstantial or even immoral. Galt notes that the iconophobia of much of Western classical and neoclassical thought was often bound up with a prohibition against gendered and racialized bodies, with "discourses of primitivism, effeminacy, and orientalism [working], often in combination, to map out a geopolitics of aesthetic disdain."³⁶ While Galt's consideration of "the pretty" becomes somewhat broad and slippery in terms of its application to individual films, her paradigm is less useful in articulating a specific style than in elaborating a politics of aesthetic exclusion, particularly one premised in the absence of use-value or rational streamlining. In this sense, *Hausu*'s numerous presentations of dated or girlish stylistic gestures (elaborate painted backdrops, rear projection, slow motion, garish color, cluttered decoration) suggest a reversion of the nationalized imperative of teleological womanhood and heterosexuality. Narratively, *Hausu* is about inevitable, elaborately orchestrated death, but it might also be possible to see this negation of adulthood in the film's style, its content and form both operating as interrogations of a gendered paradigm where to be productive is ultimately to be reproductive. Meaninglessness, or the traversal away from three-dimensionality (on the level of

character or style) could thus be paradoxically understood as a form of protest, as to be rational—to become a Japanese woman—is to give up the fantasy of a life otherwise. Artificiality is deeply political because it suggests a more imaginative relation to space, one that is less invested in authenticity or believability than in purposefully remaining illegitimate and unreal—qualities that have been assigned to disregarded populaces like women, children, queer people, and racial minorities.

At the same time, artificiality was also associated with a growing consumer culture targeted heavily, but not exclusively, at young girls during the period of *Hausu*'s production. This is embodied not only in the influence of shōjo aesthetics discussed earlier, but also in the presence of Westernized fashion (worn by all the girls), the use of Anglicized words (including the film's title), and the commodity nature of its soundtrack, which was performed in part by the psychedelic rock band Godiego. All of these factors coincide in the sequence where the girls journey to Auntie's house: a song called "Cherries Are Made for Eating" (heralding consumption to come?) plays while they transition through kitschy, fantastical environments—including a portion that renders their train car through psychedelic cell animation—all while wearing pastel, summery, advert-ready outfits. As at many points in *Hausu*, aesthetics are the organizing principle, not the supplement. Yet even so, this is also the sequence where Auntie's tragic past is recounted, and it includes the only moment where the bombing of Hiroshima is directly portrayed (through tinted stock footage), both elements that would theoretically propose a contrast to the girls' euphoric innocence. But these interruptions to the girls' commodity bliss are introduced through a rapidly flashing shot of a camera that grounds these historical allusions less in official fact and more within self-reflexive, gendered artificiality. Although the subject matter becomes gradually more "serious" in these flashbacks (and the footage shifts into the pastness of sepia tones), the girls provide a less grounded commentary: they label Auntie's doomed fiancé "handsome," remark upon the deliciousness of cakes in the background, and one girl proclaims that a mushroom cloud "is like a cotton candy!" I would argue that such descriptions are not meant to illustrate the girls' ignorance, their need to be reminded of the violence inflicted upon their parents, but are instead meant to elaborate a slippage between playful consumption (cute boys, desserts, vintage postcards) and

destructive consumption (imperialist violence, mass death, compulsory militarism), to ground political questions in a "bad," unserious idiom.

In a piece detailing the gradual shift in Japanese society from productive to consumptive subjectivities in the 1970s, Tomiko Yoda defines a term she calls "girlscape," or the process wherein young women came to stand in for the biopolitical mandates of an ambient, experiential advertising culture. The principles of neoliberal labor—"celebrating creativity, experimental openness, individuated lifestyles, self-organization, flexibility, the removal of rigid hierarchy, and schemes to extract values from cultural volatility"³⁷—that governed girlscape were by no means unique to Japan, nor was the collapse of "feminine" and "consumer" a novel phenomenon in the 1970s. What *was* particular about girlscape (at least according to Yoda) was the manner in which it acted as a compensatory mechanism for women left behind by masculinist radicalism; while the rise of commodity-based "self-transformation" cultures was typically blamed for the decline of leftist sociability, Yoda suggests that women had been assigned subordinate gendered positions even within these movements: "At campus barricades and street clashes between students and riot police, female activists were told to stay away from the frontlines, to crack pavements into pellets for male comrades to throw, to take care of the injured, and to serve in the 'rice-ball brigade' (*onigiri tai*) so as to feed others."³⁸ In this sense, girlscape—perhaps like Lunning's description of the paradox of shōjo—was orchestrated around an understanding of femininity's abjection, while also further working to secure femininity as a site of abjection. It provided girls with a "space of their own," but one that relied upon an implicit articulation of women's second-class status in Japanese society. Moreover, John Whittier Treat discusses the ways in which shōjo-based consumerism—particularly the idea of the social as *un*-productive, mimicking the culture of teen girls—came to represent an acutely gender-based anxiety among Japanese men, with binaristic male/female signifiers becoming less relevant in an era of nigh-universal commodity sexuality. This sublimation of traditional masculinity into this feminine positionality is best encapsulated by the writer Naoto Horikiri:

