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Modes of Play: Playwork and The Prosumption of Visual Kei

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In loving memory of Oshida Daisuke (1978-2010).
My youth was yours.

Abstract

The boundaries between work and play are institutionally and ideologically ordered. The former via government stipulated labor laws that regulate work hours and holidays and the latter assembled by a host of interacting institutions; culture, religion, industry, corporations, education and the mass media to name a few. The ordering of these boundaries are always subject to contestation and change.

The contemporary moment in Japan is one in which we see several coexisting realities in which first, there is a perceived lack of work-life balance, most salient in the discussion of the entrenched culture of overwork. At the same time there is a perceived generational shift that has taken place since the 1980s with the proliferation of lifestyle choices and a growing diversity of work-life trajectories that see play as a central component to a meaningful existence. This coincides with socio-economic shifts such as structural changes in the workforce, an entrenched recession and deregulation which have resulted in the proliferation of irregular work.

There is a second 'paradox' regarding the relationship of work and play in Japan that pertains to the idea that there are 'Japanese' ways of playing which tends to conceive of leisure as activities of particular age groups in relation to specific points in the life course. Play is often cast as a temporal activity, confined to particularly gendered activities, spaces, times and consumer identities that are 'managed' in that they do not appear to interfere with other arenas of life. Simultaneously, play is also seen to be proliferating with the intensification of 'economies of play' that see more areas of everyday life mediated and colonized by play and the leisure industries. I suggest that this double paradox of 'overwork and overplay' and 'play as regulated and play as everywhere' could be understood as a spectrum of 'modes of play' where yet to be accounted for work-

play amalgamations or different configurations of relationships of work with play can be re-thought and brought to the fore.

One such mode of play that I see present is located in the relational acts of consumption and production, 'prosumption' (Toffler 1980; Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010) of a form of music in Japan called Visual Kei. I aim to develop the concept that I term 'playwork' to capture this mode which charactertizes the nature of the labor and the relationship to creative production that those involved in making Visual Kei are subject to. Playwork exists within the double paradox in that it contains some of the elements of each axis but cannot be explained by any one of them in isolation.

This study is divided into two parts. The first part builds an empirical base for Visual Kei, which has yet to be investigated thoroughly academically. Here, the methods used to gather data for this study are also introduced. Qualitative methods such as ethnography, interviews and music media analysis were employed. A literature review that covers the abovementioned relationships between work and play are explored, followed by an investigation into the concept of prosumption, similar concepts and their applicability to this research and relationship to playwork. Here I also review the current state of literature on Visual Kei and identify the areas and topics that have yet to be explored mainly in that there is a lack on the side of research concerning performers and their work.

The following chapters in part one deal with the prosumption of Visual Kei and looks at how producers and consumers create and sustain culture and examines why this is of significance. It asks the questions: What is Visual Kei? How can we understand this cultural phenomenon and how and why do people engage with it? While I attempt to show how there is some consensus of the meaningfulness surrounding what is valued within prosumptive practices, I also highlight in particular different modes of gendered or

uneven prosumption and the social stigma that comes with involvement in this subculture which can be attributed to the aesthetic and thematic content of its products and the behaviors and mindsets it is thought to engender

The second part looks at Visual Kei under the context of the digitalization of music, the proliferation of immaterial labor and production, the commoditization of intimacy and other socio-economic consumer trends such as the proliferation of the internet and how these effect our ways of prosuming subcultures and ways of communicating with culture. Here the focus is on the concept of 'playwork' and how musicians attempt to turn play into work. I ask: What are the skills that musicians have to cultivate in order to sustain their careers and how has their labor changed? How do they balance crafting otherworldliness with the demands of digital and prosumer capitalism? How is 'success' envisioned and realized? What are the ideologies that inform notions of success? How does their labor effect other arenas of life and what do these impacts entail? How can we understand the nature of their work? Each chapter in part two deals with a different 'skill' of playwork and shows how musicians struggle to carve a career due to the different notions of success that are nestled within competing ideologies of work and play and are therefore sometimes at odds with one another.

I will attempt to show how the acts of prosumption highlighted in the first part, which already entails a re-examination of the process of culture being produced and consumed relationally, is a key element of playwork for this simultaneously exacerbates the blurring of the boundaries between work and play. I suggest that playwork may be an increasingly common feature of work, particularly in the creative industries (although by no means limited to it exclusively) in the current era where the lines between labor and leisure, private and public, people and commodities, material and immaterial labor are increasingly obscured.

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Chapter 1 Introduction: An Aspiring Musician and A Retiring Musician

1.1 From Play to Work

Ren is 20 years old. He comes from Hikone City in Shiga prefecture, but he is currently attending *biyou senmon gakkou* (beauty school) in Osaka. His parents pay for his tuition and continue to give him a small allowance which just about covers his rent, but he is responsible for his own living expenses. He has two *baito* (part-time jobs) at a *karaoke-kan* and another at a baseball batting center. But more importantly to him, he plays guitar in a Visual Kei band. His current band is actually his second. His first was in high school and while they only played cover songs at their school's cultural festival, it was for him the first time he performed in a band in front of an audience.

He says he can still remember the feeling well and that his classmates were surprised that he had a skill that they had no idea he even possessed. It made him feel confident in something about himself in a way he had not felt before. For a few weeks after the performance, he felt a sense of vindication as not only had his practice paid off and he felt his classmates now saw him in a different light, he also felt he had found something just for himself, outside of his school, his family and his entire existence up till now. He felt like he had found something that he truly wanted to do.

Ren says he was not a 'good' student. His grades were slightly below average except in two subjects. He was not very interested in school or any of the school's clubs. While they did have a music club, he felt he did not fit in with those students who had different musical orientations. Ren liked rock music, and while he listened to all kinds of bands, his favorite is the Visual Kei band Dir en grey, which for most people he says was "too heavy, too dark." Those in the music club mostly liked popular songs and some of them were classically trained. He also just felt he couldn't bond with such people who seemed so different from him.

Instead he improved his music skills mostly on his own and by practicing with his band friends, a drummer in his year who loved progressive metal but also listened to Visual Kei as well as their senior, a bassist who seemed to listen to just about any form of heavy or hard rock, but really secretly loved idol groups. These were the only people he felt he could be frank with, with their shared understanding and common interests that other people in their school probably thought of as uncool (*dasai*) which were Visual Kei,Q and in the case of their senior, idol groups. Their band naturally broke up after their senior left to go to university in Tokyo, but it left Ren with the resolution to pursue music.

Ren says his parents didn't have much to say about his choice of going to *biyou senmon gakkou*. "They were like, "As long as you can find some job after you graduate." And they also could understand what kind of jobs it would get me into because it was obvious to them, like a hair salon." The truth is Ren chose this because he felt it was the only thing they would agree to fund that still had something to do with his musical interests. He could use the knowledge he gained at beauty school towards bettering his look which was vital as a Visual Kei musician where both music and one's 'visuals' (appearance) mattered equally. Ren also knew that in such schools there were even classes one could take and skills one could gain related to stage makeup, so he felt it wouldn't be a total waste.

He did not enter a vocational music school because he felt that he was already at a disadvantage as most students there would already have had years of classes and training under their belts. Furthermore, his parents, he says, would not accept it as they already felt he spent too much time in front his computer and playing his guitar when he could have been studying harder.

Ren began looking for band mates as soon as he knew he was heading to Osaka for sure. It wasn't hard to find them— he used an internet portal for recruiting members.

There were some unfruitful meetings where he felt the potential members he met didn't share the same vision he had and there were some no-shows as well, but eventually he met Toma, a bassist who already had other members in mind and some experience playing in Visual Kei bands. After just one studio session, they decided to form a band. Toma, who had actual experience playing live and, having been in two bands already, was actually impressed with Ren's self-taught skills.

Despite not being formally trained, Ren was also confident in his own skills, as not only could he play well, he had also been composing and with the help of the internet and his former school/bandmates, had learned how to use sound editing programs and generate beats. He felt he actually had a lot to offer even if he was just starting out and that he just needed to get a foot in the door somehow.

After 4 months spent in rehearsal studios and at each other's houses writing music and laying down tracks, his band is able to book several lives[1] at smaller *taiban* (multiband) events. At their first live, 18 people come to see them, seven of which were their own friends, while the rest were some of Toma and Hikaru's (the vocalist) fans from their previous bands. Nevertheless, that's 15 tickets sold (some of their friend were kind enough to pay for tickets, the rest simply came in for free), but it is still not enough to cover their 20 ticket *noruma* (quota) that was set by the event organizer. So, the remaining 5 tickets come out of their own pockets. Still, they are elated and this is absolutely normal for a first live. More importantly, some people who weren't there to see them but had come to see other bands didn't just sit out their set or stand there without participating, they actually seemed to enjoy them. They were even told by the live house staff that after

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[1] In Japan, Visual Kei concerts are referred to as *raibu* (live) and not 'concerts' and therefore this terminology will be adopted when referring to live performances/ live concerts.

the live, 3 people asked if there was a *buppan* (goods/merchandise table) for them today, which there wasn't, because they don't have anything to sell. *Yet*.

Things pick up slowly over the year and they even begin to tour a bit, playing Nagoya, Kyoto, Tokyo and recently Sendai. But mostly they play only in the Kansai area. Their biggest turnout has been 62 people at a live house they usually play at in Osaka. Their smallest was 7 people when they played in Sendai for the first time. This is Ren's schedule for the next three days:

Tuesday	Wednesday (Skipped School)	Thursday
1-5:00 Work on website/tracks	07:50 Arrive in Tokyo	02:00 Leave for Osaka
05:00 Sleep	10:00 *Shiten mawari*	09:20 Service manners (cl)
09:20 *Biyou bunkaron* (cl)	12:30 Enter venue	10:20 Communication (cl)
10:20 Texture basics (cl)	15:30 Sound check/Prep	11:10 *Biyou hoken* (cl)
11:20 Hygiene Management (cl)	18:30 Live starts	12:10 Lunch break
12:10 Lunch break	21:00 Live ends/ Admin issues/ *Satsueikai*	12:55 Self study
13:10 Enter venue (late)	00:15 *Uchiage*	16:30 *Baito*
14:30 Sound check		22:30 Rehearsal
15:20 Sleep/Study/Prep		00:30 Work on tracks and check footage
18:00 Live Starts		05:00 Sleep
21:00 Live Ends		
23:00 Dinner and leave for Tokyo		

*cl= class

His day starts at 1 a.m. where he does website maintenance for his band as well

as some programming for a song he is currently working on. He sleeps for a few hours, then he goes to class. He leaves school midway because his band have a live on that day and he is already late. They do their sound-check and he has about two hours of free time which he says he usually uses to study or sleep, so he sleeps. The live starts at six and ends at nine but after that, there are management details and post-live logistics to attend to. At eleven, the band have a quick meal and then drive to Tokyo where they have a live the next day. They take turns driving and change drivers every three hours. They arrive just before eight in the morning and sleep in the *kizaisha* (equipment vehicle) itself for about two hours before having to visit some CD stores for business. At twelve thirty they enter the venue and do a sound-check. The live starts at six thirty and ends three hours later. After the packing up of equipment and accounts are taken care of, they attend an after party with the other bands that performed. They leave after two hours to drive back to Osaka and Ren, who missed school the day before, manages to get to class on time. Thank god for the self-study afternoon period, because he needs to sleep. After a nap he heads to his *baito*. At night the band has rehearsal. When he goes home there is more to update on the website and he has to work on the pre-production of their new mini album. He goes to bed at five because he has class again at nine.

Ren is basically sleep deprived, overworked, barely going to school, in constant need of money, and is caught in a dilemma— he wants to become a professional musician, but at this stage of his dream, he makes no money from his band. In fact they often lose money as they have to put in money towards rehearsals, transportation, hiring a hair and makeup artist, renting time/slots at live houses and events, putting money into production, printing flyers and for advertising, producing goods etc., so he has to do *baito*. Also, having to work and go to school takes time away from his band.

Toma, his bandmate says: "At this rate, we have no *ikioi* (momentum) because

not enough people get to see us. We need to tour more, release more, promote more and to do that you need the time. If you chase two rabbits at once you'll catch neither."

With still a year left to go in school, Ren rids himself of one rabbit and he quits school. His parents are furious and worried about his future. His mother says "Music is just as a hobby!" while his father adds, "Nobody is going to hire you to work with that long, bleached hair and those facial piercings. What kind of work will you do? Just one more year and you could have at least have finished school!"

He says "My parents don't understand anything. If this is just done at the level of a hobby, it'll never go anywhere. Being halfhearted is defeat in itself."

Even with more time now, he still doesn't have enough money. Studio rental, recording, printing, hiring an engineer, equipment, advertising, touring, transportation, booking lives, producing goods, etc. — it all costs. It doesn't matter how many good demos the band makes if they can't make a music video for any of them. The cost of a decent promotional video would come slightly under 200,000 yen and that's doesn't even yet include the extra charges like effects, transportation, nuanced editing etc. 200,000 plus may not be an exorbitant amount of money, but it still has to come from somewhere, or someone. They don't always meet their *noruma* when they play lives sometimes.

Toma also says if they keep playing in the same small live houses in the Kansai area, nobody new will see them. Toma suggests they should join a *jimusho* (artist management) or a label. Doing so will find them a way to pay up front for such costs and widen their connections by putting them on certain event circuits. All this is in exchange for their publishing and recording rights and them paying the *jimusho* back for any initial costs incurred through their sales. There might be some other requirements but that's up for discussion. The band is unsure, but generally in favor of it.

Ren writes this on his blog, "There is nothing else in the world like music. The

way it enters your body and mind. I want to make music to enter people's lives. Like the way it enters mine." On one of the days we talk, Ren tells me:

"When I put makeup on and wear a costume and step on stage, it's like my 'switch' comes on and I can transport everyone, myself, the audience, somewhere new, somewhere I don't even know exists. It only exists there. Some have asked "Must you wear makeup to make music? Can't you do it without the makeup? It's not really about the music if you can't just play music." To be honest, I am more concerned that they think in such ways…that there is only one proper way to do 'real' music. If somebody can feel my music, then it is real music and when I see the audience moving to my music, I realize there is nothing I can't do when I am on stage. You might think it is stupid, but there have been times when I really felt that."

But there are things Ren really can do nothing about. Before they can even decide on what to do about a *jimusho*, the vocalist, Hikaru decides to quit, as his girlfriend is now pregnant and he needs to find a job to support his growing family. He feels like he's disappointed the others, but he also feels like it doesn't matter too much because "It's not like we were making money anyway. We were losing money." Their drummer, Yasu, would like to continue doing music, but is unsure. He likes playing music and he really loves playing live, but he doesn't know if he wants to devote so much to something that may not ever bear fruit. Also, he's decided he doesn't like wearing makeup. He doesn't offer any particularly deep reason for it, saying "It feels bad. I hate having to take it off! It feels bad!" Toma, the bassist, has decided to join another Visual Kei band, one that has the backing of a *jimusho*.

I ask Toma why he didn't continue with Ren. He says:

"Ren is talented, especially for his age, but he is still young (immature) and he has no sense of how to be a professional. He likes to talk and he likes the attention. To be honest, talent isn't everything. Realistically, there are many things you have to be willing to sacrifice, things he hasn't even considered…he is too idealistic about many things."

Unsure about how to proceed, Ren seeks the advice of Satoshi, a guitar maintainer whose services he utilizes. Satoshi tells him that if he is really serious about being in a band and making it into a profession, he should become a roadie for a bigger band in Tokyo. But he also warns:

"The music industry in general is very tough, it is a business and in the grand scheme of things, Visual Kei is like a high school club, it's just a tiny corner of the world and few take it seriously. It's not impossible but in this day and age, it's harder. Any music genre is hard, but this one has its own brand of difficulties."

Satoshi would know as he was in a Visual Kei band 8 years ago. Ren takes half of Satoshi's advice. The 'go to Tokyo and become a roadie' half and as for Satoshi's warning, Ren says he's heard that many times before, but that he'll cross that bridge when he comes to it. He's already come this far so what's there to lose? He applies to roadie for a Visual Kei band in Tokyo. This band is fairly well known. The pay isn't great especially considering he'll be living in Tokyo without any help from his parents and because he has no previous relevant experience aside from his own short-lived band. He'll be starting from a salary of 110,000 yen a month but there are additional earnings from commissions (*buaisei)* and on-site benefits (*genba teate*). There will be days when his meals will also be provided for. But the biggest thing he believes he gains will be the ability watch and learn from a real working band up close, he will come to understand equipment and gear at a more practical level, and he will meet all kinds of new people.

He writes this final entry on his band blog:

"I'm sorry that this comes so suddenly, but this will be the last entry as Ren. I will come back one day to show you that the days away from the stage were not wasted. I will not forget your support and I will treasure our time together always. I just want everyone to know that when I took to the stage, it was always real for me. I was never once 'playing' up there. Everything…I really meant it, not a single lie, not even an ounce of deceit in my words and music. Everyone will be going on their own different paths now, some of us will still do music. If you are reading this, I promise you I will continue to play with all of my soul. I want to play music for real."

1.2 All Played Out

This next vignette I will share is about another musician, Naoki. His situation could not be more different from the one was Ren facing, but they are in fact deeply intertwined. Naoki is at the end of his career. He is 35 and has been in several different Visual Kei bands, his first was in 2002 when he was just 18. He has informed his band that he is thinking of quitting, not just the band, but music for good. He has actually been thinking to leave the band for over a year now and he first verbalized this to his band members 9 months ago, but they did not accept it. Already in their fifth year as a band, they are relatively famous within the Visual Kei scene and able to fill up medium sized live venues that have an audience capacity of 800-1000 on their own. The band is signed to a *jimusho* and while their income is not stable, some of the members (not all) are able to make a living off their music and related activities.

In Naoki's case, it is not an issue of the style of music they play, but some of these 'related activities' have worn him down and are the cause of much anxiety. Issues so big it's beginning to affect his feelings about himself and how he wants to lead the rest

of life. Naoki has a reputation within the Visual Kei scene for his drumming skills which are outstanding 'especially for a Visual Kei band,' as he's often told. A statement he says is really not a compliment to him considering he grew up admiring Visual Kei drummers and knows what the sentence implies about the scene he has dedicated much of his life to. Drumming aside, he is an equally gifted composer and lyricist and he writes about half the songs the band puts out.

But that's on the surface and as much as he has been able to live out his life following his childhood dreams until now, inside his feelings have changed. It is not due to just one thing, but many factors, the first of which is the lifestyle. The irregular hours have taken a toll on his health. There are days he sleeps 14 hours a day out of total exhaustion and others when he sleeps only there. This situation constantly oscillates, especially when the band is on tour and have not only concerts to play in the evenings, but in-store events on the same day, often in the late morning, and other post-concert meet and greet events for the fans after having played for two hours or longer. This was not the norm when Naoki first started out in bands, but in recent years has become another part of the activities of Visual Kei bands.

Lives are physically exhausting for all musicians, but particularly so for drummers who need to use a lot of energy and as the core element of the entire band's rhythm, requires great mental concentration. He could power through the lack of sleep when he was younger, but now it is not simply about feeling tired or sleepy, and instead he has begun to develop chronic chest pains, cholesterol issues and high blood pressure. It doesn't help of course that he smokes and drinks (alcohol and a lot of coffee) everyday— habits he doesn't really show any signs of stopping for he says they are the easiest things in reach that help him get through the day. Because he doesn't feel well, he is often late and unable to focus.

Health is one thing, but his girlfriend of more than 10 years whom he lives with has brought up wanting to have children before it's too late. He is on the same page with her about this. She is actually a few years older than him, nearing 40 and while she has not asked him to quit his music, the reality is obvious— that they cannot have a family based on her current income and his unstable one which may have been alright for two people, but is not at all enough once a child has been added to that equation. Ideally, they would like to have two, but even having one would be financially challenging.

His income is not only unstable in that it changes based on their sales and amount of touring, but he actually makes the least amongst all the members, despite writing half the songs, because the payout he receives is not one based on royalties. For every song he writes that gets recorded, he does not receive anything extra. This is because of an internal agreement they have within the band that they all contribute music, even if not equally, and they have signed over the copyrights to their record label and do not actually own any of their own writing credits. This was in exchange for a fixed basic salary, but with commissions that would come from the sales of their music, tickets and merchandise, with the largest income variable being merchandise.

While there is band merchandise that they all get a cut from, there is also individual member merchandise and several other forms of sales which they are individually responsible for. In general, these are sold in two forms; items that carry an individual member's image and his individual time (the opportunity for communication in that time) that can be bought. The latter is purchased in the form of very short opportunities to converse and photo ops. These are commodities that may seem to have nothing to do with music, but are part and parcel of the music in that they have become completely normalized in the Visual Kei industry where music and the musicians themselves are both part of the appeal.

Naoki says that in his band he sells the least as an individual. He thinks it is because he is not actually 'good' Visual Kei material. What he means by this is he believes he is not good looking, especially compared to his band members who are slimmer, more stylish, have better faces and have '*hana*' ('flower,' i.e. a special, outstanding quality that is attractive and shines). His health problems have also made him gain weight which he finds harder to shed in recent years. He sometimes feels he looks bad in his costumes or with makeup, so he begins to wear simpler things and requests for costumes that are looser fitting, and plain. He knows his body type is straying farther from the ideal, one he feels he was never even close to, to begin with. While he says that nobody in the band or their management has said anything to him about it, I have seen the members make jokes about his weight, which he just chooses to laugh along with.