I wonder if we men shouldn't now think of ourselves as "shōjo," given our compulsory and excessive consumerism, a consumerism that in recent years afflicts us like sleepwalking.

. . . The “shōjo,” that new human species born of modern commodification, has today commodified everything and everyone.³⁹

The national status of “commodity” in this context is ambivalent, aligned simultaneously with a postmodern unsettledness (which is also to some degree implicitly Western) and a specifically Japanese gendered formation, both of which affix themselves to the masculine ego and render impotent the sovereignty that could oppose either the collapse of cultural particularity or the influx of a consumptive drive. In such a paradigm, femininity is both a sign of subjective vulnerability and an omnipotently powerful, culturally imperialist mode. While one can disapprove of the obvious sexism in such a statement, the contradictory girliness produced by male effeminophobic paranoia does provide a platform for examining a film like *Hausu*, whose horror premise follows a group of girlscape-influenced shōjo who are systematically eaten—swallowed narratively by a figure of Japan’s historical past (the traumatized Auntie) and aesthetically by an array of advertising-style special effects.

Hausu’s first shot (following two title cards proclaiming its status as “a movie”) is of the “a” of the title transforming into a lipsticked mouth that chews and spits out an arm, a sequence that immediately locates cannibalistic desire in feminine forms and thus introduces the film’s ambivalence not just toward traditional images of women but also toward the pleasures of consumerist violence. Locating this feminine metonymy in the mouth—and also, by the preceding title cards, locating the cinematic apparatus there as well—suggests a negotiation of the image through acts of eating and being eaten, of being fascinated and destroyed by gendered exaggeration. The film throughout displays a kind of child-like glee in death’s (and girliness’s) capacity for invention, which perhaps reflects the contributions of Chigumi Ôbayashi, then eleven years old, to its story. It was she, for instance, who invented all of the girls’ deaths and who particularly delighted in the image of Melody being eaten by the piano. Yet it could also suggest a more generalized interest in the inverted taste categories embodied through what Allison James calls “kets” (slang for trash), or children’s candies that not only possess no nutritive value and are made cheaply, but thematize the consumption of inedible beings such as objects, machines, or even other people.⁴⁰ In the film’s terms, James’s thesis is valuable less because it

revalues children’s modes of social organization or even their disreputable tastes, and more because it foregrounds a disturbing doubleness about the relationship between this childish insatiability and antisocial eroticism. The question becomes less one of satirizing (as Williams suggested) Japan’s economic growth or consumer saturation, and more one of establishing the loss of subjectivity, wherein violent overthrow is directed inward as well as outward.

Perhaps the easiest way to understand this erotic formation is through the cute-ified way the film works through violence, and the manner through which it uses presentational elements not just to contrast with but to define the nature of that violence. Sianne Ngai suggests there is a rhetoric of the minor (perhaps of both diminutive status and size) that inspires and perpetuates cruelty or objectification—that the very smallness or pliancy of a being, that which permits it to demand sanctuary, also entails its lack of agency or mobility. As Ngai proposes, the cute is defined not just by a relation of maternal care, but also by one of aggressiveness or potential harm, “for in its exaggerated passivity and vulnerability, the cute object is as often intended to excite a consumer’s sadistic desires for mastery and control as much as his or her desire to cuddle.”⁴¹ There is thus a certain gendered logic to Ngai’s cute, with the protectionism invited by the miniature object potentially masking relational inequality or propagating mutual dependency. When Ngai situates these dynamics specifically within Japanese culture,⁴² she proposes that the aural slippage of *kawaii* (cute) and *kowai* (scary)—mobilized in the work of artists like Takashi Murakami—can be recognized historically in the nation’s geopolitical doubleness, its sense of itself as a victim, permitting an amnesia concerning its own capacity for predation.⁴³ Several of the deaths in *Hausu* make use of this affective and aesthetic contradiction: Sweet is suffocated by pillows (and transformed into an inanimate doll), adorably rounded Mac is rendered as a ravenous decapitated head, Kung Fu descends into a kaleidoscopic whirlwind of images of children and flowers that severs each of her limbs, and Melody is swallowed by a piano—perhaps *the* prototypically feminine, middle-class instrument.