Another reason his personal sales aren't as good as his other members' is that he provides the least 'service.' He feels he isn't good at conversation, and he isn't comfortable or able to flirt well. He can act along to some extent because he has spent years seeing how it's done, but he doesn't enjoy it and he can somehow never get quite used to it. It is not that he dislikes his fans, but that he feels that this is something he just isn't good at. The fans expect him to make them feel 'special.' They expect him to always be ready and willing to entertain them beyond what he does on stage and that he has to meet this responsibility because of the money and efforts they've spent supporting him in this way. The other day one of his fans asked if he would carry her like a princess being rescued by a hero (*hime dakko)* for a photograph. He went ahead and did as requested, but it is times like this when he really questions what he is doing as a musician. He says:

> "I don't actually hate the fans. Actually, most of them are good people. But I hate
> being in this situation. I do want to make them happy, but not in this way. I'm
> not good at this way. I can't just play along so well. Actually I am uncomfortable

playing with people I don't know well. I appreciate them, but… "

He says he knows it is not just him and that many of his peers feel the same way. Some of his own band members completely understand his feelings, but they seem to be coping better than him. He thinks it is because they are also genuinely better at it and that some of them actually enjoy it, and the others have somehow accepted and made peace with having to do the job of entertaining fans, outside of music.

He says the shared goal the band had was always to reach the point of success where they wouldn't have to do these things, but it's five years in and they've plateaued. In fact, their fans enjoy the extras so much, there doesn't appear to be a situation where they'll ever be free of it. They don't appear to be growing and there are younger bands who may be better equipped than he is in the 'entertainment' department, with fresher faces. He wonders if he can really go on like this and maybe he has reached a point in his life where he can't keep chasing the impossible.

The other reason he is suffering is that, unlike the other members, he is the only one who has a job on top of all of this. Without this job, he is not able to make enough money to get by simply from his musician's salary. His other members have found other ways to make money or sustain themselves economically— financial arrangements with their families, spouses or significant others, the incentives earned from their individual sales, expensive gifts from fans. Two of the members even receive monthly stipends from 'sponsors' (*mitsu*)[2]. Not only is Naoki not able to command the high price they do, he doesn't want to get involved with such things and has promised his girlfriend that he would never involve himself in such affairs. He doesn't look down on his bandmates. He understands 'the hustle' and sometimes he envies the luxuries they have. At the end of

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[2] I return to the subject of *mitsu* in detail in Chapter 6
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the day, they need to survive in order to keep the dream alive and for a while now he has been wondering if it is even worth it. He is physically, emotionally and mentally drained.

The final blow for him comes when he tells his bandmates for the fourth time that he thinks it is time for him to quit. While they previously managed to convince him to stick it out for a little while longer, this time when he tells them, one of his members accuses him of being selfish and not willing to tough it out and that if he had known that Naoki was going to eventually cop-out (which he had a bad feeling would happen), then he should have never have joined their band in the first place. More angry words are exchanged and eventually a chair is tossed at him and punches are thrown. What hurt more was that this member was his old friend, someone he had known since they were teenagers.

When he talks to his family about it, they tell him it is time to really 'grow up' and become an adult. They say that maybe it took him a long time to realize this, but he now has and that he should leave this unhappy situation. They say to him that there is nothing wrong with leading a 'normal' life. His younger brother tells him the same thing, but in a different way, saying that he has suffered and worked so hard, when it was always supposed to be a fun thing. For Naoki, the problems he faces have really taken any fun out of what was something he once loved. Naoki leaves the band 5 months later. He finishes recording their last single. They have a farewell tour for him and it is a civil but nevertheless painful goodbye and the end of long dream.

The details of Ren and Naoki's lives are not meant to be representative of the kinds of people who join Visual Kei bands, but their struggles are common among those who seek careers as performing artists in a scene like this and revolve around two issues: work and play.

1.3. Working or Playing?

Both Ren and Naoki chose to pursue careers in a field of music that they felt passionate about and had personal attachment to, one that begun as an act of consumption— they wanted to turn play into work. In Ren's case, he is struggling to find a way to turn this 'hobby' of his into an actual career path. One that he has to work *at* (his band's various activities) and work while (his *baito*) he pursues, on top of attending school. To his parents and some others around him, it is not recognized as potential work not only for the risks and uncertainty involved in any music career, but particularly because of the content which involves the use of 'strange' costumes and makeup which his parents do not see as respectful for a man and is therefore neither 'worthy' of being called work as it is bad enough even as 'play.' They also do not recognize his current musical efforts as work because he doesn't earn from it and even has to work to spend money on it. They also worry how all of this will affect his ability to find 'real work.' His *senpai*, though he gives him concrete advice, warns him that even though it will involve very hard work, he may not be taken seriously by others in the music industry because the scene has a juvenile reputation— its stylistic content, the costume and makeup, the perceived lack of technical emphasis or a clear sonic contribution, because it is women who consume it, the reputation of its artists. These elements all come together such that Visual Kei is trivialized as mere play (in his words 'a high-school club'), and is not worthy of being treated as art.

His bandmates also struggle, for the band, despite gaining some momentum, is not working out as they had hoped, considering other things in their lives that involve having to take on 'real' work of the kind that allows them to make a living and support their families. The one bandmate, Toma, who is also keen on making a career out of music, sees Ren with his tendencies to vocalize his passions and unwillingness to join a *jimusho*

as idealistic. Thus, to him Ren's dreams will never work out, because he doesn't display an actual understanding of what Toma sees as the actual work. He sees Ren as enchanted with the 'idea' of being a rock star while to a more experienced and realistic person like Toma, Ren is just 'playing' at being a musician.

Ren is, as we have seen, actually working very hard, but he cannot say his musical career is working out (yet) and he cannot yet even call it his work. Furthermore, most of his social connections see him as playing, albeit in different ways. But he is trying to turn this 'play' into work.

On the other hand, Naoki has what Ren wants. He is an example of someone who has chased his passion, and for 17 years (which was about half of his life at that point) was able to make something of a career out of it. But the nature of his work has evolved and his work requires him to increasingly generate 'play' for others as he has to entertain and provide services for his fans in a way that he cannot reconcile with his 'actual' work as a musician. Out of a sense of professionalism he does it, but it takes away from the own joy that he finds in his work. He feels less like a musician and more like an entertainment commodity, one that he is simply not skilled at selling himself as, but it is a reality of his chosen field of work and now a job requirement.

Furthermore, his health and self-esteem suffer and as a result, he cannot work well and he cannot 'play' well for others either; his commodity status suffers when he puts weight on and he feels increasingly disconnected. He is also robbed of his own play in that he is not well enough to enjoy anything, not even his free time, given his health and burnout. His life's goal of playing and creating music, which used to be so important to him, no longer seems as clear as it once used to, nor is he financially rewarded for it in the contract and system he has willingly entered. Because Naoki is not a 'skilled worker' or a 'skilled player' in the contemporary current sense of what his work requires of him,

he does not make as much as his band mates and even continues to work at another job. Naoki is actually respected as a musician, but he can no longer respect himself as he cannot respect the very nature of his work.

Because Naoki is also considering other important aspects of his life and wants to start a family, his current work does not allow him this option so easily. He makes money, but it is not enough for anything more than what he currently has. If he wants to continue being a musician and also make more money, this will mean he has to engage more proactively and intensely in the areas of work that he is already personally struggling with. Something has got to give and it does when he decides to leave his band and his own friend accuses of him of ruining it for everyone because he is not, to him, willing to work hard enough. His parents tell him that it's time to let go and to finally 'grow up.' His brother tells him to stop 'working so hard' at something that is no longer even fun for him. Naoki leaves his band because gone is both the joy of his play and his work.

How is it that both Naoki and Ren are working very hard, but are seen or see themselves as playing? Is what they do play or is it work? How does one turn play into work? Why and how does their work involve notions of play and actual play? Are play and work ultimately located within mutually exclusively boundaries, or are these malleable? and if they are, how are we to understand the nature and effects of these amalgamations? These are but some of the puzzles surrounding the relational acts of the production and consumption of the music genre known as Visual Kei that this research project will endeavor to shed light on.

1.4 Research Objectives and Research Questions

Because Visual Kei has yet to be vigorously researched, the first part of this study attempts to build an empirical base by addressing its contents, the actors, and institutions

involved in the phenomenon and how and why it is prosumed. It asks the questions: What is Visual Kei? How can we understand this cultural phenomenon and how and why do people engage with it? I will argue that the concept of prosumption— that is, relational acts of production and consumption (Toffler 1980; Ritzer, Dean and Jurgenson 2012), is a particularly useful tool to employ in understanding how people come to cultivate an affinity to subcultures such as Visual Kei. I will also show how prosumption is never a neutral process for it is uneven, gendered, and stigmatized precisely because the boundaries between production and consumption are institutionalized as much as they are moralized.

The second part looks at Visual Kei under the context of the digitalization of music, the proliferation of immaterial labor and production, the commoditization of intimacy and other socio-economic consumer trends. In the second part I focus on another mode of engagement, that which I call playwork and how one carves a professional career in Visual Kei. I ask: What are the skills that musicians have to cultivate in order to sustain their careers and how has their labor changed? How do they balance crafting otherworldliness with the demands of digital capitalism? How is 'success' envisioned and realized? What are the ideologies that inform notions of success? How does their labor effect other arenas of life and what do these impacts entail? How can we understand the nature of their work? I will attempt to show how the acts of prosumption highlighted in the first part, which already entails a re-examination of the process of culture being produced and consumed relationally, is a key element of playwork, for this simultaneously exacerbates the blurring of the boundaries between work and play. I suggest that playwork may be an increasingly common feature of work, particularly in the creative industries (although by no means limited to them exclusively) in the current era where the lines between labor and leisure, private and public, people and commodities,

material and immaterial labor are increasingly obscured.

1.5 Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation has been organized into two parts and thirteen chapters in total. Parts one and two have been divided as addressed in the previous section. Part one deals with the prosumption of Visual Kei and looks at how producers and consumers create and sustain culture and examines why this is of significance. In Chapter 2 I review the concept of prosumption, showing how it is an appropriate concept to utilize with regards to participatory cultures and, as is with the case of this research project, the ideas surrounding prosumption are also vital for it is inherently a part of the process of becoming a professional music. I then go on to an overview of the various ways in which play and work have been studied in relation to one another over time, paying particular attention to the ways in which play, leisure, hobbies and subcultures have been studied in the context of Japan. I present that which I have tentatively labeled as a double paradox—that play is at once everywhere, as it is confined, and that a culture of overwork appears to be existing alongside an increasingly prominent yet subtle culture of 'overplay.' I then propose to develop a concept that accounts for the explanation of the double paradox which says that points on the paradox continuum can be understood as different 'modes of play.' The mode of play I will examine in this dissertation is that which I have termed 'playwork.'

It exists within this double paradox in that it contains some of the elements within each axis, but cannot be explained by any one of them alone. There are many other 'modes of play' out there that I believe can be detected using this theory in development. I also review the current state of research on Visual Kei and identify the various gaps and problems in the existing body of literature.

In Chapter 3 I cover the three main methods and the methodology used to gather

data, while reviewing their pros and cons. I also touch on some of my reasons for conducting research in this particular field and my positionality in relation to the field and the research participants. Chapter 4 provides readers with a chronological look at the history of Visual Kei beginning with its emergence in the 1980s, how a specialized industry surrounding it developed, and an overview of the different subgenres and their characteristics throughout the evolution of this music-based subculture. Chapter 5 examines how Visual Kei is prosumed both materially (its products such as music and live performances) and immaterially (as ideas, experiences, sociality, and identities in relation to perceptions surrounding normative/hegemonic culture). While I attempt to show how there is some consensus of the meaningfulness surrounding what is valued within these prosumptive practices, I also highlight, in particular, different modes of gendered prosumption and the social stigma that comes with involvement in this subculture which can be attributed to the aesthetic and thematic content of its products and the behaviors and mindsets it is thought to engender. This stigma is internally circulated amongst participants while at the same time externally ascribed by people outside the subculture.

Part 2 of the dissertation begins with Chapter 6 where attention shifts towards those who prosume Visual Kei as career and examines the labor, entry and attempts to carve out a career as a musician. I first identify the various skills and types of labor that have become necessary in the contemporary music market and each chapter in Part 2 focuses on a particular skill and notions of success. These different notions of success are nestled within competing ideologies of work and play and are therefore sometimes at odds with one another. It is within this context that I analyze each of these skills as the 'skills of playwork.' In Chapter 6 I look at how play first turns into work trajectories and how the family and social relationships come into play in the skill of 'sustenance and

maintenance' and the beginnings of how men develop their musicianship skills. Their precarious economic situations are shown to be part of why they are seen as playing as opposed to working. Entrenched instability is what renders their career attempts as 'playwork.'

Chapter 7 investigates stagework and involves the analysis of two particular skills. The first involves the on-stage skill I have termed 'craftwork' and how band men become Visual Kei band men focusing on musicianship, stage work and body work. The particular aesthetic inclinations, difficult to define styles of musical contribution and varying levels of obscured labor with regards to craftwork is shown to render their labor 'superficial' and is cause for ridicule and stigma. The second element of stagework that I investigate is that which occurs 'off-stage' and these are termed business skills. Here I look at how entering the specialized circuits and networks is not simply a built-in process, but one that bands have to navigate in order to gain success and make profits. Both these on-stage and off-stage elements involve very different aspects of labor and skills, but they come together to make the products that showcase the core products of a band.

Chapter 8 looks at service skills which I examine under the context of the rise of the digitalization of music and immaterial labor. I demonstrate how notions of service are involving increased investment of individual effort and the very sense of personhood as labor and that this subjects them to a type of self-commoditization that is at once normalized, but also thought to be irrelevant to the ideals of 'musicianship' and the artist.

Chapter 9 provides an analysis of how the prosumption of digital leisure, internet fan-spaces and cyberculture, which have become an integral part of most contemporary fandoms, have affected ideas surrounding the labor of performers as well as the subculture as a whole. I show how the proliferation of the use of anonymous internet boards contributes to both the authenticating and alienation of social relations between fans and

artists due to the presence of increasingly intrusive forms of net-surveillance and monitoring. Here is where we see how prosumptive practices intensify the work of band members as 'playwork' for the product of online prosumption of Visual Kei in these spaces tends to intrude into the private lives of people and provides a breeding ground for gossip scandal.

Chapter 10 looks at both those who choose to remain prosuming Visual Kei as well as those who leave and this is analyzed under a skill I term "Reconnaissance and Monitoring". While it may not seem like a skill in a more classic understanding of the word in the context of work-skills, I suggest that if viewed through the playwork analytic, it involves the skill of monitoring, motivating and positioning of the self within the web of the aforementioned competing ideologies of success and is therefore a kind labor 'for the self'. This chapter also examines the long-term implications of subcultural prosumption and engagement with playwork for the individual.

Chapter 11 offers some conclusions to each of the research questions and re-examines the intersections of playwork and prosumption. By returning to the double paradox, I argue that each skill is informed by different and clashing ideologies of 'success' that are not only contingent upon ideals formed within the frame of what it means to be a musician, but also by a variety of institutions and larger socio-cultural norms that shape the meanings of work and play. The dynamics of these conflicts are captured by the concept of 'playwork'. In addition to this, the limitations and shortcomings of this study will also be covered in this chapter with the hopes that they may lead to more research contributions in the future both within the fields of Visual Kei as a subject of investigation as well as for the utilization of playwork in a wider variety of studies beyond music.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 The Changing Boundaries of Work and Play

Work and play are two commonly understood, distinct spheres of activity which are ordered by time, activity, intent and space. People have always worked and played, but with industrialization, clearer divisions of what constitutes leisure time became more prominent with the development of government stipulated labor laws that began with the regulation of work hours and the formalization of holidays. Ideas about labor and leisure are also assembled by a host of interacting institutions— religion, industry and corporations, education, and the mass media to name a few (Hane 1992; Thompson 1967; Leheny 2003). The ordering of the boundaries of work and play are always subject to contestation and change.

This is evident in discussions of work-life balance. In Japan, the lack of work-life balance is centered on overwork, which is directly contributive to negatively perceived demographic changes. At its worst, overwork has been shown to lead to death. The entrenched culture of overwork is simultaneously coercive, as it is also morally internalized, linked to ideas about proper citizenship, adulthood, and meaningful existences. There is in Japan what scholars like Harada and Leheny have described as 'Leisure Poverty' (Harada 1998; Leheny 2003). Within this frame, work is the locus of importance for one's livelihood and leisure is a residual perk.

At the same time, we see in both the academic and popular literature an equally robust discussion centered on emergent forms of attitudes towards work and play which depict a growing segment of young people since the 1980s as engaged in a different approach to leisure, lifestyles, and consumerism. Each of these generational categories is thought to possess a disposition that emphasizes play over work.

On one hand, this shift has been depicted as one in which we see the growth of

self-indulgent, consumer-oriented individualists who, having grown up in a society of material affluence, lack a work ethic visible in their rejection of stable employment. On the other, scholars have also shown how deregulation, an entrenched recession and structural changes in the workforce have resulted in a decrease in the number of opportunities for stability and the proliferation of irregular work (Genda 2005). Finger pointing and sympathy aside, work that is thought to be fulfilling and linked to personal interests or work being but one element of a multifaceted self is one of the main tenets of the experience of socio-economic precarity that many young people find themselves in whether they are victims of circumstances or are dreamwork chasers (Lukacs 2013; Mori 2009).

This is a paradox that is already in discussion. Harada has termed this the "bifurcation of work and leisure groups" (Harada 1998). Daliot-Bul writes about those who see "play as a subsidiary of work as opposed to those who see play as central to personal significance and meaning" (Daliot-Bul 2009). In short, the lack of work-life balance and overwork is a discussion that takes place alongside that of the proliferation of lifestyle choices and the growing diversity of work-life trajectories. Death from overwork and quitting one's job to focus on surfing may represent two ends of a continuum and in between lies a variety of 'modes of playing' in which the boundaries between work and play are far less stable.

2.2 Are There Japanese Ways of Playing?

But before I go on to talk about these modes, there is more to say about play. Anthropological and consumer studies of play have suggested there are culturally characteristic ways of playing in Japan. The appearance of the abundance of consumer choices, profusion of subcultural identities, and the sophistication of material and immaterial product forms are not to be mistaken for leisurely approaches to leisure. When

and how Japanese people play has tended to be conceived as activities of particular age groups in relation to specific points in the life course. And when people do play, it is often cast as a temporal activity confined to particularly gendered activities, spaces, times, and consumer identities that do not 'spill over' into other arenas of life. I will now go on to examine this discussion in detail in the next section.

2.2.1 Japanese Subcultures and Calculated Play

Ethnography has done much to reveal how the spaces in which music is performed live is used by both performers and audience members for various projects, be these as sites for alternative forms of identity and sociality (Rojek 2009; Spracklen 2010, 2014; Williams 2011), spaces in which specific kinds of embodied expressions and practices proliferate (Hansen 2015; Skutlin 2016), or the locations where a multitude of everyday notions of normalcy and propriety can be transgressed (Halnon 2006; Rushkoff 2001).

Similar notions appear in the research on live music spaces in Japan, and their manifestations are often rationalized in the context of a number of socio-cultural 'realities' that amalgamate to form what is described as 'hegemonic culture' which can be located in various institutional forms of ordering (Dunn 2008; McLeod 2012; Hashimoto 2007; Inoue 2003; Seibt 2013; Tsuji 2012). The institutions of school, work and family, to name a few, become sites whereby socially and morally sanctioned ways of doing things are put into circulation and become real through practice. They are also the sites in which the rewards for conformity and delivering performances of propriety are to be reaped (Allison 1991, 2013; Yoder 2004; Ogasawara 1998; Sugimoto 2003). The corporeal management of the body, heteronormative production and reproduction, and a positive-active-responsible-sociable personhood (or subjectivity) are but just a few key areas which assemble to form ideas about what makes for a responsible citizen in a particular moral

universe of discourse (Kam 2013; Kondo 1990; Nagai 2012; Galbraith 2021; Skutlin 2017; Suganuma 2007, 2012) that, while subject to change, draws its enduring legitimacy by evoking traditions, culture, and history.

It is vis-a-vis these everyday norms and such ideas about responsible or moral personhood that music-based cultures gain and craft their subcultural status. Such counter-hegemonic notions can be found in the ways people who participate in such cultural forms talk about or justify the way they dress or fashion themselves and what it is that they enjoy about the content of such subcultures, which, to the disinterested or those perceived to be 'outside' of it, may label or identify as deviant, degenerate, or simply 'strange.' Keywords that emerge in narratives evoke this idea of the non-normative, such as '*hinichijyou*' (out of the ordinary), 'the 'real' me,' or 'another dimension,' as well as expressions of feeling reborn through cathartic live experiences or being able to have left something behind that is for others memorable and meaningful beyond its material form (Condry 2006; Dunn 2008).

Such sentiments are, of course, not unique to the Japanese experience, but what research often presents is that there are 'Japanese' ways of doing this. Thus, Japanese fans of heavy metal, punk, and goth (as well as other forms of alternative music that can be categorized by genre) are said to enjoy elements of these global genres of music, but in their own 'local' ways. What constitutes this idea of locality here and how is it thought to differ from the vast expanse that is the global 'rest'/'other'?

The formation of this local context is not only present in studies about alternative music scenes in Japan, but also detectable in a variety of studies on Japanese consumer and subculture practices where participants are shown to be able to know when and how to control their play.

Examples include: Isaac Gagné's work on Lolita (Gagné 2013) and Sato Ikuya's

work on *bosozoku* (motorcycle gangs) (Sato 1998). In both these studies, participants anticipate *en avance* graduation from their subcultural practices and identities upon becoming adults and almost always do so. Fans of Heavy Metal (Dunn 2008; Minamida 2012; Itoh 2007) and of homo-erotic fiction (Hashimoto 2007; Marran 2005) are not as interested in the politics of resistance against capitalism as they are in their other globally practiced forms or in the struggles of the rights of sexual minorities. Heavy metal concerts are a place to 'blow off steam,' 'de-stress from work,' and enjoy the company of friends or fellow enthusiasts. Meanwhile, *yaoi* is thought to be an expression of gender subordination in which women enjoy the fantasy of equality in relationships by living vicariously through one of the male characters, an equality that they are not able to experience in real life heterosexual relationships. In other words, these consumer markets offer 'safe spaces' to express social strain. Outside of these spaces, it's 'life as usual,' for even these people have no desire to ostracize their own social stability. These analyses may have been true of these particular practices, but they also end up contributing to the literature in which subcultural participants' relationship to culture is often depicted in a way that "assumes that they are always juvenile, waiting to grow up, and are still enjoying the irresponsibility of their fandom" (Grossberg 1992, 51).

And even if and when people embody their play forms of choice (Condry 2006; Miyadai 1994), such analyses claim they are not really discriminated against because of the understanding that is supposedly present in Japanese society in which there are no territorial clashes, as consumer society can be understood as operating in what Miyadai labels as "islands of consumption" (Miyadai 1994) which do not interact or clash and float about in a state where inhabitants of these islands are more concerned with the goings-on of their own islands.

And so, we are back where we started. Leisure choices and participating in

subculture involves knowing how to manage one's (embodied) actions, while at some level continuing to align oneself with the 'regular' flow of social re-production and finding a means to emplace conflict through consumer practices. In other words, their hobbies, leisure activities and participation in (sub)cultures are depicted as isolated, 'playful' acts of rebellion.

Play is presented as confined, apolitical, functional, and regulated; the effect of a highly sophisticated, segmented, and fragmented, compartmentalized-databased consumer society. Play is depicted as a calculated choice in which actors know the rules of the game.

2.3 Play in Japan, Play is Everywhere

At the same time, it appears that the game itself is changing. The socio-economic present appears to be one in which we are witnessing an intensification of economies of play. At the macro level is an active push for the development of content industries by the government through its 'Cool Japan' policy. At the micro, more and more forms of mobile communication technologies are multipurpose devices which enable people to work and communicate around the clock, but also enable them to play games, binge watch movies and dramas, and shop at any time.

Play can also be detected in broader trends that see the ludification of practices that extend into the digital media culture (Frissen et al. 2015) and in gamification (Mayra 2017) where game-like elements become applied to non-entertainment applications. Frissen, for example, notes that there is something of a collective, playful media landscape with mobile devices—as they are often always on us—allowing the user to play whenever and wherever. Many have found that play is subtly present in a variety of spaces in our daily lives as mobile technology infiltrates even mundane aspects of our everyday lives. "Chughtai and Myers (2014), for example, suggest that Huizinga's ludic

perspective 'can be used as a framework to help understand everyday practice' in terms of the way play often resides in the 'betwixt and between' of quotidian life, and that people's use of technology today frequently involves playful interaction, both communicative and creative" (Hjorth, 2017).

It is not just that play is incorporated as a conscious activity itself, but the way in which we interact with media and digital technologies that "have an inherent ludic dimension" (Frissen et al. 2015) involve sharing and interacting with creative content and therefore, these practices are increasingly geared to shape our perceptions and experiences in playful ways.

Advertising, and consumer services validate and legitimize feelings. This is one of the operative tenets of affect, immaterial, and experience economies. Only 'real' cats can make you feel really 'at home' (Plourde 2014),+ hosts make women feel attractive in ways 'normal' men can't (Takeyama 2010, 2016), *'furusato'* (hometown) is where Japanese remember what it is like to be Japanese (Craig, Fongaro and Tollini 2020; Robertson 1995). Feelings—both the worker's, as a kind of labor, and the consumer's, as a commodity—are increasingly up for sale.

It seems that much of everyday life is mediated by play and more areas of life are colonized by the leisure industries (Rojek 2010). It is the location of where and how people experience companionship, well-being, and intimacy. We express ourselves in playful styles and communicate through leisure activities and expertise. Play is every day, and everywhere, and everything is a potential invitation to play.

This is not just because play is fun, therefore it sells, but the idea of consumers as an active collective is well developed in consumer studies, where there is lively discussion of how the rise of digital capitalism has aided the co-opting of prosumer and other D.I.Y practices towards the service of capitalism where consumers are increasingly

re-configured as co-creators of various products through the free labor and surplus value which they 'willingly' generate in the name of enjoyment, creativity, and freedom. Feedback loops of input and opinion-sharing are welcomed by corporations who portray these activities as democratic, empowering, community-building projects that bring customers and producers closer together (Ritzer and Jurgeson 2010; Zwick, Bonsu and Darmody 2008). As work goes more and more online and becomes intertwined with digital labor, especially in the creative and culture industries, it acquires the image of being creative and playful (Douglas, 1999; Gillespie, 2006), and seemingly, by melding with notions of fun and games, can be conceived of not as work, but as play. This ethos has permeated the digital creative industries in which those "attracted to places with an 'anti-corporate culture' where young people are ready to work unusual hours for sometimes very little money… it is not unusual in this sector to be paid in stock options of companies that have yet to emerge" (van Dijck 2009, 51). T.L Taylor also notes a shift in the casualization of labor as partly due to the expansion of the professionalization of leisure industries, as found in his study of the professionalization of esports where players/consumers attempt to game for professional and economic rewards (Taylor, 2012).

These new forms of irregular employment are internalized as desirable and employment risks are justified for the perceived sense of freedom and play allowed to workers who see themselves as lucky to be able to pursue work that they find enjoyable. However, they are, in many circumstances, especially in the case of user generated content creators, instances of workers being subjected to "a variable scale of labor relations, where many contractual forms can be pinpointed somewhere between the two poles of volunteerism and professionalism" (van Dijck 2009, 51). Furthermore because people willingly generate content for free, this in turn has resulted in a culture in which such products and content may appear to have become available for free.

These same technologies have seen the proliferation of new careers that appear fulfilling, far-reaching, and which involve the self as a resource for alternative self-realizing careers (Lukacs 2013). The culture of deception that permeates the idea of leisure and play as free choices(Rojek 2010) is also consciously and unconsciously equipping people with play skills that allow for the further intensification of commoditization, hence people who are better 'players' are also better workers for they possess the communicative, empathetic, up-to-date competence necessary in today's competitive global economy.   "…When the empire of play can no longer be clearly demarcated, play can no longer be reliably or decisively claimed for the principle of free self-unfolding on the one hand, or for the grim clinching of systematicity on the other. When every instance of play deepens the reach of organized complexity, simultaneously loosening and consolidating, when the place of play is no longer self-evident, the effects of play are themselves put into play" (Connor 2005, 13).

2.4 The Paradoxes of Play: Modes of Play
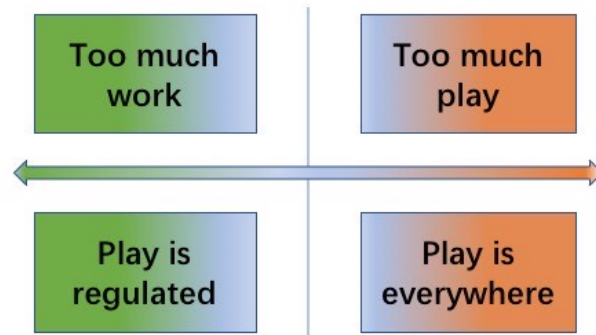
Diagram 1: DOUBLE PARADOX

Based on the literature I have reviewed up to now, I have devised the diagram above to summarize these various ideas surrounding the current state of play in society that appear to simultaneously co-exist. What we are presented with is a double paradox. The top half has been discussed thoroughly and the discussion surrounding the bottom half is growing. I am not denying any of these realities and it may be that the majority of people occupy various middle positions. So, rather than paradoxes, it would appear that we could understand these configurations as particular points on a spectrum of modes of play. There are many modes that aren't accounted for here, for example craftsman and risk work, and what I intend to do is to highlight a mode of play that has yet to be discussed. This mode of play contains some of these elements but cannot be explained by any one of them alone.

I see this mode of play present in the relational acts of consumption and production (prosumption) (Ritzer, Dean and Jurgenson 2012) of a form of music in Japan called Visual Kei and I aim to develop the concept of 'playwork' to capture this mode and

the nature of the labor and relationship to creative production that those involved in making Visual Kei are subject to.

At the most basic level, prosumption refers to some kind of combination or configuration of the process of production and consumption. While the word itself was coined by Alvin Toffler (Toffler 1980), the ideas surrounding the presence of an inherent relationship between acts of production and consumption were present well before Toffler's work. I will build upon this body of scholarship of prosumption studies in this study, focusing on how playwork is inherently prosumptive in nature.

In the next few sections I will first review the literature on prosumption and then proceed to an overview of other existing concepts and theories of work-play hybrids. I later will return to the diagram above to discuss how playwork differs from these existing concepts.

2.5 Prosumption

In this section I will first discuss the characteristics, applications, and criticisms of the concept of prosumption as per a variety of disciplines such as consumer studies, behavioral sciences, sociology, and business studies. I will also then touch on common or related concepts such as Pro-Am, playbor, and serious leisure to highlight how each of these perspectives differ in relation to the boundaries between work and play. I will highlight how these concepts will be applied to this study by considering them in relation to the concept of playwork in order to explicate what is vital about playwork as a separate concept.

I maintain that prosumption provides a particularly suitable conceptual frame for understanding the nature of the relationship between work and play in subcultural participation within the current state of capitalism. This is because playwork is inherently prosumptive and requires that workers be intimately versed in the consumption of one's

play so that it can be generative of value. By examining the prosumptive dimensions of Visual Kei, much can be brought to the fore regarding the nature in which the work involved in the pursuit of a professional career is at once deeply personal yet very much embedded in larger socio-economic conditions.

2.5.1 Prosumption: Relational acts of production and consumption

At the most basic level, prosumption refers to relational acts of consumption and production. George Ritzer, who has written extensively on the topic suggests that prosumption can be thought of as an interrelationship between production and consumption whereby one cannot be completely separate from the other (Ritzer, Dean and Jurgenson 2012; Ritzer 2015; Andrews and Ritzer 2018). In other words, it is the simple idea that in every act of production there are things (both material and immaterial) that are consumed before, as well as ongoingly, in the process of production. Similarly, any act of consumption entails the production of uses, ideas, values, identities, etc., and therefore, further disperses into new processes of production. Consumption, especially in the retail and service sectors, also increasingly involves acts of labor once provided by workers that have now been delegated to consumers themselves. This can range from somewhat seemingly easy or straight-forward processes of self-checkout and assembling products, to actual involvement in product design and creation in which the input of the consumer is vital in the creation of what will be the final product. The consumer now also produces not only the labor, but the experience of the act of consumption and the knowledge in which such practices circulate.

Scholars who deal with the concept of prosumption often point out that this should not be thought of as a new idea in of itself as prosumption has always existed and has been dealt with without referring to it as such. The interconnected relationship between production and consumption was noted even by Karl Marx who, although

focused more on the side of production, pointed out that all production involves aspects of consuming goods, services, and ideas in order to make a product (Marx, 1992). Therefore, while not new, prosumption may be more production-oriented or consumption-oriented at certain points in history, in certain contexts, or in particular moments in time. A clear example of this would be the industrial revolution as a production-heavy period and the rise of the post-industrial service economy as leaning more towards the side of the consumer's experience.

Ritzer proposes thinking of prosumption as existing along a continuum of 'prosumption as production' (p-a-p) and 'prosumption as consumption' (p-a-c) with the midpoint of the continuum being a more equal sort of relationship between the two (Ritzer, 2015). In doing so, one is able to avoid thinking in terms of a great divide which situates people, products, and ideas as inhibiting one or the either or in absolute terms. This can also be extended to other instances when the binaries of production and consumption are applied to societies or eras that are thought of as dominated by one or the other process and in doing so, remind people that these are not possible to separate as acts and to highlight the interrelatedness of these processes. By doing so, this also allows for the tendency to disproportionately place emphasis on the passivity of consumption to be somewhat redirected towards seeing the process as an on-going one and at the same time to highlight the diversity of consumptive acts and processes that go into developing a product. What is emphasized as a result is that one always contains elements of the other and these processes are interrelated. Minute as some of these relations may be, it is, nevertheless, "perhaps an overlooked facet, but one deeply engrained in its manifestation is that prosumption is inherently relational, involving micro interaction between consumer and producer" (Bond et.al 2021,70). In sum, the prosumption analytic works to reveal that these links cannot be separated.

While the p-a-p and p-a-c terminology will not be actively applied to this study and both will be referred to in most instances as simply 'prosumption,' this distinction is nevertheless important in understanding the different acts and processes of prosumption within this study, namely, that of the prosumption by fans (which leans more towards p-a-c) and the prosumption of artists and producers (which is evidently p-a-p-leaning). Therefore, while both parties are prosumers, they are engaged with prosumption in different ways, and while there is overlap, these are also towards different productive ends.

The term prosumption itself was coined by the futurist Alvin Toffler. Toffler saw prosumption not simply as a means to reconsider the relationship between production and consumption, but on a macro-level, as a revolutionary system that could change the dynamics of capitalist economies which he saw as a positive force (Toffler 1980). While he viewed prosumption in a romantically optimistic light as a force for its potential to change capitalistic relations that would result in market principals losing their hold on society, Toffler did not view prosumption as new, but rather, as always having existed in 'waves.' The first wave being hunter-gatherer societies in which people were by nature consumers of that which they produced. During the industrial revolution (the second wave), a productivist bias emerges which forced the perception of the separation of production and consumption, mostly due to the dominance of industrialization. It is what he terms as the 'third-wave' during the post-industrial period where we see the rise of the role of prosumption and the prosumer.

However, prior to Toffler's conceiving of the term, the intensification of the questioning surrounding the division between production and consumption had already begun to increase in relevance to the growth of postmodernism. Thinkers such as Baudrillard have called the divide an "artificial disjunction" (Baudrillard et al. 1976, 112).

In their critiques of this false dichotomy, one of the points raised is that consumers do not just use and re-produce the products they have purchased, but that they construct their very identities via consumption. This then transforms the product as it adds to its use value, which makes consumption itself part of the production process (Firat et al. 1996). The acknowledgement of these aspects is indeed taken up within the prosumption literature, as "a common theme of all forms of prosumption is that prosumers co-create value and transform the good or service before its consumption" (Florea and Woods 2018). However, in terms of postmodernist thought, the boundary between production and consumption itself could be seen as yet another typically modernist binary that becomes taken for granted (Saussure, 1994).

Prosumption at the present has once again gained relevance, for much of the digital economy and leisure spaces involve some level of consumers involving themselves in aspects of production that were previously less accessible or integrated into their daily lives. In fact, much of the application of prosumption has involved studies of the use of the internet and Web 2.0 as sites where prosumptive processes are easily visible (Beer and Burrows 2010; Bond et al. 2020; Fuchs 2011; Yamamoto et.al 2019).

It is not just online where prosumption matters. This process is occurring at the heart of a variety of areas of daily life: internet, commerce, service industry, industrial goods, and healthcare (Florea and Woods 2018). The process is as immaterial and digital as it is material and tactile, for it is both integral to the experience of platforms like Instagram, Wikipedia, and Twitter where content is generated by users and then consumed by the masses, just as it is part of the experience of shopping in stores at places like Ikea where furniture is assembled by the buyers themselves. Then there are daily experiences that involve both the equal use of the digital and the tactile, such as what happens when we use a ride-sharing or food delivery application. Important to note here

as well is that there are not clear separations between the material and immaterial experiences, as both are constantly and, perhaps at this point in time, increasingly intermeshed in reality.

What can certainly be detected is an increase in the sites and spaces that allow, and at times demand, that we prosume. Ritzer terms these, referencing the Marxian origins of the term, the 'means of prosumption' (Ritzer, 2015b) of which there are many new forms, thanks to new technological advances and the proliferation of the internet. As more people use and access these means, more people are recruited into performing unpaid labor which further maximizes profits for capitalists as this reduces the costs of production. For example, this decreases the need and costs for manpower as well as physical work sites. Content is generated for free and along with this is access to user data which can be sold for profits and advertising purposes. Also related is how this kind of prosumer is remunerated (if they ever are) and what sort of exploitation and effects on ideas of work and play emerge as a result of this new prosumer capitalism (Ritzer, 2015), a point I will return to in a more thorough discussion of exploitation within prosumption later in the chapter.

At this particular moment in time, perhaps prosumption is all the more vividly felt because the technologies integrated into everyday life demand that we perform prosumptive tasks. Therefore, while it can be said that even hunter-gatherers prosumed, there is a different kind of prosumption that has emerged on a large scale of practice that is visible today thanks to mobile technologies and other related changes in the fabric of the organization of the economy.

For one, the rise of immaterial labor does away with production in a traditional sense as confined to specific working hours and workplace (eg. factories and offices with fixed working hours) (Hardt and Negri 2000). Immaterial production that takes place in

the realm of ideas (marketing, consumer loyalty, advertising, etc.) have become just as important as the material products they are connected to and since "immaterial production takes place in the realm of ideas, and these ideas are part of what is called the general intellect" (Ritzer et.al 2012, 382), it becomes easier to recruit people who start out as consumers into the production process since they are already familiar with these ideas as they are subject to them.

Recruitment is perhaps a misleading word as, while their labor is used by organizations and companies, equally important to users/consumers are the incentives and gains from their perspectives. Most prominent are the emotional and social dimensions to prosumption that consumers enjoy. For example (modding, the act of modifying and altering aspects of games by players) began organically out of player interest and self-developed expertise involving gaming, which has now evolved into a profitable and innovative aspect of gaming. While I will return to the example of modding later, for now, what should be stated is that such voluntary production by consumers often can stem from their own leisure interests within sites of culture in which they already have an emotional investment. Moreover, because it comes out of their own volition, shared meaning is co-produced in a way which it rarely is when instilled from a top down (eg. work employment scenario) approach. These meanings and enjoyment can only come into existence through prosumers efforts in creating and contributing towards it, making it authentically theirs. Thus, the voices and contributive efforts of consumers has a legitimizing effect on products, brands, and activities in a way that businesses on their own are not capable of producing through paid labor. Done for free, this could be viewed as a kind of exploitation. Yet the crux lies in the fact that most people would not see themselves as laboring or working, nor would they necessarily stop had the idea of them as providing free labor be presented to them, but instead see themselves as enjoying

creative processes, self-expression, and even a sense of contribution from their participation.

Other factors that have led to the prominence of prosumption are the growth of the service and self-service industries. Prosumers are made to work in that they have to complete the steps, sourcing, and transactions all on their own when they make purchases. Advances in technology such as the growth of cashless payments and internet shopping have done away with much of the previously needed worker to perform these steps. But on top of this, with the concurrent growth of the experience economy in which, more than goods, it is the immaterial experience that people seek out, they are also responsible for producing their own consumer experiences. Blogging, reviews, and social media posts all contribute to images and the atmosphere that one comes to expect (and in doing so, reproduce upon experiencing and producing content of it oneself). Prosumption is perhaps most easily understood and fascilitated on social media platforms where all content is user-generated. It is their very participation as prosumers that allows such sites to even exist and operate. When the content generation is experienced through ones free-will and as choice, it is not coercive, even when monetary profit is being generated out of that content and does not flow back to the producers of said content, precisely because they continue to see themselves as fans, consumers, or as simply having fun pursuing their interests and not as laboring prosumers.

2.5.2 Prosumption as Exploitation

As already alluded to, one of problems that prosumption brings to the fore is that of the free labor performed by prosumers. Not only is this unpaid, but when ideas supplied by consumers are incorporated into products and their labor is not compensated, they face double exploitation when they may even have to now buy the product they helped design. Another way of seeing their labor as potentially exploited is that there is no overall

lowering of prices that consumers get to enjoy from doing the work previously done by a paid employee (Ritzer 2015). In fact, most businesses save on labor costs and make even more profit.

And, as previously stated, most prosumers do not see themselves as exploited but enjoy their experiences and, having become accustomed to performing it themselves, may even feel more efficient at it than the workers who once performed it. Prosumption is often not alienating, as prosumers gain all kinds of emotional rewards from the mundane feeling of efficiency to much deeper emotional gratification when their ideas and creativity are explicitly adopted for use. Prosumers may also be more satisfied with the services that are now available for them to prosume and are fine with the trade-off of no economic gains. In many ways, prosumers are extremely good and efficient workers for they do not even need to be coerced or supervised the way workers and trainees often do. It is for this reason too that it is difficult to think of prosumers as blatantly exploited, although it is easy to think of workers as such.