Yet the *kowai/kawaii* paradox is likely most visible in the scene of Fantasy’s death, which is far less cartoonishly exaggerated than many of the others; in fact, it is not technically demonstrated for the audience at all. After Gorgeous saves Fantasy from a raft floating on a river of blood, Fantasy

implicitly dies in the arms of her friend, who has been possessed by Auntie, a moment of erotic bliss and sisterly closeness that also functions as a shattering, as the moment wherein the accoutrements of the past suffocate and immobilize the present. Fantasy is, in effect, swallowed by *dōseiai*. To return to a sequence referenced earlier, perhaps the girl who calls out when Ryōko burns up is Fantasy, and one is left to wonder if her voice is the remnant of that eroticized, cannibalistic hunger, or the *shōjo* intimacy that persists between her and Gorgeous. The haunting of queer attachment mingled with sexualized consumption suggests that perhaps these tangled affects are one and the same, that *shōjo dōseiai* is woven into postwar consumerism, radical sexuality, and imperial nostalgia (the bad objects) while also slipping through the intentionality of them all.

The film concludes with a close-up of Gorgeous without any diegetic context, her hair being blown around as if she is in a ghostly perfume ad, unnatural green and purple light echoing behind her, a feminine voice-over (belonging to no established character) elaborating a vision of a blissful afterlife:

Even after the flesh perishes, one can live in the hearts of others, together with the feelings one has for them. Therefore, the story of love must be told many times, so that the spirits of lovers may live forever. Forever. The one thing that never perishes, the only promise, is love.

What is the viewer to make of this ending? Is it possible to reconcile such sweetness with the brutality and chaos one has just witnessed? To return to Kogonada's allegorical reading, perhaps this sequence alludes to the incomprehensible nature of mass death, the need for quasi-spiritual communal mourning during periods of national tragedy, which Ôbayashi is reminding his audience of during an era of willful forgetting. Kogonada includes in his video essay an interview with Nobuhiko Ôbayashi, the film's director, who states that because he was born in Hiroshima in 1938, all of his close friends died during the tragedy, and that he wanted to "write a fantasy with the atomic bomb as a theme."⁴⁴ To make the bomb a theme, in this scenario, is to draw direct, intentional lines between the violent deaths that Ôbayashi experienced as a child and the violent deaths of the girls in the film, which utilize the motifs and appendages of Westernized consumer culture to secure a didactic (if fanciful and bizarre) narrative concerning the need for memorialization,

national consolidation, and a materialized identification between present and past.

Yet why, in its final moments, does the film turn to this portrait of affective intimacy, rather than one of horror or annihilation? In the reading suggested above, the ornamentation that adorns these words is ignored, and an assumption is put forward that the love being referred to is implicitly heteronationalistic: one that seeks to foster repair of a fractured and traumatized Japanese body, one that coalesces itself around the embrace of traditional relationalities and normative kinships, all aligned around a conventionally attractive (i.e., Gorgeous) feminine form. In contradistinction to such an assumption, it seems necessary to reexamine the logic of sexuality's relationship to national belonging, and by extension, what Ôbayashi means when he refers to the film as a "fantasy." If, as Lauren Berlant suggests, the social potential of love is produced through its enabling of less sovereign ways of being, then what *Hausu* is demonstrating in these final moments—in fact, what it has been demonstrating throughout its entire run time—is the political slipperiness (but also possibility) of centering memorialization in erotic affects that do not necessarily perform in expected or intentional ways. To experience *Hausu* as a palimpsest of love stories—each informed by ambivalent longing over consummated end-pleasure—is to accept that the film troubles any coherent narrative of national reconstruction or deconstruction. It is a film that, like *shōjo*, remains in an incipient stage of attachment, and that posits love not as an inherently redemptive or vicious figure, but rather as the spectral presence of *dōseiai*, the fantasy—and the horror—of being intimate with the bad object.