On the surface, prosumption is appealing in that it presents opportunities for transparency, individualization of preferences and the democratization of participation. The ubiquity of the internet further enables the spread of prosumption through user-generated content, open sourcing, and 1crowd funding, which often appear to be available 'for free' in that the labor performed to produce these services is free and the fruits of such labor are easily available for all to consume. Prosumption also fosters the belief that there is more transparency and freedom for users and consumers on the rise that have the potential to undo previously monopolized formats. For example, sites like Wikipedia where contribution and monitoring of content is a public and open access endeavor has displaced the role once held by encyclopedias. Knowledge in this arena is shared and maintained by the public, for the public.

Physical and immaterial labor are not the only ways in which capitalists generate profit, as "…capitalist firms are using information provided to them by currently uncommodified labor (prosumers) on a wide range of products and services in order to create an infinitely more commodified world of "big data" in the future" (Ritzer 2018,11). Overall, there are many ways in which prosumption complicates and exacerbates notions of exploitation and alienation in ways that render the position and agency of prosumers as neither clearly empowered or precarious.

2.5.3 Prosumption in Application

In some ways, leisure may not seem obviously applicable to the understanding of prosumption because of a clear exchange between consumers and producers in most forms of leisure. In terms of sports for example, "the 'product' (event) is 'consumed' by the end-user (fan). Importantly, however, both the organization and the end-user have worked to create value in the live event. Thus, the creation of value does not adequately distinguish the roles of 'producer' and 'consumer'" (Andrews and Ritzer 2018, 72).

Another clear example of the links between leisure/play with prosumption is how much the play of people has migrated and expanded to include web applications specifically for their leisure interests that are basically functioning in the form of "modern-day digital prosumption systems, meaning the user-generated content becomes the commodity which is consumed and demanded" (Andrews and Ritzer 2018, 72). These engender new forms of sociality and value of a particular nature as "value only exists relationally, between prosumers. It is the networked nature of prosumption that enables value to be generated and exchanged, only existing in an ongoing social network" (Andrews and Ritzer 2018, 72). On the subject of fan prosumption, Ritzer has noted that there is an increasingly established awareness of the prosumption that fans engage in, despite their traditionally being thought of as the clear 'consumers' of their fandom:

"…audience members, especially "fans" (Jenkins 2006), engage in immaterial work before, during, and after such events…At one time, those who studied the media tended to see audiences as passive consumers of the content being produced and promulgated by the media. However, that view has long been rejected and replaced by a view of the audience as, in the terms of this analysis, actively producing (defining, interpreting, etc.) content as they consume it (Ritzer 2015, 417).

Prosumption is also relevant to this study as, just like most other currently existing fandoms, interactions between participants take place not simply in physical spaces but are intertextual. They involve and result in the consumption and production of a variety of online and offline mediums that result in the co-production of the subculture in a way that does not separate the two but see these as intermeshed in reality.

I will now review some of the applications of prosumption to a variety of leisure, subcultures, and cultures of consumable identity that are relevant to this study. Prosumption has been applied to a wide variety of fields. In sports, (Millington 2016; Woermann 2012; Andrews and Ritzer 2018; Santomier and Hogan 2013) fans are shown to be very much involved in the co-production of value and the very experiences surrounding games and tournaments[3]. Online they also actively produce social media content and the on-going meanings of participation that circulate. What they do in such instances is provide an alternative to 'official' and nationalized media channels and in many ways circumvent the standardization or professionalization of opinions and rationalized ways of participating. The voices of these prosumers are so much a part the

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[3] Esports is also another site in which the discussion of prosumption is highly relevant, but I will discuss esports in a later section on playbor in this chapter, as this concept has been used extensively in research on esports.

experience of sports that the mass media has come to incorporate them into their own content and reportage of events. Thus, prosumers are all the more encouraged to prosume, for they can see the effects of their prosumption on official channels and experience a sense of importance and value in their own prosumptive efforts. This is evident from the proliferation of official social media accounts attempting to engage and appeal to a younger online demographic (Andrews and Ritzer 2018; Bowman and Cranmer 2014).

Prosumption is not just about involvement in an activity, but also involves processes of identity formation, construction, and reproduction. In her study of the website transabled.org, Jenny Davis has shown how the obscure and stigmatized nature of the experience means an online space has importance as a place to gather and share feelings and experiences, while defining what it means to be transabled (people who believe they are born in incorrectly abled bodies) in the process. "Prosumption of this content therefore holds identity meanings for those who prosume it. These identity meanings are constructed and reinforced socially as members of the community respond to one another through public comments and private e-mail exchanges (Davis 2012, 601)."

Through consuming narratives, people who are new to the site first discover what it is and what it means, then relate and connect to it in a process of self-discovery. If someone can relate to what is being read even though they lack the knowledge and vocabulary to identify as transabled, the content available on the site provides them a baseline to begin with, as well as identity narratives. It forms a framework from which one can begin to express oneself and live as transabled.

A feedback loop between newcomers and established members of the community takes place when newcomers join in on posts and converse with others in the community. Often times, because they find themselves relating so much to the content, this reaffirms and legitimizes the existence and very identity of what it means to be a

transabled person. Here, prosumption is not just of content in one's leisure time or for its immediate practical usage, but of identity signified by the content. More evidence that proves just how much this became a consumable identity comes in the form of the making of Carlos Brooks's Flim *Quid Pro Quo* which features transabled characters. The filmmaker said he became interested in the topic upon finding out about transableism online via the site. The very dialogue in the film comes directly from the voices and narratives of site users (Davis 2012, 613). The film then becomes a new consumable product that further circulates conversations around transableism as per the identity constructed by the online community.

Similarly, when people prosume Visual Kei, they are not simply engaged in the process of making/listening/watching music and performances; they are also at the same time specifically participating and re-creating band men and fan identities. These are all learnt through observation, reading, communicating, and participating in activities that range from in person events (eg. live concerts) or in online spaces (eg. social media, internet boards, etc.) with those already involved with and experienced in the subculture. An entire lingo and vocabulary, customs, and norms unique to Visual Kei, even the manner of interactions that range from staged to banal presentations of self are all cultivated habits that become normalized once immersed. These are not just actions, but as publicly displayed consumable information, they become laden with meaning of what it means to be involved with Visual Kei. As Davis explains in her chapter on prosuming transable identities, prosumption is often "conceptualized in a way that understands as separate the prosumer of the content and the content that is prosumed" (Davis 2012, 596) which she believes to be untrue as content itself can signify far more and be meaningful in ways that are deeply wrapped up in the identity of the prosumer.

Niklos Woermann has shown how web participation and practices shapes offline participation and bodily practice of free-skiers. In a critique of how research on online culture tends to treat online practices as reflecting participation offline, he argues "that rather than being an isomorphic form of creative expression, the freeskiers' use of social media is integral to the practice itself" (Woermann 2012, 621). While the actual time spent on the 'action' elements of skiing and performing the pivotal tricks is brief, skiers spend hours and hours watching others ski in order to produce videos of themselves to upload for others to consume in a similar manner. This on-going cycle of production and consumption of videos does not just involve using the internet as a medium of dissemination but the very production of social media itself that has come to shape the very practice of free-skiing and thus "media need to be understood not only as a transmission technology but simultaneously as a societal institution, a modus of coordination, and a site of experiences" (Woermann 2012, 624).

This idea that it is not just the prosumers consuming content but of the mode of the content itself affecting the way a subculture comes to be prosumed will be applied in this study, especially with regards to how the dissemination of information online has come to change both fan prosumption (reduction of cosplay and in person gathering), as well as how it effects the concept of work time for band men who now work around the clock as their private lives and private time become open to consumption. Opinions and vocabulary that circulate in a particular way online informs in-person behavior and the future of consumption itself. Similarly, social media is not simply a medium used for the objective of sharing information, but is a way to produce in of itself, a means by which intimacy, authenticity, and personality can be produced, making it a new tool at the disposal of the artist in crafting his persona and like all tools, some master and use it better than others.

There is yet another way in which the practice of freeskiing and Visual Kei prosumption intersect, in that both are inherently aesthetic practices where "seeing plays a ubiquitous role throughout the subculture, from beginners to advanced amateurs and professional" (Woermann 2012, 625). A large part of how to perform on stage and what sort of standards of excellence exist are learned through the act of seeing, watching, copying and being seen. While this is not new in of itself, new technologies have changed the standards and scope of what can be incorporated. While artists in the 1980's and 1990's mostly had to rely on actual live performances or video footage, now anyone can access footage of all kinds of levels of professionality to amateur works with the mere tap of an app. Monitoring, reflection and understanding what one's peers are doing to 'keep up' also effects work practices as now it is not simply live music and live performance that one needs to put practice hours to, but also mastering other forms of visual presentation and media that may not directly have anything to do with what happens during a live performance but are part and parcel of crafting an attractive commoditized self. This ultimately does contribute to audience, peer, and industry perception, as with a raised commodity potential in the new arena of social media, 'on the stage is on the screen' just as how the realities of screen and slope merge for Woermann's freeskiers.

Prosumption has not been used much to study the arts, especially with regards to the relationship between artists and viewers/consumers. Nakajima goes on to show how historically, art has always involved prosumptive processes (the consumption of artists of materials and of ideas, techniques, and inspiration from other artists and art as field) and that more recently as a result of proliferation of digital internet technologies, prosumption itself is incorporated into art practices and criticism. Nakajima also shows how movements within the art world such as readymade, pop art, simulationism, and appropriation all generate meaning and relevance socially through prosumption, that is to

say that they are evaluated and given significance not simply by the hands of the artist but equally by the audience who perceives them.

A key aspect of prosumption in such movements is also the materials that constitute the art. For example, readymade is derived from the idea that the object of artwork itself is already made and consumed to become art. Meanwhile, pop art draws from images and figures of mass culture and consumerism, blurring the lines of mass consumerism and art production, consumer and producer. Appropriation meanwhile explicitly uses already existing works not in a subtle hue of 'influence' but from purposeful taking, "Whereas the notions and techniques of citation, parody, and collage are means of expressing artists' authorial voices, sampling, cutting up, and remixing aim to erase the privileged author, or create the prosumer, who consumes bits and pieces of existing elements (of art and non-art) to produce artworks" (Nakajima, 2011, 557).

Nakajima also discusses the more recent example of relational art, a form that is based on its relationship to audience and surrounding context. What is being produced is relations between all the elements that surround the art and a sociability through the connections, comments and perceptions between the art, artist and viewers. Put otherwise, such artworks are collective processes and productive of prosumption itself. Art does not and cannot exist independently of these relations and processes. Furthermore, as social media and digital technologies are incorporated into relational art, the spaces for exchange and the creation of communicative channels further opens up inviting more participants into the creative process.

By showing how art is affected by its audience, Nakajima reveals how there are more connections than have thus been presented so far between the receivers of art (the consumers) with the (until recently) elevated artist who is put on a pedestal of creative

genius and as distinctly separated from the passive audience in their ability as the sole creator of artworks. Art, as prosumed, is therefore a kind of social activity.

Similarly, in Visual Kei, it is not just up to the musicians and industry to decide what is good, let alone how Visual Kei should be done, but consumers with their own understandings of authenticity and expectations can also make or break bands. Just as Nakajima has shown in the case of artworks, the performing arts too are a social activity that is prosumed by a number of actors who all contribute to the end result. Nakajima's ideas on how the very techniques and materials applied in art muddle the distinction between consumer and producer as well as originals and copies will also be used to explain how Visual Kei is formed over time as a prosumptive template that people can draw from, hence providing an explanation for both the diversity as well as the continuity of its contents, practices, and themes.

2.5.4 Critiques and the Unevenness of Prosumption

While there is much discussion of the visibility of prosumption in contemporary capitalist society and there are those that suggest this may be indicative of larger shifts in capitalist relations, there are also scholars who are wary of the use of the term prosumption. Including other dimensions that draw attention to the problems of the application of prosumption, this is what I refer to when I use the term 'uneven prosumption' throughout this dissertation. It is the explication that prosumption is rarely ever balanced or fair and that it is not a singular process, but one that can refer to a number of processes with minute relations and a number of different repercussions.

Meanwhile, when consumers perform what was once the work of producers, Humphreys and Grayson suggest that this should not be viewed as evidence of a deeper change or revolutionary reconfiguration of economic relations and the capitalist system (Humphreys and Grayson 2008). They suggest that when consumers produce exchange

value (its equivalent worth in the marketplace with another commodity) it could represent a potentially deeper change. However, when consumers only produce, enjoy, and re-create use-value, "those activities are what we would define as merely consumption, regardless of what steps in the value chain he or she may be taking on" (Humphreys and Grayson 2008, 971).

By adopting Cardador and Pratt's (2006) framework for an understanding of affiliation dimensions between producer and consumer[4], three factors are deemed important in understanding the experience of the consumer, which are the proximity, financial rewards, and time spent in relation to the producer. Under the consideration of these factors, typically in terms of the employee to organization affiliation and the customer to producer affiliation, the employee would feel a proximal affiliation and the customer one of distance. However, upon closer consideration this doesn't hold true in many ways. As Humphreys and Grayson point out, if the focus is on the *feeling* of proximity the person has towards the organization/producer, a consumer may feel very 'affiliated' even if they are not an employee. This affiliation towards product is likely to even be more prominent when the consumer is constantly using or feeling the presence of the product in their lives and all the more so when they are aware of their own production of use value or when it figures into a process in which they get to express their creativity.

Nevertheless, Humphreys and Grayson maintain that while consumers who produce may even have an effect on use value, their role still remains as consumer so long as they do not get a piece of the exchange value pie. To them, while prosumer is a social role, it is not necessarily an economic one "because the process of creating value for

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[4] This framework is originally applied to the relationship between employee and organization but has been adopted to fit the prosumer relationship.

market exchange is fundamentally different from the process of creating personalized value for consumption" (Humphreys and Grayson 2008, 973). Use value tends to be individualized and its enjoyment and value is intrinsic. Value here may range from simply enjoying the process itself, to less immediately felt but meaningful phenomenon such as the experience of dis-alienation from the product, the experience of community, and a sense of contribution. At the same time, as previously mentioned, the recruiting of consumers into the prosumption process can also be exploitive via their free labor or doubly exploitive if they are then also made to buy the products of their labor. This, therefore, is the conundrum of prosumption: prosumers are not alienated in the same way a worker may be and potentially face a kind of double exploitation, one that they may not be critical of as they become more complicit in the capitalist system that enables this.

From such critiques, what becomes apparent is that two types of prosumption or co-production need to be distinguished from one another. The first kind is that of collective co-production, which often only produces use value. The second kind is company-consumer co-production, which can involve exchange value if the consumer is renumerated in some way. While there is some overlap, this is different from Ritzer's previously discussed p-a-p and p-a-c distinction in that the trajectory and nature of value becomes a factor in the consideration of how to conceive of the experience of prosumers, but more importantly, this has implications for the larger discussion on whether the prosumer economy actually entails a difference in economic relations or a new kind of capitalism. Applied to this study, band members as prosumers are indeed enagaged in the attempt to create both use and exchange value as they seek to make music their livelihood. Yet, prosumer fans, although engaged in producing use value are not producing exchange value (and by and large do not actively seek to do so unless they wish to become musicians or involved in music industry work).

The location of agency and false empowerment is an issue taken up in other critiques of prosumption. Van Dijck suggests that we need to exercise caution when attributing power to users who he reveals have a very difficult-to-pinpoint sense of user agency, "as a complex concept involving not only his cultural role as a facilitator of civic engagement and participation, but also his economic meaning as a producer, consumer and data provider, as well as the user's volatile position in the labor market" (van Dijck 2009, 55). This is one of the reasons it is important to distinguish the unevenness of prosumption when employing the term. The majority of those deeply involved in a subculture may be prosumers, but they do not prosume in the same way towards the same ends. Fans do not prosume for monetary profit as band members do. Women prosume differently from men. Yet, it is this very volatile position of the prosumer and the multiple locations of where their agency rests upon that captures the struggle that those engaged in playwork have to contend with. Because it is not clear where the fruits of their labor will end up despite the massive efforts and investments made, there is a lack of clarity over where the line between play and work can be perceived with regards to their choices. Nevertheless, as van Dijck warns, to over attribute power to the potential of the prosumer runs the risk of failing to understand the multiple roles and sources of value that are at stake.

Van Dijck does however note that there is one way in which prosumers do have more power in terms of access. While he dismisses the idea that people are not active participants, stating that there were never 'passive recipients' to begin with, as studies have shown, for example, that viewers of television were always able to be creative with text, but what is different in the digital era is that users have better access to networked media, enabling them to "'talk back' in the same multi-modal language that frames

cultural products formerly made exclusively" (van Dijck 2009, 43) with the availability of DIY channels and platforms on the internet.

While the prosumer concept is often accompanied by the idea that there is a paradigm shift in the way business is conducted and on an even larger scale a shift in the economic relations, critics like van Dijck are wary of such ideas like those of (Tapscott and Williams, 2006) that suggest equal participation and a democratization of economic relations. Van Dijck warns that "Hybrid concepts appear to disregard users as objects of targeted advertising. But in casting new user agency, it is indispensable to look at the role of advertisers as well as new media platforms in the renegotiation of power relationships" (van Dijck 2009, 46). He goes on to suggest that rather than everyone becoming prosumers, some will remain simply as consumers who, in the recruitment of these consumers to prosumer type networks and applications, will more or less serve as a segment to be targeted for advertising. They are, as van Dijck says, both "*content providers* and *data providers*" (van Dijck, 2009, 47) allowing the usage of their personal details and online user habits as tradable information in ways that they have little power over.

"Since the 1980s, the term 'prosumer' has been deployed by various academics to denote how users' agency hovers between the bipolar categories of producer versus consumer, and of professional versus consumer" (van Dijck 2009, 41-42). While this is from van Dijck's critique of the potential false empowerment the term may accord to users deemed prosumers, the metaphor of hovering here can also be applied to the playworker who struggles, whether in his actual attempts at turning his play into profession or as to how others may view his position. So long as it is difficult to sustain a regular income, he too hovers between music remaining just a possibility of play and the potential that it could turn into work. Similarly, as it emerges out of fandom and

musicians remain engaged in the act of consuming the scene, their roles as prosumers too position them in between consumer versus producer as well as consumer versus professional.

Switching from a consumer exploitation-centric critique of prosumption to one that focuses more on the musicians and producers of music, Robert Cluley's critique focuses on the framing of producers of music who represent their process and activities via images of consumption (Cluley 2013). Cluley gives us cause to re-think if producers can even be considered prosumers for, as he argues, by framing and aligning their work as consumptive practices, this gives those in the music industry a way to make sense of their own activities as un-alienated in the way production as labor tends to make the side of production seem. By explaining their motivations as consumption, musicians and producers can come off as seeming more authentically connected to their own music. Therefore, "Consumption is, in this sense, used as a demythologizing market discourse that allows producers to imagine themselves to be outside of the logics of commerce" (Cluley 2013).

This is partly because production carries an air of the 'made up' or inauthentic which are thought to be corrupting to the purity of play/enjoyment and also antithetical to the ideal that is the artist. This is also evident in the use of the word itself when people put down pop or idol music which are often critiqued as blatantly 'put together' or 'produced' by the music industry, as "There is a fundamental distinction between artistic work conceived as an expression of one's creative capacity through self-determined labor and managed 'creativity' reduced to alienated work within orthodox capitalist relations of production" (Shorthose and Strange 2004, 47).

Cluley also suggests that rather than actual changes in the organization of capitalist society brought about by prosumption, it could be that we simply lack the

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resources for thinking about production. Musicians tend to avoid presenting themselves as wholly embracing market discourse and as 'artists' they may begrudgingly have to accommodate it, so they do not position themselves as overtly engaged in commercial activity but emphasize themselves as more so involved in artistic endeavors. This has already been discussed by Becker (1982) who has already shown this distinction exists as an ideal, as few artistic products are ever really divorced from commercial activity, but by framing it within consumption musicians can escape seeming overtly capitalistic.

        According to Cluley, musicians do this in a number of ways. At the most basic level, they position themselves as consumers when referencing the beginnings of their journey as musicians. To really understand music authentically is to consume it like all other 'real' fans do. What this displays in effect is a 'genuine' enjoyment of the music. Musicians aside, this also applies to organizers and other kinds of production-involved individuals who frame their own activities as stemming from wanting to see a particular kind of music and being able to share and improve upon that experience with others. In short, their motivation for any sort of music-related endeavor is not framed in terms of trying to make profit or even a living, but is framed in terms of the non-commercial logic of play— the pure enjoyment of music for itself. This extends to the music making process as well, when musicians frame burnout or a lack of inspiration as stemming from being forced to make music they don't want to. Along a similar line of rationale, finding one's inspiration again is thought to often be a result of consuming and receiving stimulation from music and being authentically impressed, moved, and inspired by other musicians. Seen otherwise, the will to continue making music comes from organic consumption of new stimuli and is not framed in terms of being swayed or influenced by market trends. Cluley adds one more reason that the consumption of producers of music cannot be thought of as the same as that which a fan as consumer partakes in and that is because the

producer cannot divorce from themselves the specialist knowledge they have acquired of production. They are no longer "simply" consumers or fans and therefore it is hard for them to enjoy songs in the same 'pure' way that they perhaps once did when they were simply consumers.

Echoing Negus (2002), Cluley agrees that what appears to be prosumption might not be indicative of wider trends in social organization or the economy. While looking for the links between consumption and production might have its merits, it is also the gaps between them that require our attention, as these too can be replicated and widened. Along these lines, while I use the prosumption analytic to explain many of the linkages between production and consumption, I will also refer to the unevenness of prosumption and gendered prosumption in an effort to highlight these gaps which, while still prosumptive in nature, do not yield the same outcomes.

Cluley's main conclusion is that musicians describe their processes in terms of consumption because they lack another means to describe their activity in an un-alienated, un-instrumental approach. It is a discursive resource they have come to rely on as they "…turn to consumption to make sense of their activities not because they are necessarily engaged in consumption but because they are using consumption as a proxy for unalienated production by artistic logics" (Cluley 2013).

While Cluley has raised some very important points, I also suspect that both the presentation of production as consumption as a means to express authenticity and actually consuming music as part of the organic experience of production can hold true at the same time. Discursive strategy aside, many musicians from my own sample group really did begin as fans and while their consumption may change as their careers evolve, many of them continued to listen to music in a way that they would describe as leisurely or simply for enjoyment. Therefore, while it is important to understand the gaps between consuming

as a fan and consuming as a producer of music, producers of music should not be rendered no longer able to authentically or organically enjoy and prosume music, even though the way they enjoy it has evolved.

While I have already raised some points about the unevenness of prosumption as relatod to these critiques, here are a few more to consider before we move on to some other concepts related to prosumption.

As implicitly suggested, fans do not receive any remuneration for their labor, nor would the majority of them even see their immaterial labor in such market terms. There are even instances of their voices and images being used as free labor when they are recruited to participate in filming video footage and audio recordings and they are not paid. They are simply assumed to be happy to participate which, as it is voluntary, they are for the most part, and this labor is simply treated as a part of their activities that they do in the name of enjoyment of fandom and as a sign of support for the artists they love. Using previously discussed terms, they are happy to produce use value for free and do not see their labor in terms of exchange value. Therefore, while they are producing and consuming, they remain largely consumers or along the p-a-c side of the continuum.

Unevenness also falls along gendered lines as, generally speaking, there is a female fan/male musician divide. There are many male fans, and when male fans pursue bands as a career they make a clear transition to the role of band man. There are some female Visual Kei artists, however there are only a handful and for the most part, they do not operate in the same system and none have attained comparable success to most of the male membered bands. Women can enter the industry mostly as behind the scenes workers and they also may form or join bands, but they almost never reach the same levels of success, whether financially, or in terms of the significance of meaning production of Visual Kei.

In this sense, p-a-c and p-a-p in Visual Kei is overall gendered. Although there is nothing wrong with it, I avoid using this terminology because it is important as the critiques have shown to not just emphasize difference of process, but that the unevenness of prosumption also pertains to inequalities and even the unawareness of their position and roles as prosumers. While not within Cluley's critique, thinking along the same lines of paying attention to the gaps, framing fans and consumers as producers too can be a tool used to allow fans to believe themselves more empowered and active beyond the act of simply consuming, based on the rhetoric that it is production that is more 'active,' 'artistic,' and 'creative' and therefore between the two processes, the more meaningful one.

Another form of unevenness of prosumption pertains to class. Chapters 6 and 7 will cover some of these issues but to state briefly, class background or economic advantages can have an influence on the ability to access the means of prosumption. This has not been a hard and fast rule, as even those from working or lower class backgrounds have found ways to access these means, but there are other ways in which economic ability has played a role in providing other forms of sustenance in the pursuit of a musical career.

Through highlighting the characteristics, applications, and short-comings of prosumption, I have attempted in this section to show how prosumption can provide a lens for understanding the nature of how Visual Kei is reproduced and consumed. While this may be true of any sort of creative artform, there may be something of alternative-based subcultures that necessitate prosumption more so than popular or mainstream culture in that production requires an intimate understanding of the very subculture itself, even if this evolves. Furthermore, as access is not easily gained in the same way mainstream music features into daily life, the prosumptive efforts may become more

concentrated or truncated within a field of culture that is self-referential. In this way, musicians may be more conscious of their own prosumption as they are aware of that which is mainstream and how this differs from their own of career of choice in this genre. However, prosumption alone cannot capture the particular nature of what it means to attempt to carve out a career as a Visual Kei artist. It is for this reason that I have chosen to develop the playwork analytic, as it accounts for yet another vital aspect of the prosumptive experience of their work efforts: the moral dimension of play. Just as much as it is work in a genre of music, it is also play; they create the play of others, it is a career choice that emerges out of play, it is not seen as 'real' music due to its contents but just play,1and it remains 'play' so long as a professional career cannot be achieved.

Conversely (while a secondary focus of this thesis), fans too can be analyzed not just as prosumers but through the concept of playwork, the amount of work and laboring they do over their play that because has no economic return and is seen to be excessive, becomes a kind of leisure that is trivialized as hedonic play. By adopting the concept of prosumption as inherent to playwork, we can attempt to develop an analytical tool for understanding playwork as a particular mode of play that may be applicable to the other discussions of leisure-based co-production/prosumption beyond this study.

2.6 Similar Concepts: Work and Labor, Play and Leisure

Intersections of labor and play and the weakening of the boundaries between them are increasingly studied in games and media studies where concepts like ludification, gamification, and playbor have emerged and have been developed using examples of digital cultures. These tend to deal with work-play hybrids and the problems of labor that arise within these emergent forms of work. In leisure studies, ludology, and sociology, similar hybrids of the blending of work and play have also been examined leading to the development of concepts and frameworks such as serious leisure, Pro-Am, weisure, etc.

There is much overlap between all of these approaches and in this section, I will highlight some of the main issues within the approaches that are applicable to this study, as well as consider how they differ from playwork.

2.6.1 Work and Labor

The words 'work' and 'labor' often tend to be applied interchangeably, with labor carrying a slightly more critical connotation. Translations of Marx's work on the political economy tend to utilize labor more, but as Fuchs and Sevignani have highlighted, there is no difference between the two in Marx's writings, mostly because the original German word *arbeit* indicates both (Fuchs and Sevignani, 2013). Marx tended to view labor as akin to material production:

> "In the labor-process, therefore, man's activity, *via* the instruments of labor, effects an alteration in the object of labor which was intended from the outset. The process is extinguished in the product. The product of the process is a use-value, a piece of natural material adapted to human needs by the means of a change in its form (Marx 1992, 287)…Labor uses up its material factors, its subject and its instruments, consumes them, and is therefore a process of consumption (Marx 1992, 290)."

As the final part indicates, Marx did note that consumption is clearly part of the process of production. Another important aspect of his definition is that labor serves a purpose as it is the conscious intent of the laborer to produce two kinds of value, that of use (utilitarian) and that of exchange value (economic price equivalent). The laborer, however, does not own that which he produces, but sells his labor power (capacity to labor) to capitalists who then own their labor and the products they make. Capitalists accumulate more capital in form of profit via exploiting the surplus value off laborers who only collect a wage. This is the basic source of the inequality and alienation found

under capitalist structures as laborers were not able to develop a deeper sense of ownership. The solution that Marx envisioned was not to do away with labor, but change the system under which it is operated so as to reduce it to a necessary minimum such that the individual now has time for other enriching pursuits that could include leisure and play.

While Marx's understanding of labor under the capitalist regime is still applicable to many contemporary situations, his is one that privileges the material production that dominated the industrialization of his time. Given that production has evolved into other dimensions of life and away from purely industrial labor, Marx's theory of labor has also evolved to accommodate for new forms of labor that have become more prominent in the post-industrial era. These have to do with the control and production of non-material commodities such those concerned with emotions, feelings, services, ideas, information, etc. Explicating these differences are theories such as immaterial labor (Lazaratto 1996), affective labor (Hardt and Negri 2000, 2005), digital labor (Dyer-Witheford 2009; Fuchs 2014) and emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983) to name a few. Lazzaratto defines immaterial labor as:

> "The concept of immaterial labor refers to two different aspects of labor. On the one hand, as regards the "informational content" of the commodity, it refers directly to the changes taking place in workers' labor processes in big companies in the industrial and tertiary sectors, where the skills involved in direct labor are increasingly skills involving cybernetics and computer control (and horizontal and vertical communication). On the other hand, as regards the activity that produces the "cultural content" of the commodity, immaterial labor involves a series of activities that are not normally recognized as "work" — in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic

standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion" (Lazzarato 1996, 133).

This kind of labor entails an opening of the spaces and effects of work on the people performing it. Furthermore, Lazzarato has also noted that immaterial labor is not simply an issue involving highly skilled workers, but one that involves many kinds of work and is pervasive in post-industrial societies. Nevertheless, it is highly applicable to cultural industries. Hardt and Negri (2000, 2005) further developed this concept and geared their definition more towards the focus of the immateriality of the product, for example, the production of knowledge, services, culture, and communication. What they also highlight is the affective dimension of this kind of production. Because affective labor capacities and immaterial products/labor are equally of importance to the production of Visual Kei, I will often refer to these ideas throughout this study. I argue that, just as the material objects form the products of musicians' labor, and while much of the experience of concerts is tactile, much of the musician's labor involves the production of an affect of otherworldliness which lies in the realm of the immaterial. Furthermore, as more of their work involves aspects of service in the form of accompanying promotional activities of releases, labor and work in this study will delve just as much into the realm of the immaterial as it does the material.

2.6.2 Playbor

Playbor (a portmanteau of play and labor) is a term coined by Kucklich (Kucklich 2005) who views playbor as the part of the "Taylorization of leisure" in which the nature of the relationship between play and labor is changing. Playbor is often used to describe a kind of hybrid between play and labor that is often applied to the gaming industry, though not exclusive to it. Kucklich applies the concept in his study of modding (the modification of games by consumers/users). To Kucklich, the gaming industry

benefits vastly from the free labor provided by modders because their work, as it stands, is first and foremost born out of their free-will to play games. There is a high demand for such user generated mods and some of best-selling games in recent years have even resulted out of non-company directed modifications. The non-coercive stance of allowing modders to do what they want is viewed by Kucklich as a kind of self-submission or false consciousness on the part of the modder who "upholds the rules simply for the sake of pleasure she derives from submitting to them" (Kucklich 2005) and is therefore, through this voluntary participation, duped and exploited. One can critique Kucklich's development of the concept in terms of the equation of play with leisure. By not further unpacking play as but one type of leisure and conflating the two, some of the characteristics of play in playbor then become lost when the concept itself could lend important insights into understanding how play is co-opted by work in the age of the internet where so much of the play that takes place on it is open to value creation even if the participant is not partaking for those reasons (e.g. data mining, advertising exposure).

In their comprehensive overview of the labor involved in esports, Johnson and Woodcock found that many players were aware of their economic precarity, an awareness that grew more acute the longer they stayed in the field. Yet many still chose to become involved, which leads to the question of "why?" According to Johnson and Woodcock, the clear answer for esports players lies in the enjoyment and in the desire to "maximize playtime and minimize worktime…In a context of widespread labor alienation, playful labor appears to be a rare opportunity for self-actualization" (Johnson and Woodcock 2021, 459). Similarly, as we saw in the introduction chapter, aspiring musicians like Ren too are willing to gamble on the slim chance that they might make it, for as he expressed himself, this appeared to be a career in which he felt he could actualize his talents and interests and live out his potential within an arena that he enjoyed as play. An important

aspect of the kind of labor involved with games that Johnson and Woodcock point out is that labor here is often not ending at the point of product completion, but is ongoing production as in the case of esports game developers (Johnson and Woodstock 2021).

The concept and application of playbor is extended by Joyce Goggin who sees this as part of a general turn in which play and work co-exist in a growing number of sites (Goggin 2011). For one, she discusses this in terms of the playbor of virtual farmers/grinders (people who are employed to mine/grind for items in games that are later sold) who reported that they found themselves often in a very in-between state of work and play. While "…play has long been associated with notions such as buoyancy, gratuity and voluntarism, and opposed to a set of definitive characteristics that supposedly distinguished 'work' as being purpose-driven, profit motivated, and obligatory" (Goggin 2011, 357), the farmers in Dibbell's work (Dibbell, 2007) said that they did not really feel a difference between their work and play. Others noted that it was easy to do the work precisely because it was instinctual to play, but a kind of play that allowed them to earn money at the same time— all aspects that stray from Huizinga or neo-Kantian views of play that it must be divorced from work and the mundanity of everyday life.

Goggin has also noted other areas in which the categories of play and work seem to come together. This is visible in management tactics to introduce fun into the workplace (Fleming 2005) to motivate workers to see work as more enjoyable. In doing so, the desired effect is to channel workers' own volition to be proactive in work, self-regulating, and not in need of coercion. Goggin, in summarizing Kucklich's ideas, has noted that whether paid or not, fan-based playbor "is symptomatic of 'the shift from disciplinary societies to societies of control,' that led 'to a "deregulation" of work in which the primary source of coercion is no longer the institution that individual works for, but the individual herself" (Goggin 2011, 364).

In a similar vein, IBM has even outright acknowledged that gamers now make for good workers due to the skills they develop through their play activities as they are comfortable with 'leadership roles that are more ephemeral,' and have no fear of 'taking big risks that could yield big rewards' (IBM, 2007: 27). This points to the normality in which gamers accept and internalize these new working norms. As playborers, risk, insecurity, and a lack of clear employment schemes are presented as simply part of the job that they've chosen, on top of having received little in the way of training via the company as they've already trained themselves with their previous and on-going experiences of play. Goggin presents this as a clear example of the breakdown between work and play boundaries that companies use to their own benefit.

There have been studies that examine music as a kind of playbor. In their discussion of the current state of artistic works when they enter a playbor-like economy, Brondum and Kristensen show how the notion of value has changed over time (Brondum and Kristensen, 2019). Under a Marxian separation of the spheres of work and play, play is seen to have value in of itself and therefore, any kind of payment for play would change the nature of this play as the goals and the whereabouts of the value would evolve into that which resembles work (Caillois 2001), meaning play would lose its intrinsic value.

As Foucault has pointed out, art and writing prior to the industrial revolution were located not within the realms of the professional,   paid waged laborer, but instead:

> "situated in a bipolar field of sacred and profane, lawful and unlawful, religious and blasphemous. It was a gesture charged with risks long before it became a possession caught in a circuit of property values. But it was at the moment when a system of ownership and strict copyright rules were established […] that the transgressive properties always intrinsic to the act of writing became the forceful imperative of literature" (Caughie 1999).

Creative endeavors were judged by a system of moral value and their worth was not so much concerned with an economic organization surrounding commodity. However, this changed with the creation of the market for artistic products as commodities.

This is a change that alters the value of play which is all the more pronounced today as Brondum and Kristensen point out "play enters an exchange system where value is placed on the outcome rather than being intrinsic to play. We attribute the change to the post-industrial condition based on a neo-liberal idea of play" (Brondum and Kristensen 2019). One which has given birth to notions such as playbor— a situation in which players are simultaneously laborers and although they may not be paid, they are still willing to perform out of a self-directed choice to engage in it for the enjoyment of the activity itself and the feeling that they can contribute to the value, longevity, and innovation of products. Thus, the current market and digital is economy has evolved to a point where the terms of ownership and property itself are blurred alongside the making of work and content generation into voluntary play.

It goes without saying that when work and play are intertwined in this way, play and leisure time no longer are so easily separated from work time. Furthermore, when so connected to our free will and individual interest, work becomes hard to separate from the self in a way that differs from waged labor, where notions of private or non-work time and the non-worker self may be more clearly demarcated. This self-directedness of the nature of playbor is one in which one is made responsible for self-management, self-expression, and failure. The ability to perform productively is therefore completely left to the individual's ability to adapt and play smartly.

It is not difficult to draw similarities between making music and the previously discussed examples of game modding. Both can be seen as playbor for they stem from the initial act of doing something as play, which then turns into producing something out

of a form of play. Music is easily made, distributed, and shared online in ways that are not monopolized by any one industry giant (although major labels and distributors may still dominate and monopolize the media). "The line between amateur and professional is blurred since the tools to create are inexpensive, distribution is free, and many applications and music programs enable anyone to make music" (Brondum and Kristensen 2019).

Like modding though, it is often very difficult for non-professionals to make money out of their works, even if they are able to get them on to globally-available streaming services like Spotify or upload videos onto YouTube, payouts are very low despite the increasing use of such services. These streaming services themselves and record labels are making record-breaking amounts of revenue each year. For example, Spotify's revenue has gone from 4.62 billion euros in 2017 to 9.66 billion euros in 2021 (Iqbal 2022). Yet payouts to the artist still range between 0.003 to 0.005 USD per stream on Spotify and even less on YouTube. The implications of such payouts have many repercussions for both consumers of music and the people who make them, but in terms of value, it can be said that those that generate the value do not get the wealth and that wealth and profit is still within the hands of those who organize the way things are distributed (Brondum and Kristensen 2019).

Overall, in the playbor literature, there have been massive contributions to pointing out the problems of labor through this concept, in particular revealing how labor is potentially exploited when play and labor are melded. Perhaps because of the Marxian tradition from which this emerges, the terms work and labor, as well as play and leisure are used interchangeably. This posits several challenges for the concept of playbor which I feel does well to analyze particular kinds of emergent play and labor amalgamations, such as the gold farmers for whom the actual labor involves play. Work, however, can be

thought of as more diverse or, in the scheme of an overall career, beyond a particular kind of labor as well as involving a variety of types of labor. Moreover, work is not just a labor activity but can encompass even leisure activities and conceptions of the self at certain points over the life course, given the diversity of productive activities, as will be shown in the next section on play and leisure.

2.6.3 Play and Leisure

Common definitions of play begin with Huizinga who sees it as an intrinsically rewarding activity outside of rule-based everyday life. He states, "as play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is 'different' from 'ordinary life'" (Huizinga1955, 28).

To him play had particular characteristics that set it apart from other spheres of life. For one, it is not meant to be towards the goal of accumulation of economic or material wealth, therefore work becomes disqualified from entering the realm play. Most importantly, play was also something that needed to be done out of the freedom and desire of the individual to partake in it. Play is also at once intense and absorbing as it is not serious and external to the immediate needs of daily life. It is precisely because it is outside the realm of the everyday or ordinary (it is in the imagination) that it provides a respite from the drudgery of work/chores and it is here in which the fun/joy of it provides an escape for people. Other characteristics of play that he identified were that, while it is a free choice to play, playing itself consists of its own fixed rules within its own boundaries of time and space and that play had a social element to it that tended to only exist within the frame of the play.

While agreeing with him that play should be embarked upon out of the free will

of individuals and that it primarily concerns itself with the joy of the player, Caillois in critique of Huizinga's definition, points out that play can have material interests (Caillois 2001). Giving the example of casinos and gambling, Caillois is able to show how even though nothing new is produced out of gambling (it is unproductive and even wasteful), play can still be entwined with profit and materiality, especially when it is in the form of a game. What he acknowledges here is that a market for play exists. Another important element of play identified by Caillois is that there exists a range of play that spans from that which he terms *paidia* at one end, and *ludus* at the other, the former being free, impulsive, and filled with fantasy and the latter a more organized sort of play, bound by rules and discipline.

While both Huizinga's and Caillois' categorizations of play are very important in providing a basis for the understanding of the work-play divide, these are nevertheless particular constructs of play that emerged within a particular historical background. This is what Connor points out when he notes that the concept of play is never transcendental and is often in line with the state of the political economy or spirit of the times. This is why we see play treated as aesthetic reason, but with the intensification of industrialization, by the 20th century play becomes that which is 'not work' and all the more so is located within the realm of free time (non-paid time) with the structuring of work-life becoming increasingly rationalized and standardized (Connor 2005).

This is a tendency which has continued to be instrumentalized in the present era where few things retain the ability to resist commercial co-opting and even play becomes "a mirror of the growing regulatedness of what Weber would come to call the administered world rather than being an alternative to it" (Connor 2005, 7). Connor also points out that the emergence of the culture and leisure industries, concurrent with the universalization of labor, also helped sphere-off leisure as a separate realm 'away' from

work (Connor 2005).

The existence of the leisure industries is a by-product of the creation of the standardization of work-life and with this, we also witness changes in the characteristics of the understanding of play within the context of industrial modernity where it becomes regarded as something that possess a sense of the sacred and "all that was left of a fragile, vanishing world of spontaneous, unchecked self-delighting impulse" (Connor 2005, 7). However, in this need to protect the sacred idea of play came about a kind of regulation of play and penchant for making play recreative or reproductive in its own ways. Related to this, Connor mentions that a propensity that emerges out of the end of the nineteenth century was to envision play in terms of its functionality. For example, scholars like Karl Groos understood play as training for other forms of activities necessary for social life as a person grew (Groos 2020). Functionalist perspectives that saw play as an intrinsically rewarding activity continued throughout the nineteenth century to dominate views on the role of play.

While ideas of play are never stable, as "Play is constitutive of both of modernity and of the idea of man which arises as its correlate" (Connor 2005, 11), ideals and ideas surrounding play can be enduring. One of these is the element of freedom in play that comes in the form of the choice of the activity. Writing on the post-Kantian conceptions of play, Connor notes that they tend to contain notions of freedom and constraint that are paradoxically present: "When one plays, one is free, and the act of choosing to play is a free choice, and a choice of freedom (Connor 2005, 5) which is also echoed by Huizinga when he discusses play as both an act in which there is 'freedom from' (coercion) and 'freedom to' (it is not necessary) and is therefore independent in of itself from other immediate needs of daily life.