About the Author

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Notes

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1. Kogonada, "Trick or Truth: Revisiting Ôbayashi's *House*," Vimeo video, uploaded by Criterion Collection, October 30, 2014, <https://vimeo.com/110502648>.

2. Chuck Stephens, "House: The Housemaids," Criterion Collection, October 26, 2010, <https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/1634-house-the-housemaids>.

3. Stephens.

4. Thomas Lamarre describes the *otaku* (anime/manga fans) in a manner that does not limit their patterns of consumption to male subjects, but he also notes that many fictional representations of so-called *otaku* girls feature presumably heteropatriarchal devices like panty shots, infantilization, and a paradoxically chaste emphasis on monogamy. He also proposes that the usage of the term *otaku* outside of Japan has provoked a kind of national identity crisis, and that the pathologizing of fans (as creepy, unattractive loners) is a function of both gendered and xenophobic discourses. See Thomas Lamarre, "Cool, Creepy, Moé: Otaku Fictions, Discourses, and Policies," *Diversité Urbaine* 13, no. 1 (2013): 132–52.

5. Jeffrey Sconce suggests that paracinematic spectatorship (the fandom for every genre of low cinema) is—despite its overt affection for all illegitimate tastes—a form of viewing that has increasingly become governed by "cultured" reading strategies like radical excess, ironic distancing, and connoisseurship. While Sconce does not explore the gendered dimension of this spectatorship in detail (beyond declaring its mostly male and white orientation), his critique of paracinematic audiences implies that rather than functioning exclusively as politicized countercinema, such fandoms often consolidate masculinist sovereignty through their mobilization of distinction discourses. See Jeffrey Sconce, "Trashing' the Academy: Taste, Excess, and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style," *Screen* 36, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 375.

6. Stephens, "Housemaids."

7. Manohla Dargis, "Watch Out for That Disembodied Head, Girls," *New York Times*, January 14, 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/15/movies/15house.html>.

8. Examples in this tradition are too numerous to list but would include the works of Gloria Anzaldúa, Cheryl Clarke, Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, Cherríe Moraga, and the Combahee River Collective. Although this is a vast simplification of a rich and varied body of work, these women greatly influenced the development of queer of color critique, particularly in the way they examined heteropatriarchy through racial and class dynamics and interrogated the mainstream gay/lesbian neglect of projects pertaining to economic redistribution or anti-imperial collectivity. While these theorists and activists were often critical of male radical failures to address institutional homophobia or foster connections between sexual nonnormativity and anticapitalism, they were also frustrated by the single-issue tactics of lesbian separatists, arguing that solidarity with heterosexual people was often necessary for an interlocking social justice politics.

9. Judith Butler, "Against Proper Objects," *Differences* 6, nos. 2–3 (Summer–Fall 1994): 6.

10. Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?," *GLQ* 3, no. 4 (1997): 438.

11. Kogonada, "Trick or Truth."

12. Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 2.

13. Castle, 2.

14. Anjali Arondekar and Geeta Patel, "Area Impossible: Notes toward an Introduction," *GLQ* 22, no. 2 (2016): 156.

15. Karl Schoonover and Rosalind Galt, *Queer Cinema in the World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 5.

16. Schoonover and Galt, 24.

17. Lamarre elaborates this concept in contrast to a sovereign, hyperrationalized version of vision he calls "cinematism." The animetic, in contrast, relies upon an understanding of the represented landscape as a *surface*, as rendering gaps between layers of the image (foreground/background) and between frames on screen. See Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 7.

18. Mizuki Takahashi describes *shōjo* as a genre "primarily aimed at girls from their teenage years to their early twenties . . . [that] features distinctive and expressive artwork, along with stories that emphasize the inner feelings of the characters." "Distinctive" and "expressive" in this context mostly allude to the genre's differentiation from *shōnen* manga, which, much like classical cinema, privileged story continuity, narrative economy, and linear aesthetics. Genres of manga and anime typically correspond with age categories (*shōnen* being for young boys, *josei* for older women, and *seinen* for older men), but they also have their own distinctive aesthetic features and thus cannot be limited just to the age of their target audience. See Mizuki Takahashi, "Opening the Closed World of *Shōjo Manga*," in *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime*, ed. Mark W. MacWilliams (New York: Routledge, 2008), 114.