Work and play are never stable concepts, but the effects of their hybrids or

deconstructions need to be examined and we have yet to completely grasp the effects of an economy driven by play and the breakdown between the boundaries where 'ludocapitalism' is at the heart of many pursuits and everyday activities. Based on this, while ludologists' presentation of the characteristics of play are still relevant to contemporary understandings of play, it seems that it would be a mistake to think of play as an unchanging activity, given that play, whether understood as an activity, approach, or part of human nature itself, will be subject to changes in the evolution of the political economy just as in the case of labor and work. The activities and modes of playing we encounter today are as material as they are immaterial and productive as they are unproductive, as was shown in the studies on playbor. It is with this in mind that we turn to conceptions of play that account for a larger breadth of activities that can also accommodate the existence of contradictory goals.

2.6.4 Leisure Studies and the Serious Leisure Perpective

Another concept that requires exploration in terms of the work-play divide is that of leisure. Kaplan defines leisure as follows:

> "Relatively self-determined activity-experience that falls into one's economically free-time roles, that is seen as leisure by participants, that is psychologically pleasant in anticipation and recollection, that potentially covers the whole range of commitment and intensity, that contains characteristic norms and constraints, and that provides opportunities for recreation, personal growth and service to others" (Kaplan 1975, 26).

While some other definitions will be explored in a moment, what can be understood here is that compared to play, leisure encompasses a wider range of activities as well as goals and functions. Play was mostly treated as a sphere of expressive freedom in which the primary goal was the enjoyment of the individual. Leisure, while certainly

overlapping with play, as per Kaplan's definition also has social dimensions that render it more of a potential long-term project (although not all leisure activities have to have this element).

Another often-cited definition of leisure is that of the sociologist Joffre Dumazedier who discussed the three main functions of leisure which were found to be relaxation, entertainment, and personal development (Dumazedier 1967). This was based on his survey findings in the 1950s conducted in urban areas of France. Often citations refer to his initial definition of leisure in which he states, "Leisure is an activity in which individuals freely participate for rest, diversion or personal development (including educational, voluntary and creative activity), after attending to occupational, family, and social obligations" (Veal 2019, 6). An important aspect of this definition is that it is focused on activity that is done in residual time only after other obligations have been completed but, like Kaplan's, the range of activity is also shown to be wider than just that of play.

In a close examination of Dumazedier's definition of leisure, Veal has highlighted how this definition changes over time such that Dumazedier excluded some of the original activities considered in the old definition as now belonging to 'free time activity' (Veal 2019). What this means is that leisure does not simply equal that which one does in one's free time, but centers more or certain kinds of activities that include the characteristics of being liberating, disinterested, hedonistic and independent. In this sense, leisure is something free of obligations, non-utilitarian (not for material or social ends), enjoyable, and something independent of institutional commitments and therefore, not work. Here, the definition of leisure comes closer to that of play which we saw earlier. Others like Carr make the distinction between leisure and consumerism, equating leisure with activity pursued in one's free time that has links to the pursuit of enlightenment (Carr

2017). Definitions of leisure often go back and forth on this point, oscillating between that which resembles play and that which includes a wider breadth of activities. We now turn to a much-utilized leisure perspective that attempts to organize these issues under a framework for research on leisure.

2.6.4.1 The Serious Leisure Perspective

Under the framework of the Serious Leisure Perspective[5] (Diagram 2.0), several subtypes of understandings of leisure are relevant to the issue of work-play boundaries, in particular those that fall under categories of 'devotee work,' 'amateurs,' and 'serious leisure.' Insights from the SLP will be applied to this study and as a basis of the playwork analytic, as there is much overlap between the pursuit of a serious leisure career and that of playwork. Where they differ though is in that not all forms of serious leisure pursuits are trivialized in the same way play is, as will be revealed. Play is a specific kind of leisure activity which has moral dimensions to it that render it as antithetical to the ideals of work. Nevertheless, the SLP still provides a strong baseline for work/leisure amalgamations, though not specifically with the element of play in mind.

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[5] Henceforth referred to as SLP.

The Serious Leisure Perspective
(version February 2013)
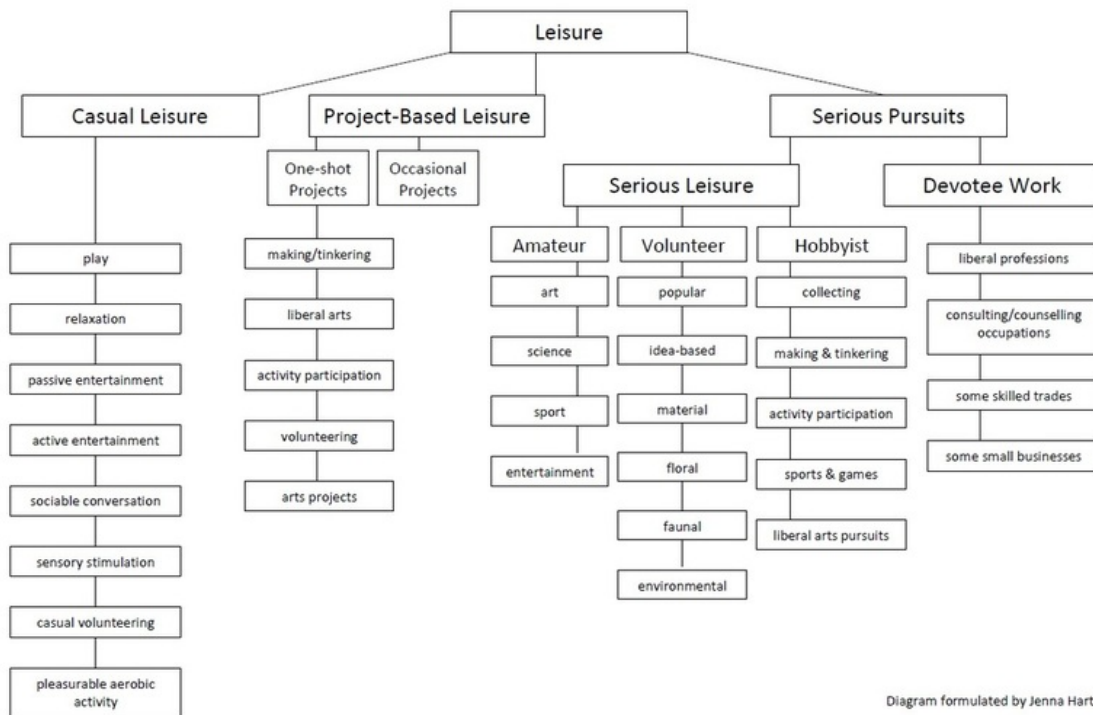
Diagram 2: The Serious Leisure Perspective (The Serious Leisure Perspective Website)

Before delving into the specifics, I will first provide the definition for leisure as per this framework. One distinct difference from the treatment of leisure as found in the previous discussions is that here, leisure is not simply about free time, but is more so an activity. The SLP first defines leisure as "un-coerced, contextually framed activity engaged during free time, which people want to do and, using their abilities and resources, actually do in either a satisfying or fulfilling way" (The Serious Leisure Perspective Website, 2022). Leisure can then be understood as occupying three broad categories: casual leisure, project-based leisure, and serious pursuits.

It is worth noting that play is placed under the umbrella of 'casual leisure,' which partly has to do with play being an activity that, unlike that of a more 'serious' pursuit, is seen as undirected, fundamentally hedonic, and intrinsically rewarding in of itself. This

is not to be mistaken with casual leisure forms or play being reduced to a trivial or 'lesser' form of activity as per its more serious sibling, as casual leisure has been shown to be very important in both personal and social life (Stebbins 2001). Similar to how play was shown to be apart from goal driven pursuits in earlier sections, play here is also seen as pleasure serving, vital, and almost natural to human beings, but notably, apart from the realm of career, which falls under the rubric of 'serious leisure.' Therefore, within the frame of leisure studies, work and play are seen as separate kinds of activities. This is also echoed in Kaplan's understanding of what constitutes leisure (Kaplan 1960). Leisure is defined by him as containing the following:

(a) an antithesis to "work" as an economic function

(b) a pleasant expectation and recollection

(c) a minimum of involuntary social role obligations

(d) a psychological perception of freedom

(e) a close relation to values of the culture

(f) the inclusion of an entire range, from inconsequence and insignificance to weightiness and importance

(g) often, but not necessarily, an activity characterized by the element of play

In the last part too, we see the subsuming of play under leisure which is seen as a larger category of activity than that of play.

Serious leisure in turn is defined as "the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that is highly substantial, interesting and fulfilling and where, in typical case, participants find a career in acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience" (Stebbins 1992, 3). It is deemed serious for six characteristic differences with other forms of activity. First, that it is something one keeps doing anf something one pursues or perseveres at. Secondly (and

vitally) is that the activity can lead to some form of career. Third, skill building and knowledge acquisition is also vital to the pursuit and improvement of said activity. Fourth, that there is a realization by the participant of particular special benefits to be gained and fifth, the presence of a unique social world that surrounds the activity (such as subculture). Finally, the sixth characteristic is that of the pursuit of the activity providing the participant with a personal or social identity that they find desirable, attractive, or meaningful. All six of these categories are applicable to many of the cases of those pursuing Visual Kei careers and the third and sixth characteristics are prosumptive in nature, in that they require the person in the serious leisure pursuit to be engaged in the consumption of knowledge, ideas, and tools in order to improve upon skills and delve deeper into the social world which they re-produce by participating and by re-affirming its social importance.

The application of the SLP tends to focus on the functions and effects leisure has on the lives of those who partake in serious leisure activities, namely that they provide benefits and positive effects on an individual as well as social level. Participation across a wide variety of leisure activities (music, theatre, sports etc.) have been shown to have been intrinsically rewarding. Stebbins found that for participants in stage acting, the rewards discussed by thespians included benefits that they found enhance them personally (self-conception, self-actualization, self-expression, self-enrichment) and in their social lives (meeting people through their acting activities). Stage acting opportunities brought otherwise novel and extraordinary moments to their lives which they experienced through playing characters and living vicariously through their roles (Stebbins 1992). Similarly, in a study on music as serious leisure for adults, it was shown that the learning of music at a later stage in life was vital for the well-being of retirees (Coffman 2006).

2.6.4.2 The SLP: Amateurs and Professionals

As briefly mentioned previously, two subcategories found within serious leisure deal with work/play amalgamations, the first being that of occupational devotees. These are people who, via a strong attachment or occupational devotion to the activity they pursue, find themselves achieving a strong sense of self-fulfillment "and the core activity is endowed with such intense appeal that the line between this work and leisure is virtually erased" (Stebbins 2004). This can even turn into work when one is able to make a livelihood from the activity.

Amateurs can be found in many different fields, but often directly in that of entertainment (and therefore music) and are in contrast to both hobbyists and professionals. The former lacks the career aspirations of amateurs while the latter differs in that such people are able make an income as workers within the field of the activity. Here the lines of activity goals and economic remuneration are the key dividing lines between these three categories that occupy a functionally interdependent relationship to one another in the field via the public audience/consumers. Stebbins refers to this as the Professional-Amateur-Public or P-A-P system (Stebbins 1992) where, between one another, standards, perspectives, organizations, participation, and other forms of interactions and developments occur. These are not the only people within the system, as the lack of a career possibility means that sometimes, depending on the situation, there is no professional status to obtain, thus expertise in such activities may lead to one being more of a hobbyist, while people who consciously only flirt with participation may be dabblers, dilettantes, etc. Self-identification, goals/aspirations, and consistency of engagement are what separates amateurs from these others.

Conversely, what makes a professional is contingent upon the possibility that one can make a career (and sustain livelihood) out of an activity. This is the line between

the amateur and the professional. While this is the main dividing line, Stebbins also points out (summarizing ideas from Gross 1958, 7782; Kaplan 1960, 203-204) that professionality also allows for a fuller open identification with one's colleagues and the field. This may be due to the presence of an institutionalized means of validating adequacy and competence and belonging to an institution itself, but also has to do with the authority that outsiders (e.g. clients, customers, consumers, audiences) recognize them as possessing. I will add another element to this which is that it is not just identification but the public ability to call it 'work' or a profession which, for example, Ren in chapter one did not possess, for he had to do part-time work—his 'actual' work—that provided him a living which had nothing to do with his music activities. Thus, Ren could not publicly call music his work, for the presence of 'actual' paid work in his life was located elsewhere.

Professional status and professionality, however, do not mean that economic rewards and the social sense of security exempt one from the grind that amateurs may find themselves locked in time-wise, as in actuality, professional work has been shown to be so engaging that it becomes an end to itself, erasing the lines between work and leisure (Stebbins, 1992; 31, Pavalko, 1971: 179; Orzack, 1959; Parker, 1974: 78).

2.6.4.3 The Marginality of Amateurs

Amongst the various groups of amateurs (stage actors, archeologists, musicians, and baseball players) that Stebbins studied, what he found was that often times, certain groups of adult amateurs were placed in a unique marginal position in contemporary society. Four aspects characterize the marginality of amateurs. First, that they adopt a serious orientation towards their leisure that others often misunderstand. In this way, their marginality appears to be 'chosen,' as it may seem to others a mere leisure activity, but to the amateur, it requires a lot of work and devotion. They will be misunderstood by those

who enjoy lighter leisure or don't understand the appeals of the activity over their commitments (time, effort, and why they even take it seriously). Their perseverance is for an activity that isn't easy and can even be a source of tension, which may even seem un-leisurely to those who are dabblers or only want to partake in leisure activities for their pleasurable qualities. Outsiders may also be puzzled by the apparent 'lack' of returns.

The second aspect of marginality has to do with the tendency towards uncontrollability (time, resources). Uncontrollability is also a source of marginalization as the want to devote obeself to and pursue the activity can come at the cost of sources of stability, most obviously that of money, and sometimes, the participant's health. Therefore, it can be seen as an unhealthy and risky pursuit. Risks are also pertinent to the third aspect of marginality, which is the struggle to gain professional entry. Amateurs are marginalized because they are 'not professional' and therefore a more capable/stable counterpart of theirs exists out there by and against which amateurs and the public can measure themselves. The allure of the lifestyle a professional leads is also a source of comparison, as well as their achievements and the standards they meet and set.

All this can lead to a sense of frustration for the amateur that results from understanding what it takes to become professional , yet not having access, which is the fourth aspect of marginalization. Frustration, which is felt when amateurs don't have the time, money, or resources to improve themselves to achieve professionality. Overall, marginalization can be compounded when there is some kind of subcultural involvement which may already have a stigma surrounding it. Truncated in involvement in the subcultural world, while trying to pursue a career, one can become distanced from 'normal' cultural activities (the latest movies, current news, etc.) and being away from home and at a distance from family-centered activities can also lead to some levels of estrangement from mass culture. Ultimately, it is the ambiguity of their marginalized

status where they are caught between notions of play and work, producer and consumer, in a role in which they are "Neither the professionals as they work nor the consumers of popular leisure as they play have to confront misunderstanding, uncontrollability, outsider status, or frustration in the ways amateurs do. This, then, is marginality (Stebbins 1992, 264).

2.6.5 Pro-Am

While Stebbins discusses the differences and the relationship between amateurs and professionals, another similar concept, that of Pro-Am, exists that sees the amateur as engaged in a professional manner. According to Leadbeater and Miller, many developments and revolutions that we have in society can be attributed to the result of the growth of that which they call Pro-Ams— "innovative, committed and networked amateurs working to professional standards" (Leadbeater and Miller 2004, 9). Examples of these can be found in a variety of fields that range from the development of linux softwear, some of the best-selling online games, and genres of music such as rap. These are not only witnessed in leisure industries or in terms of the reshaping of daily life resources, but they can even shape how democracy and governance if thought of. For example, the influence NGO's and microloan banks have had on coming up with new forms of distributing and organizing funding.

Part of the appeal in participating in Pro-Am-type organizations or opportunities is that many of them are collaborative open-source efforts that channel the interests of the participants themselves. Rather than monetary incentives, most Pro-Ams come to participate in a kind of D.I.Y fashion where bottom up, self-organization forms the approach where users themselves create, innovate, and modify content. They are inclusive and welcome non-professional participation. In fact, they may serve as alternatives to arenas once monopolized by professionals.

Pro-Am is also an individual effort and can be applied to amateurs aspiring to attain professional status. The Pro-Am efforts of musicians and sports athletes who do not yet qualify as professionals can involve lifestyles that are taxing and costly. Leadbeater and Miller used the example of a Pro-Am tennis player whose life involved tennis around the clock. His work as a tennis coach was what he did to sustain himself financially while he tried to compete to raise his rankings in an attempt to become a professional. Yet, at the same time, he could not afford a coach himself which was what he needed to improve his own game. While his work involved tennis, coaching was not what he wanted to be doing and it only served as a way to fund his Pro-Am goals and lifestyle. A lot of money was spent on competing, as equipment, travel, hotels, fees, etc. were all covered by the aspiring pro himself. Here, Pro-Am is not merely a status category indicating he was not a professional yet, but also that he was not just an amateur, as his dedication, love for the sport, and the standards he judged himself by were all on par with a professional. He had to compete by professional standards with professional knowledge, not because he was paid to, but because he had goals he wanted to achieve and out of a genuine like for the sport.

Needless to say, this all takes place during non-work time, yet for people like him, "leisure is not passive consumerism but active and participatory; it involves the deployment of publicly accredited knowledge and skills, often built up over a long career, which has involved sacrifices and frustrations" (Leadbeater and Miller 2004, 20). The emergence of these Pro-Am types therefore, necessitates the rethinking of categories especially with regards to those who divide work and leisure as well as consumer and producer. Pro-Am involves work in leisure time, sometimes in what is, for the individual and others, a leisure activity. Hours of training, research, practice, and competition, to name a few, which often result in stress, disappointments, and sacrifices are difficult to

grasp in terms of tangible payoffs. There is little that is leisurely about the approach, as it is done towards the goal of professionalism, and therefore held to a standard that is public and one of excellence. Using terminology from the SLP, this would indeed qualify as a form of serious leisure.

What Pro-Ams do report however are the benefits they experience that are a found channel for self-expression and being able to explore their creativity. Depending on the activity, another benefit gained is a sense of community, not simply as a casual participant, but one that plays an active, socially contributive role. The element of the social experience of community within the realm of leisure has elsewhere been found to also be increasingly important and felt by participants, as scholars of leisure have noted that "leisure promotes solidarity through acquaintance and understanding, which it does better than work" (Parker 1971, 56-57). Similarly, it was found that in the UK, "Six out of ten people say they have more in common with people they share a hobby with thaqn with their neighbors," (Leadbeater and Miller 2004) which is more evidence that leisure-centric social circles may be the new basis of community for many.

It also follows, as was the case with prosumption, serious leisure, amateurs, and playbour, that another reward gained was a sense of place and identity and due to the level of commitment, involvement,1 and investment, Pro-Ams experienced intense feelings that they did not find to be available elsewhere. These are only obtained through these laborious efforts and therefore it is still found to be rewarding work, even if unpaid. The question then emerges, is this really not work simply because it is unpaid? Given that many also report that their deep involvement and participation in these activities is also driven by compulsion, obligation, and a need to perform, rather than just a pure desire born out of enjoyment or pleasure, as much as the efforts and results can bring those positive emotions. It is also not completely governed by freedom or choice, and much

like, work it requires scheduling and time management. The only difference here is that all compulsions are internalized and not imposed by external forces. There are no institutionalized contractual obligations at play.

As earlier stated, another line blurred by Pro-Ams is that of producer and consumer. Participation in activities to produce results and new products at the same time necessitates consumption. It is not hard to see how Pro-Ams are constantly prosumers in all of their efforts. This differs from regular leisure in one clear regard, in that they are spending and consuming on leisure/hobbies with the intent to re-produce towards standards that meet professional ones.

Leadbeater and Miller are generally very positive in their presentation of what they deemn "the Pro-Am revolution." "As more people have more time, money and inclination to find their own distinctive definition of self-fulfillment they will turn to Pro-Am activities. As more people make that move, it will set off other shifts in society" (Leadbeater and Miller 2004, 70). They saw the emergence of such people as beneficial on a societal level, as now with more people engaged in professional-like activities, this would also result in an exchange between actual professionals and amateurs, leading to inclusive collaborative efforts. Pro-Ams, as often operating outside established institutional limitations, were also found to be disruptive innovators who, via their participation, allowed for the increase of access regarding who could participate in what were previously industry-only dominated fields.

It should be clear, however, while there may be some positive gains from the rise of these efforts, as this is a largely self-regulating, structure-free, and individually governed mode of approaching pursuits, it can become laden with a neo-liberal-infused mentality in which the responsibility for failure and the lack of support systems to protect workers are normalized as being risks taken on through the choice of the individual to

even take part in such endeavors in the first place.

Playwork, like Pro-Am, sees both the blurring of the boundaries of work and play. Where and when does a player (the amateur) become a worker (the professional)? There are, of course, the clear issues of salary, time, and the standards of operation in which the Pro-Am occupies some categories, but then is excluded from others. This is exactly like what was previously expressed as being some of the dilemmas of playwork. And while Pro-Am does not explicitly exclude this dimension, what is clearly lacking in the literature is the social/moral dimension that I have raised in terms of how play is conceived as an activity that lacks the moral pedigree work is assumed to have.