19. Queer temporality is typically constructed through an opposition to sequential time, associating what Elizabeth Freeman calls "chrononormativity" with an ideological habituation into "seemingly ordinary bodily tempos and routines" that regulate flesh into acceptable—and thus maximally productive—states. Queer temporality refuses this teleological biopolitics—the inevitable progression of reproductive futurity, timeless intimacy, and inheritance—inscribing itself instead in interruption, fracture, and visceral eruption. Many queer conceptualizations of childhood also emphasize the ways in which "growing up" often ensures incorporation into heteropatriarchal versions of adulthood that are often hostile to alternative kinship formations, noncoupled sexuality, or anticapitalist politics. See Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.

20. Lamarre, *Anime Machine*, 237.

21. Takahashi, "Opening the Closed World," 117.

22. Takahashi, 126–27.
23. Frenchy Lunning, “Under the Ruffles: Shōjo and the Morphology of Power,” *Mechademia* 6 (2011): 7.
24. Nobuko Anan, *Contemporary Japanese Women’s Theatre and Visual Arts: Performing Girls’ Aesthetics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 21, 22–23.
25. Deborah Shamoan, “Revolutionary Romance: *The Rose of Versailles* and the Transformation of Shojo Manga,” *Mechademia* 2 (2007): 5.
26. Anan, *Contemporary Japanese Women’s Theatre*, 23.
27. Shamoan, “Revolutionary Romance,” 6.
28. For a review of theories connecting masculine selfhood and the nation, see Tamar Mayer, “Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Setting the Stage,” in *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*, ed. Mayer (New York: Routledge, 2000).
29. Anne McKnight, “The Wages of Affluence: The High-Rise Housewife in Japanese Sex Films,” *Camera Obscura* 27, no. 1 (2012): 2.
30. Catherine Russell, “‘Overcoming Modernity’: Gender and the Pathos of History in Japanese Film Melodrama,” *Camera Obscura* 12, no. 2 (1995): 132.
31. Setsu Shigematsu, *Scream from the Shadows: The Women’s Liberation Movement in Japan* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), xvi, xxiii.
32. Shigematsu, 69.
33. Shigematsu, xiii.
34. Evan Calder Williams, “Sunset with Chainsaw,” *Film Quarterly* 64, no. 4 (2011): 30.
35. According to an extensive profile of Ōbayashi by Paul Roquet, the director started off making short, experimental works on 8 and 16 mm, eventually becoming part of a Tokyo art scene called “new film art” that included other cinephiles and figures like Yoko Ono. After encountering a producer from Japan’s largest advertising firm, Dentsu, following a screening of these works at Kinokuniya Hall, Ōbayashi was supposedly lured away to television commercials with the promise of richer film stock and access to innovative technical materials. Roquet notes that from the 1960s to the 1980s, Ōbayashi directed over two thousand commercials, many featuring international stars (like Sophia Loren and Catherine Deneuve), permitting him a platform to explore his interest in a kind of commodity surrealism. See Paul Roquet, “Nobuhiko Obayashi, Vagabond of Time,” *Midnight Eye*, November 10, 2009, <http://www.midnighteye.com/features/nobuhiko-obayashi-vagabond-of-time/>.
36. Rosalind Galt, *Pretty: Film and the Decorative Image* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 300.
37. Tomiko Yoda, “Girlscape: The Marketing of Mediatic Ambience in Japan,” in *Media Theory in Japan*, ed. Marc Steinberg and Alexander Zahlten (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 184.
38. Yoda, 192.
39. Naoto Horikiri quoted in John Whittier Treat, “Yoshimoto Banana Writes Home: *Shōjo* Culture and the Nostalgic Subject,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 19, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 363.
40. Allison James, “Confections, Concoctions, and Conceptions,” in *The Children’s Culture Reader*, ed. Henry Jenkins (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 397–98.
41. Sianne Ngai, “The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde,” *Critical Inquiry* 31, no. 4 (Summer 2005): 816.
42. Ngai, 819.
43. Kogonada’s video essay draws attention to the fact that the atomic bomb was code-named “Little Boy” and aligns this diminution with Blanche, who, with her blinking green eyes, signals incoming violence throughout the film. In this sense, perhaps the film’s coupling of the destructive and the adorable alludes to this historical attribution and provides another thematic and political link to Hiroshima. See Kogonada, “Trick or Truth.”
44. Kogonada.