Therefore, while many playworkers are engaged in Pro-Am-like efforts, by analyzing the same efforts through the playwork analytic, one can also breech the discussion on the level of the social values that are seen as 'unbeneficial' in the pursuit of playwork. Pro-Am may be seen as risk, but it is not one that is inherently stigmatized and ridiculed as tainted by play. At the same time, Pro-Am can also be extended to arenas that do not involve play, hence the analysis also extends to the field of self-medication and the activities of NGOs to name a few. Playwork, on the other hand, is meant to capture a specific type of work, one embedded deep within a mode of play. On an end note, while this may simply be an issue of semantics, Pro-Am may also not be the most useful terminology to apply to the case of Visual Kei (and other fields and subcultures where professional and amateur possess specific meanings). Amateur bands are a separate category from independant bands (which, in this case, occupies a more Pro-Am like position) in that amateur bands are in a position below independant bands and do not even have professional aspirations necessarily. They are groups of musicians who may sometimes come together, but to not always have cumulative goals towards music as a career. Overall, the concept of Pro-Am, while certainly capturing the efforts of aspiring

non-professionals well, does not deal specifically with notions of play in a particularly nuanced manner.

2.6.6 Weisure

While I will not delve in detail into the concept of weisure, suffice it to say, the term that was coined by the sociologist Dalton Conley, like the other aforementioned hybrids, deals with the collapsing of work and leisure into one another. Conley notes that "activities and social spaces are becoming more work-play ambiguous" (Patterson 2009) and this is seen as largely attributable to the expansion of technology that allows us to constantly remain connected at any time of the day, complicating work-life balance (Thomas 2013), thus people are enjoying leisure (e.g. texting and+ posting on social media) during work hours and similarly, may be taking conference calls while on holiday with their families.

Social networking is also another site that displays this ambiguity in that 'friends' on sites like Facebook may also comprise colleagues and other profession-related acquaintances, thus functioning both instrumentally as well as for enjoyment and entertainment purposes (Patterson 2009). But another vital reason for the emergence of weisure also has to do with people finding their work more fun, in particular the professionals who Conley refers to as the 'creative class' — those whose work is largely involved with the immaterial production of creative and information technology industries.

As much as weisure is presented as something people do willingly and may even enjoy, others have noted how this comes at the cost of privacy, private time, and actual relaxation. Vajda has pointed to how the blurring of worktime and leisure time correlates with less vacation time actually taken, as "Many feel not only that they have to stay connected on holidays and weekends but that they actually fear they might lose their jobs

if they went on vacation" (Vajda 2009).

In short, weisure tends to highlight problems concerning the issue of 'leisure time' and how work impedes on this. Playbor and weisure are different in that while work and labor have some overlap, play and leisure are not the same and do not allow for the same slippage. This boils down to a matter of definition and depending on which framework is employed, play may be considered a kind of leisure activity or, moving away from the ideal that is play into the realm of behavior, play may have evolved into an approach to a variety of activities, including work. One thing that should be apparent by now is that not all leisure activity is necessarily playful (as seen in the SLP). Nevertheless, the issues of the loss of leisure time and how this a1ffects the well-being of workers, as well as the ambiguous qualities that weisure highlights, are still relevant to the concept of playwork. Where they differ, however, is that playwork will follow the understanding that play is a particular kind of leisure.

2.7 Playwork

While play and leisure have traditionally been thought of as separate spheres of activity, some of the previously explored theories have shown how they do indeed intersect in ways that make what were previously assumed to be exclusive boundaries between the two difficult to ascertain. Play is a kind of leisure and non-play leisure activities do converge within the realm of work in that they can be about material accumulation that can also be put towards economic or monetary gains. In addition, play is embedded in leisure and cultural industries where they are prosumed towards a variety of profit-oriented goals.

Also, while work-play hybrids appear to be more present, what is revealed is that the demarcation between work and play in terms of subjectivity and agency does not disappear, nor is it so easily accepted as a new way of work or the new status quo, for

when 'play' is located within work, while voluntary, the fun aspects of it may also be eroded as it becomes subject to ideals/ideas about work and worker subjectivity (professionalism, responsibilities, quotas, and other forms of profit). As Goggin has noted, "Whether or not something is playful or fun has to do with one's attitude when approaching and executing it, as well as the very conditions, rules, and goals around which the activity is structured" (Goggin 2011, 359).

In some of the theories of work/play boundaries explored here, exploitation and marginalization were explicated in terms of the problems of labor and the precarious position a non-professional or unemployed worker faced. However, playbor was the only concept which actually dealt with the issue of 'play' beyond it being a choice activity and delved into the dimensions of play as a deeper, more pervasive way of doing things or an approach that has come to inform interactions and ways of communicating themselves. Playwork will build on this and in addition, show how play is not simply the activity in which work is centered , but that play itself has dimensions that inform perception socially.

While I have mentioned along with each of the concepts reviewed here the ways in which playwork is informed by and will continue to build or highlight a particular dimension perhaps ignored in these other theories, what I wish to reiterate here is that none of these concepts specifically deals with the issue of play itself being 'the problem' within work. Play has been shown to be co-opted by corporations, understood as a profitable commodity, with playborers exploitable for their enjoyment of the labor that corporations reap the benefits of for free. Leisure studies revealed how amateurs are marginalized socially and economically because they lack the stability and status that comes with professionalism. Yet none of these actually dealt with how play is not socially seen as work or rather, struggles in a moral universe of discourse to gain legitimacy because it is seen and treated as play. Perhaps it boils down to a matter of the kind of play

ultimately, and, as in the case of Visual Kei, this is particularly salient for its provocative contents deal much with an affect of otherworldliness that seems, to the outsider, to have little 'real' value. What I endeavor to reveal via playwork is how this particular quality of play can informs the intermeshing of play and work in ways that have little do with the playworkers' choices and despite their efforts to turn play into work.

2.8 Literature on Visual Kei

While not extensively studied, there has been a small but growing body of literature from a diverse range of disciplines and approaches that have dealt with the subject of Visual Kei. These studies can be divided into five groups, although there is an overlap of themes and approaches.

The first group tends to focus on fan practices, consumer reception, and gender (Brunelle 2008; Koizumi 2002; McLeod 2013; Seibt 2012). Here, Visual Kei is treated as a safe space for deviant leisure where women enjoy rebellious alternative identities and express their 'darker' sides (Koizumi 2002). Others have analyzed this space as one where desire is learned, expressed, and commoditized (Seibt 2012). The analysis of gender relations and identity is divided with some saying heteronormative relations are reproduced (Brunelle 2008) and others seeing Visual Kei as evidence of hybrid postmodern consumer identities (McLeod 2013).

The second group treats Visual Kei as 'text' and sees the eclectic components of its contents and characteristics as evidence of localization (Matter 2008; Steponaviciute 2011; Johnson and Kawamoto 2016). Topics range from motif analysis of visual content (Steponaviciute 2011), to music and performance analysis (Matter 2008; Johnson and Kawamoto 2016).

Visual Kei is also mentioned in studies of music and under the context of other popular culture/subculture forms and trends. In such cases, Visual Kei is depicted as a

manifestation of the diversification of masculinities, ones fueled by consumerism and the female gaze (Iida 2006; Stevens 2008). It also appears as overlapping with Lolita culture (Monden 2008, 2013; Gagne 2013), as it is sometimes part of the consumption of Lolita and certain Visual Kei artists are also active and influential in the Lolita subculture.

The fourth group analyzes Visual Kei in terms of its localization outside of Japan where it is seen as a deterritorialized, translocal, and transcultural form of popular culture (Pfeifle 2011; Hashimoto 2007; Heymann 2013; Adamowicz 2014; Kato 2009; Chen 2019; Obi 2016; Reyes Navarro 2021). Some of these studies have provided wonderful insights into how Visual Kei is prosumed in different locales and under different contexts. Finally, the fifth group contains studies that focus solely on Visual Kei as a genre or that situate it in the larger socio-historical context of Japanese society and the global music industry.

It should be mentioned that there is some literature on the Visual Kei industry often written by musicians or music journalists themselves in the form of autobiographies, memoirs, or opinion/critique-type pieces. While these are insightful first-hand sources rich in valuable information, they are not academic in nature. I do sometimes refer to these throughout this study, but I will not include them in this literature review section due to their non-academic status. In the following subsections I will introduce the aforementioned groups of Visual Kei research in more detail. On a final note, while I employ the word prosumption/prosumer at various points in the following sections of the literature review, none of the authors of these works have actually used these terms themselves. I am merely using them to describe the processes at play within these works in terms of how I will treat them, as I will do for the rest of this dissertation.

2.8.1 Visual Kei Consumption: Fan culture and Gender

Emily Brunelle conducted a study of gender performance at Visual Kei lives. She noted that the audience at indies lives consisted completely of young teenage girls but found a few men at the back who did not actively participate, making her one of the few who have noted the presence of gendered prosumption. Though she does not go into detail as to how she arrived at this conclusion, she depicts and states that the relationship between band men and their fans appeared to fall along the lines of a normative heterosexual nature, as she interpreted the role of artist as functionng as the target of sexual interest and as a style icon to the female fans. She also believed that most of the band members themselves were heterosexual and also noted that they were not engaging in transvestism, but were involved in aesthetic practice for the 'cool factor,' and that they wanted to look beautiful. Her findings report that fans did not perceive band members as feminine, but very much male, even if they did not dress or speak in typically or normatively masculine ways. While some of the terminology she adopts is not well-defined and assumptions are made about sexuality, she makes the important distinction between what appears to be a non-normative gender 'performance' and the actual perception of gendered relations between the performer and audience which largely remains heteronormative.

Seibt applies Lacanian psychoanalysis principals to argue that Visual Kei functions as a fantasy site to teach people how to desire. While theoretically there are some potentially valid ideas behind his main argument, his overall study is problematic in its presentation of evidence to back his argument and in the functionalistic line of reasoning he employs.

Subscribing to the commonly held believe that it is the visual elements that define what it means to be a Visual Kei band, he sees the use of aesthetics by bands as

"the main instrument to evoke those fantastical imaginary worlds that for their fans serve as an escape from their everyday lives" (Seibt, 249, 2012). Rendering their prosumption as escapist is done without much explanation nor evidence that the majority of prosumers feel this way. In other words, it is a generalization and assumption, one of many he makes about Visual Kei in practice.

And while it is completely possible that Visual Kei does provide fantasy for people, the idea of how this is executed is also rife with baseless assumptions: "their (artists) everyday outfits…also their real names are concealed from their fans" (Seibt, 249, 2012). In doing so, Seibt not only infantilizes the consumption of women (as he only addresses female fans as being involved in the fandom), but by assuming they have no connections or means to understand any sort of real-life aspects of band members lives, his conclusions are simply baseless. What band members wear off stage is not a secret— oftentimes it is visible even from official footage, pictures, and pre- or post-live situations. This is not even a matter of hunting for such 'privy' information, as it is simply available for the public to consume in a variety of formats. As for names, this is completely up to the individual. Members of the band 12012 all use their real names and often times, the origins of stage names are derived from some element of the band members' real names, which they reveal themselves. Most importantly, it is not as if band members emerge from social vacuums, and often friends, family, or former school mates may unmaliciously be the source of a variety of information leaks. Assuming fans are divorced form such information (whether it comes to them through official or unofficial channels) is baseless and socially unrealistic. Some of these issues will be taken up in Chapter 9 where I discuss internet surveillance and how the artist is a commodity beyond the bounds of his official labor and how this bleeds into his private life.

"Fans at indies lives collectively follow the thoroughly prescribed behavioral patterns that constitute the ritual of attending a Visual Kei concert" (Seibt, 256, 2012) is an observation Seibt makes, but I suggest that this is only a very impressionistic reading of live-going practices. Not only does he carry on this hyperbolical insistence of nothing but uniformed behavior where "nothing but latent abidance" is present, he also then goes on to baselessly state that this is actually just female competition for male attention:

"Strictly choreographed and collectively executed, these movements do not seem to contribute to any feeling of togetherness among the female fans…though all *bangya* behave in the same manner at the same time, the most prominent feeling among them does not seem to be of sympathy or togetherness but rather that of competition for the attention of the male musician on stage" (Seibt, 257, 2012).

He comes to this conclusion after not having included any voices or indicated any sort of conversations with any of the Japanese fans at lives, but only through what he believes *furitsuke* functions towards. Not only is this contrary to what I will endeavor to reveal in Chapter 5 in a detailed study of live culture and prosuming lives, this also goes against the research performed by many others who have touched on the kind of girls' culture of Visual Kei (Malick 2013, Gagne 2013, Koizumi 2002, Inoue 2003) that reveals how one of the joys of their fandom or consumptive practices is in the friendships they make. Seibt even goes so far as to equate logistic ordering (crowd flow, safety) as a systematic and deliberate means to quell personal interactions between bands and fans: "The entire Visual Kei etiquette seems to exist for no other reason but to tame the fans desire and to prevent any girl from fulfilling it" (Seibt, 258, 2012).

Seibt has also made assumptions about subcultural etiquette and insists that regularly attending fans are not allowed to have any contact with band members and that the *shikiri* system (explained in Chapter 5) exists for this purpose without realizing how

it can function in place of a lack of 'fairness' at multiband events and is also a means to facilitate overall fan participation. What will be shown throughout this dissertation is that contact and boundaries are easily 'breeched' and re-made between fans and bands, and often it is left to personal discretion and decision-making. Fans are far from 'equal' or rule-abiding in every instance or situation and seeing them as collectively incapable of acting on an individual basis perhaps becomes a convenient tool for evidence of facile tropes about the collective behavior of Japanese.

Seibt also manages to be patronizingly ageist when he states "…what is so fascinating for adolescent women of 15 or 20 years of age about a twenty-something year old male dressed up in luxurious and playful female wardrobe, wearing oversized artificial red roses in his flowing long hair, and screwing up his voice to the dazzling heights of a prima donna? Do they want to be with him? Do they want to be his sexual partner?...But the rules in Visual kei culture effectively prevent them from fulfilling this desire" (268, Seibt, 2013). As not only my own sample size shows, but time itself will attest to, the majority of Visual Kei fans are not 'adolescents,' as is often assumed, but instead comprise a wide range of ages as corresponds to the age of the subculture itself. Thus, Seibt has once again based his analysis on stereotyped assumptions and never once provides any data to prove that an actual sample size of 15 to 20 year olds was present at the live performance he attended. Once again, he also, by default, assigns the use of aesthetics to the realm of the 'female' without taking into account how they are received or the functions they serve for the people who use them themselves.

Perhaps most disturbing of all is his equating the consumption of female fans with having been 'prevented' or blocked off from what they desire; an assumed desire to be the object of desire or to desire the artist himself. I am not negating the existence of this possibility, but what I find appalling is the generalization made without any sort of

data or evidence for this. Furthermore, as this dissertation will show, the lines between fan and artist are often crossed in a multitude of ways and personal, sexual, and platonic, private connections are made for a variety of reasons. Seibt, therefore, not only jumps to assumptions of what desire consists of, he also assumes it only ever remains circumvented, thus the conclusion of his thesis is that Visual Kei functions as a training ground for young women to learn how to desire.

In McLeod's study, Visual Kei is seen as a platform that provides a view into the complex hybridity at play in contemporary Japanese culture, which he sees as evident from its sound and look as dislocated from time, place, and gender (McLeod, 319, 2013). While McLeod begins with this convincing enough basis for an argument, for indeed, the plethora of references and possibilities found in Visual Kei do contain a wide variety of contents that do not speak to clear binaries and are hybrid-like, much of his ideas surrounding gender, its presentations, and the manner in which the aesthetics function and are employed, stem from tenuous assumptions. For one, he begins with the idea that male musicians are 'cross-dressing as women' and that this is done to get attention from teenage or young female fans (McLeod, 310, 2013). He refers to Visual Kei musicians in costume as "unambiguously female" and "overtly feminine," but to whom they are seen as such is never specified or explained. Therefore, one cannot help but feel this is his personal assumptions about gender and gender performance which he has confounded with the general perceptions that Japanese people have.

He does this elsewhere as well, by falling back on binary-based terminology and categories, as even in his depiction of the sonic qualities of Visual Kei music we see the same male/female stereotypes emerge: "The combination of stereotypically masculine coded sounds (heavy metal and punk) and feminine (classical and pop) creates a hybridized cross-performance of gender both musically and visually" (McLeod, 2013,

313). While he points out that this is a stereotype, in choosing to use this as evidence for his thesis, he reinforces and relegates that of the female to that which is at once 'mass culture' (pop) and that which is effete and refined (classical music).

Here, it would be useful to point out in that studies by several women scholars of Visual Kei (Brunelle 2003, Iida 2006, Inoue 2003), they often point out two important points about the assumed dislocation of gender. The first is that this is not a female performance, but is instead one still rooted in masculinity, albeit an alternative one. Second, the sonic alignment and roots of Visual Kei, which are hard rock/metal, are sounds that are often expressions that conform to heteronormative masculine performances, expressions, and identity. Thus, musically and in their gender presentation, while artists on stage may not display what is at once identifiably 'masculine' in a normative sense, this does not mean that such displays should be then treated as indicative of the feminine.

Like Seibt, there is another erroneous belief that McLeod perpetuates in that he constantly refers to fans as young women and teenagers. His paper published in 2013 meant that at this point Visual Kei was already beyond the 20-year mark as a subculture, a point he acknowledges in his brief history of the genre, but he makes no mention of how the older, more senior band fans are far from the teenage age bracket, in a bid to make his point about it being a kind of fantasy for seemingly gullible young women more believable. This is further perpetuated when he states, "These girls, in keeping with some of the genderless imagery associated with shojo manga heroes, see the band members almost as fairy tale figures" (McLeod, 313, 2013). I endeavor to reveal how fans, while they may have high expectations of the artists they like, are in fact engaged very much in 'revealing' realities, even at the cost of their own ideals. The idea that fans are so divorced from seeing band members as people is more likely a fantasy ideal promulgated on the

side of production (or by academics who choose to frame things a certain way) for convenience's sake or an ideal they may hold on to for marketing purposes, but this is no longer a convincing take, all the more so in an era where the internet enables the flow of information, infringements on privacy, and intensified surveillance in a variety of forms, some which exposes, in spite of what those on the side of production may prefer, much about the realities of musicians' lives. Thus, it is not realistic to assume, as McLeod has, when he describes artists as "constructed confections of records executives who have a vested economic interest in maintaining the myth of the genderless heroic quality of the male band members in order to appeal to the teenage girl fans and their pocketbooks" (316, McLeod, 2013).

Perhaps even more confusing is when McLeod attempts to double down on his own presentation of fans as full of fantasy about Visual Kei band men when he then states that we shouldn't see these 'young girls' as victims, but instead as 'sexually empowered' in their fan practices as they project themselves on to the (now to his convenience) men on stage (McLeod, 314, 2013). Finding commonalities, projection, empathizing, sympathizing and superimposing one's own feelings and experience on to Visual Kei are indeed part of the enjoyment for some fans, especially those who find a deep connection with a particular artist, but the manner in which McLeod suggests this—that female's fans are able to feel empowered through consuming these men—is condescending and is not something he backs up with any evidence whatsoever. There are simply no voices of any actual fans in his study.

McLeod also only seems to pay attention to *tanbi-kei* bands (a subgenre/style within Visual Kei, see Chapter 4) in order to make the point he wishes about cross-dressing more convincing. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 4, *tanbi kei* is but one of many subtypes of Visual Kei and is by no means the biggest or most dominant one. He

extends the characteristics of visuals found in *tanbi kei* to all of Visual Kei throughout his article. Overall, the problem with his analysis is that it is simply a textual analysis of impression that he extends to social function and the general perception held by Japanese people.

Koizumi Kyoko's study revealed that the techniques for concealing personal tastes of high-schoolers with regards to their music interests are gendered. Her findings showed that this was particularly true of those who liked Visual Kei and all the more so for girls who would publicly express liking 'safe' seeming artists of international caliber or to generalize their tastes to match currently popular music. When in private, they actually consumed Visual Kei, which they did not articulate publicly, but as Koizumi found, they were doing so to hide "the personal music to which they were deeply committed at the moment" (Koizumi, 113, 2002).

High-school girls, according to Koizumi, find places like live houses and specialist CD stores as sites of comfort where they can freely consume the music they like without the evaluation of their peers and where they do not need to act the part of "good high school girls" (Koizumi, 120, 2002). Koizumi also found that cosplayers of Visual Kei bands would hide their tastes from their 'ordinary friends' (non-Visual Kei fan friends) by singing more widely acceptable popular music at karaoke. She says that they felt that having to distinguish their own personal tastes in different public settings while pretending to reveal their true interests was a necessary survival skill in order to "live in ordinary society" (Koizumi, 121, 2002). What this reveals is that there is a public perception regarding Visual Kei as deviant, abnormal, and inappropriate. Put otherwise, it is stigmatized and as I have briefly touched upon, stigma over the choice of prosumptive object/subject is one of the qualities that strips work of its legitimacy. If society does not see it as respectful or if it becomes so intensely private, even as a leisure activity (as is in

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the case of the students Koizumi studied), then it is not just as a form of work that it is seen as shameful, but is considered so even at the level of private play.

Other important findings by Koizumi in her study of the personal music consumption of Visual Kei fans found that they enjoyed Visual Kei and cosplaying as a respite from complicated interpersonal relationships that she felt were related to gender role expectations. Visual Kei provided them with visions or ways for envisioning something beyond their current oppression through the presentation of gender-free bodies. In a way, what can be witnessed here is a kind of construction of female-centric spaces out of the prosumption activities of fans. While authors like Koizumi present these as safe spaces for women, I will go on to show how the concept of 'safe spaces' may sometimes end up giving the false impression of cohesiveness when these spaces are also open to surveillance and critique both online and offline. I therefore see the safe space presentation of Visual Kei as only a partial representation of one of the outcomes of sociality within the subcultural space which I argue is rife with complications.

2.8.2 Visual Kei Studies in Music and Text

In his overview of contemporary music genres in Japan, Matter sets out with the intention of enabling "Anglophonic audiences to understand Japanese popular music in a more familiar instead of ethnocentric way" (Matter, 2008, 114), which results in the creation of the tenuous category of the 'anglophonic audience.' Because the existence of this as an actual listener category is never established nor is an explanation to qualify what is meant by this ever offered, what he presumes is simply by virtue of being an English speaker, a similar popular music repertoire and a corresponding system of interpretation exists. This alleged shared understanding even encompasses genres of music such as darkwave, metal, and hardcore punk, etc., and is further evident in statements such as "Anglophonic audiences would not find the make-up and costumes of

Visual Kei bands to be all that novel" (Matter, 2008, 118) which he attributes to the presence of androgynously coded elements and costumes found in other forms of rock music as has already been presented by artists like David Bowie and Poison. In other words, his main assumption is it that the non-Japanese, English speaking world forms not only a culturally coherent category of audience, it is one that is distinct from other groups and 'naturally' interprets the content of musical acts in a way that is only capable of being self-referential to an imagined, shared 'horizon of expectations' (Jauss, 1970).

While it may be possibile to separate consumers into particular categories that may include linguistic, regional, or cultural groupings of preferences and references (and even then, this would be susceptible to overly broad generalizations), the Anglophonic audience in particular runs too large a gamut of disparate individuals to constitute a cohesive consumer category, let alone one that could possess a shared sensibility or framework regarding the relationship between music, style, and consumptive practices.

Equally dubious is his presentation of what Visual Kei consists of. First, he highlights that there exists a broad variation of musical and lyrical content. Then he goes on to say that "the raison d'etre of the genre itself is the desire to "shock" the audience visually with pomp and pageantry" (Matter, 117, 2008) which he sees as evident in the use of aesthetics that he believes to function and exist only at a superficial and ornamental level, for artists "perform neither theatrical shows…not violent stage acts" (Matter, 117, 2008)[6]. This, to him, lacks appeal to the Anglophonic audience, who he believes prefers to watch bands who "actually act out their personas" (Matter, 119, 2008). He arrives at the somewhat puzzling conclusion that, despite it being uniquely Japanese, Visual Kei is a genre that he feels foreigners will not enjoy because it isn't novel enough to them.

Steponaviciute's study, on the other hand, provides a reading of Visual Kei as a

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[6] I will return to dispute this in section 2.6

localization of the gothic. Analyzing the usage of *sakura* (cherry blossoms) and *oni* (ogre) motifs, as found in a variety of Visual Kei products (music, lyrics, music videos, costumes, promotional media items), she shows how they function much like how roses and vampires do in gothic text and contents, which are considered quintessential gothic tropes. Her analysis is rich and unique, albeit tinged with some orientalist trappings, that she does not extend this textual reading to social realities or to make assumptions about everyday life at a general level. It is very much a literary analysis in this sense and while she does not overtly come to this conclusion, she succeeds in showing how a straightforward reading of cultural motifs is not always possible especially in the case of contemporary artforms.

Johnson and Kawamoto provide an analysis of characteristics and themes found in Visual Kei by focusing on visuals, performance, and androgyny using a performance studies and cultural studies approach. Though they do not offer a convincing argument due to a lack of evidence, they suggest that divergence and androgyny are key themes visible throughout the history of Visual Kei and therefore see these as a means to interpret the genre. Divergence here refers to variety (indies/major, eclectic music styles, eclectic visual style). Because they find there are no commonalities in these aspects, they then arrive at the conclusion that the link between bands is that of androgyny.

What I find unconvincing about this conclusion is that there is no consideration for Visual Kei's binding links having to do with the music industry or as a genre that has to do with social or subcultural qualities and at the same time there are erroneous historical details regarding the generational shifts and their provided timeliness, along with little consideration for social context. Androgyny alone is not a convincing link in grouping these diverse bands together, also because Johnson and Kawamoto are using

androgyny itself as a category of perception, yet not all bands even present gender-fluid images.

Here are some examples of their problematic discussion on the topic of evidence of androgyny and gender, some of which ends up coming off as sexist. On the popularity of Visual Kei in its heyday in the 1990s, they attribute this to a "softer guitar sound, lighter texture, slower tempo, and easy to understand congenial lyrics" which allowed the genre to become mainstream more easily because "they were acceptable for girls" (Johnson and Kawamoto, 202, 2016), as if girls did not already form a massive part of the fandom even in earlier era[s. While I understand that they are trying to convey its general audience appeal, they do so by attributing it to women in a way that ends up being condescending by suggesting women need something to be made 'uncomplicated' and simplified in order for it to be appealing.

In their discussion of the characteristics of one of X JAPAN's later releases, the album *Dahlia*, they describe a shift towards a "more feminine quality" of music which they see as located in "piano and orchestra sounds" (Johnson and Kawamoto, 204, 2016). It seems that to them, any sort of classical music can be equated with femininization. At the same time, they never explain why this is thought to be so and therefore they seem to assume that the reader also implicitly understands the logic of this linkage. "The feminine side of Yoshiki's creativity has also produced work on classical music compositions and performances, and he has recorded with the London Philharmonic Orchestra" (Johnson and Kawamoto, 204, 2016). Why this is attributed to his 'feminine side' is never explained (nor does he have a publicly known 'feminine side persona') but seems to follow along their flawed logic of any classical music elements being equated with the feminine.

Even pitch alone is deemed feminine. In describing the singing voice of GLAY's vocalist, "Teru's dynamic vocal range contributed to the style, and he performed a mix of low and high pitched singing, thus helping to contrast degrees of masculinity and femininity through sound…" (Kawamoto and Johnson, 206, 2016). Here I should add that Teru's voice is within the low G–hi E range (not particularly wide) and his voice quality is very often described as husky. There may be evidence of androgyny in Teru's visual appearance, but sonically, it seems that these attempts to identify the presence of the 'feminine' are contrived.

2.8.3 Visual Kei in Popular Culture and Music

While not focused on Visual Kei as a subject, it also appears in other studies of music and pop-culture (cosplay, Lolita, subculture, fashion) in Japan. In her overview of Japanese pop music, Stevens devotes a few pages to introducing Visual Kei, which she sees as generally possessing a hard rock sound that is combined with a flamboyant artist image. She highlights that one notable aspect of Visual Kei is its very devoted fandom as well as its status as an alternative music, especially in comparison to mainstream music, for it has a sound and image that is far from conservative. On its impact beyond music, she notes that by the time of the height of its popularity in the 1990s "mainstream Japanese men [became] more comfortable with the idea of grooming products (Stevens, 57, 2008)" due to the push of beauty commodities for men by the beauty industry as informed by the female gaze and thus Visual Kei in some ways moved from being seen as strange to cutting edge.

Mentionings of Visual Kei also appear alongside studies of related subcultures such as that of Lolita. In Gagne's work on the Lolita subculture, one of the things shown to be consumed by Lolita was Visual Kei. Gagne's main argument is that Lolitas actually anticipate graduating from their hobbies upon transitioning into another life stage and

therefore their play has specific intensified meanings within the frame of their youth. While this may be true of Lolita, and he does not explicitly extend this to their Visual Kei consumption, while the focus of his argument is on their dressing, consuming, and participating in Lolita activities, as a related consumption practice, it might be assumed by some or implicit that they also graduate from Visual Kei consumption. This may be the case for some, but what I wish to show in the following content chapters is that, unlike Lolita, departing from Visual Kei is not quite as anticipated or 'well-managed' for many of the prosumers I encountered.

What I also wished to highlight here is that while prosumers may be aware that there are risks and that the chances of success are slim and contingent upon things beyond their control, they do not exercise a complete self-conscious awareness or impending acceptance of the limits of what Visual Kei has to offer them while they are in the thick of things. This is evident in the emotional recollections of the struggles, listlessness, and time it took for them to move on that they are able to channel even though they may have moved on at the point I spoke to them (see chapter 12). Thus, this speaks against the idea that their play or attempts to make a career out of their play is something that simply functioned as a kind of escapism from the mundane which they would definitely have to get over or move on from as part of the transition to 'real' adulthood. While some accepted and found comfort in the social maturity they eventually achieved, this was not necessarily one that they acted accordingly with based on reaching a certain life stage or age but rather, upon having to give up on their dreams after putting in a lot of time and effort (one that was often prolonged or extended/not based on an age/time line they had anticipated in advance). Indeed, there is an awareness of the temporality but, rather than it ending with anticipated graduation which signals the acceptance of adulthood, the temporality prosumers exhibited experiencing here was one in which they were not yet

who they envisioned themselves to be, not yet who they desired to be, and the end of this period of limbo meant at some level giving up on these wishes. There was no clear built-in mechanism for ending participation as was found in Gagne's study, but instead, an assessment of circumstances, chances, and opportunities or needing to work through the emotions that was far from neat or displaying any sort of ease of transition.

In his studies on Lolita culture, Masafumi Monden (Monden, 2008, 2013) credits the prosumers of Visual Kei with being the impetus for the popularizing of *Lolita kei* fashion. While Lolita and Visual Kei are separate subcultures, there is much cross-over that occurs partly due to the role of influential stylists and particular Visual Kei artists (e.g. Mana from Malice Mizer) who created costumes as well as founded clothing brands that brought together these audiences. Monden highlights that part of this fashion and aesthetic appeal lies in that it is at once transperiodic as well as 'authentically' and recognizably Japanese. Thus, when it is prosumed outside of Japan there exists a kind of seemingly contradictory phenomenon of it being inauthentic (unlike its 'originally' Japanese version) yet also authentic in a way that speaks to European consumers who link it to a trans-European aesthetic history and worldview that allows them to express differentiation from popular trends in their localities.

Yumiko Iida sees Visual Kei as part of and partially the cause of larger socio-cultural trends that deal with the emergence of image-conscious young men in Japan who explore new masculinity via 'feminine' aesthetic practices and beautification. She argues that, while there is a difference between this type of portrayal and exploration of masculinity in terms of its distancing itself from conventional masculinity, it is with its own limitations. Nevertheless, Iida sees these conscious representations of the self as allowing men "a means to refute silently imposed ideological assignments and cultural expectations to reproduce the conventional masculine order" (Iida, 57, 2006) that remains

dominant in Japan, while at the same time also reconfiguring the focus to the feminine gaze. Therefore, in her opinion, through its symbolic ability to disturb the stability of the portrayal and image of what constitutes the masculine, it does manage to instill a sort of fear over patriarchal orders in terms of what it could entail, mainly in what it would mean for reproductive heteronormativity. Her findings very much relate to one of the tenets of playwork, which is this nonconformity and boundary crossing subjects those who participate in it to criticism by those who feel that the participants are threatening a variety of cultural norms, mainly the authority of the patriarchy-led economy, hence the relegation of their work to the category of 'not proper work.' The ambiguities found in Visual Kei lends it a non-transparent quality that, because is not at once easily coherent, induces an anxiety over 'what is right' about culture.

There is also more evidence of stigma as directly related to Visual Kei as playwork that can be detected in her study. One of the examples of this type of male that Iida mentions is that of the Visual Kei musician, who is "inclined to display sophisticated, sensitive and introverted images broadly associated with 'European' Romantic artistic codes (Iida, 59, 2006)." She goes on to note that there is a judgmental tone surrounding these bands who are "pejoratively called '*bijuaru-kei*'- a sub-category of musicians who are 'visually oriented', and by implication not musically serious, although there is no reason to assume that the quality of music produced is negatively correlated to the attention given to appearance (Iida, 59, 2006)."

Iida also sees the objectives of the use of aesthetic techniques of Visual Kei musicians as linked, not with cross-dressing, but instead as a presentation of new masculinity in which musicians "skillfully combined their feminine appearance with new and attractive images of young adult men, such as independence, gentleness and sensitivity, although admittedly overridden by narcissistic self-awareness of their

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beauty…pioneers of new identities…who no longer comfort themselves by simply following hegemonic masculine ideals, but actively seek and employ aesthetic styles and characteristics conventionally associated with women for their own purposes" (Iida, 59, 2006)

Referencing Masabuchi, who notes that the popular appeal of both Glay and L'arc~en~Ciel can partially be found in their lyrical depictions which reject adulthood, Iida shows how these ideas also extend to the lyrics of Visual Kei music. This is done, not so much in an out-rightly rebellious or superficial way, but in ways which deal with the loss of innocence that is presented as inevitable, a sort of knowledge of the jaded reality that may await them as they become 'adults' in a world that appears to lack spirituality (Masabuchi, 2000). "Presumably, their fans are likely hearing their own inarticulate voices in the groups' songs, sharing similar feelings of pressures, anxieties and frustrations, perhaps stronger in the adolescent male than in female, to enter an adult world where dishonesty, 'dirty' power games and hierachical orders prevail (Iida, 62, 2006)." She then goes on to add that this empathically shared message is made all the more potent with the beautiful appearance of the male musicians, as it "serves as an effective and indispensable currency to advance young men's generational challenge to configure new masculine ideals" (Iida, 62, 2006). Similar ideas along with other readings of the lyrics of Visual Kei music will be further explored in Chapter 5.

In summary of her main argument, "By holding an ambiguous gender position, they relocate their practice to the de-gendered space where alternative identities can be constructed in negotiation with the historical and discursive contexts" (Iida, 63, 2006). Put otherwise, the employment of these 'feminine' aesthetics as found in Visual kei is not towards the purpose of creating solidarity between the genders or to align with the politics of feminism or women, but to cultivate and re-constitute a new form of masculinity, one

that differs from the salaryman corporate masculine identity and the rigid expectations that come along with such life choices. Beauty and aesthetics here are not to be seen as a challenge to male-dominance, but as a new characteristic of value to the masculine.

2.8.4 Visual Kei as Deterritorialized: A Transcultural, Translocal Subculture

In this body of literature, studies that are more anthropological and sociological in nature can be found in which the spread of Visual Kei, which often in of itself was treated as born out of global music culture flows, is examined in localities outside of Japan. Here researchers reveal how the subculture took on specific new meanings as they were prosumed locally, often times in very different ways from practices found in Japan. Yet there remains a specific loaded meaning to it being Japanese in particular within these localities which leant it a double layer as an alternative. Put otherwise, it is consumed very much as a Japanese product although not necessarily in ways that mimic how it is prosumed in Japan.

Using an ethnographic approach, Nadine Heymann examines how as a translocal subculture, Visual Kei was used, read, and practiced as an aesthetic amongst the *Visu* (Visual Kei fans in Germany) as a bodily performance to express non-normative visions and conceptions of gender, desire, and self. While not referring to it as prosumption, the data she presents is abundant with prosumptive processes whereby she reveals how the German fans she encountered (mostly girls or transgender identifying people) consume and reproduce Visual Kei for their own bodily projects as a "*fractious practice* against heteronormative images of bodies and gender…Positions and dispositions of bodies in Visual Kei are not coherent with a naturalized normalized gender dichotomy and hence are able to irritate and unsettle…(Heymann, 6, 2013)."

Meanwhile, Klaudia Adamowicz has suggested that the concept of transculturality is suitable for analyzing the mélange or seemingly contradictory

components found in Visual Kei as it allows for a better understanding of the presence of various elements found in the repertoire that forms Visual Kei. This would prevent having to reduce or separate the elements according to what could seem like their cultures of national origin as well as falling into the trap of seeing them as the result of interculturalism or multiculturalism which still runs the risk of basing things or people on an idea of an original finite cultural locus. She does so by employing the concept of transculturality as developed by Woflgang Welsch, where culture can be thought of as composed of transcultural networks with complex configurations and diverse components that are dynamic and always evolving (Welsch 1998, 2002). These networks are not new, as they are ever evolving, but may have perhaps become intensified in particular periods and thus do not pre-suppose a time when any sort of 'pure' national entity may have existed. Summarizing Welsch on the transculturality present in Japan, "The cultural components which are considered Japanese are in fact very often of foreign origin and their Japaneseness lies in the way they were transformed and then adapted. The final product was very often so different from the original one that we can without a doubt conclude about its Japanese nature" (Adamowicz, 14, 2014).

While Adamowicz's idea of transculturality as a suitable approach for understanding Visual Kei is convincing, especially in the point she makes on how it allows for researchers to avoid the pitfalls of deeming things as identifiably national in their origins, I do feel that when she points to the historical presence of kabuki as an element of proximity that facilitates ease of flow of the use of performative cross-dressing of Visual Kei into Japanese culture, this is not an actually strongly held or easily proved influence on Visual Kei. This is not to say kabuki has zero influence, but just how it does and how artists actually apply techniques or ideas from kabuki needs to be proven and

investigated at a deeper level before such connections can be drawn. This is not something Admowicz alone is guilty of.

One of the common ways in which kabuki is evoked as a historical connection is in the presence of the *onnagata* (female role played by a male actor) in plays. What this sets up is a tempting comparison with the sometimes feminine seeming/coded visual appearance of some band members. For example, Johnson and Kawamoto state (without an explanation of actual examples or evidence from band members themselves) that Visual Kei bands "do not just draw from Western music influences but also local ones, especially with regards to androgynous elements for example the *onnagata* of kabuki and *bishonen* aesthetics of manga" (Johnson and Kawamoto, 2016). Without any empirical evidence, the kabuki comparison only exists as a potential weak link and as an attempt to culturally rationalize androgyny without actually showing just where and how this is done by the artist. In actual general day to day practice, forms, techniques, and philosophy from kabuki is a bit disconnected from the actual practices of Visual Kei performers in their laboring to develop their craft. What I have noted, however, is that there have been several instances of a handful of artists who are likely to evoke kabuki in trying to legitimize or elevate the status of their craft (especially when explaining or defending Visual Kei). But in actual practice, this has yet to be shown to actually have any stronger ties in terms of actually applying the techniques of kabuki to Visual Kei performance.

Therefore, while it might be tempting to see a sort of cultural trace or to draw from Japanese historical examples such as kabuki as explanations for the presence of any sort of cross-gendering performance in the arts, in a similar light to Iida's approach, it is perhaps more beneficial to locate the emergence of these presentations of the body and aesthetic inclinations not to that of kabuki, which does not have a directly traceable path towards Visual Kei and other forms of aesthetic rock, but rather to understand these as

located "not along this highly specialized artistic tradition but within a popular, modern, and capitalist cultural phenomenon that exposes masculine bodies to full-scale commercialization where powerful, inscriptional forces of media-constituted aesthetics are at work (Iida, 2006, 58)."

Hashimoto Miyuki's study provides an 'intercultural analysis' by comparing the fans of Visual Kei in Japan and Austria to that of the otaku and how this shapes identity. Hashimoto notes that much of what characterizes otaku is an investment and intense consumption in "re-creating" their culture (Hashimoto, 87, 2007), thus, seen another way, they are not just consumers, but productive prosumers of the very identity that surrounds their subculture.

However, she also employs a somewhat skewed definition of otaku by insisting they display fetishistic tendencies, have a propensity towards fantasizing, and possess a bond that is sexual in nature to a character they like. Applying psychosexual theory to the consumption of yaoi amongst female otaku, she suggests that they are thought to be fetishistic in a manner which is about denying sexuality on a genital level (Hashimoto, 91, 2007). Hashimoto sees this as the reason for the enjoyment of *yaoi* both amongst female otaku and Visual Kei fans. She does not agree with the way *yaoi* has been interpreted by feminist scholars (Ueno, 2005) where *yaoi* is seen as a means for women to experience liberation from stereotypes about womanhood as they identify with the androgynous characters. Hashimoto instead sees *yaoi* more as a kind of fetishistic consumption which she claims is evident in the sheer amount of pornography found within it. She also sees evidence of fetishism in the fact that *yaoi* is very much prosumed (a term not used by Hashimoto herself) by women: "As followers, many female Otaku are very much immersed in this genre, not just as a reader, but also as a creator. Creativity of fetishism is the source of Otaku culture. Besides Yaoi costume play could be regarded

as an expression of fetishistic creativity" (Hashimoto, 92, 2007). She attempts to prove this by showing the commonalities between otaku practices of cosplay with those found amongst Visual Kei fans, in particular with regards to the way in which fans related to a specific artist they were cosplaying as a 'character' more than an actual person.

Her findings about cosplayers also showed that they enjoyed the activity for reasons such as providing them the ability to transform, allowing them to feel closer to the artist they were emulating, experiencing feeling good about themselves/feeling attractive, as well as the joy of making costumes and sharing their feelings and interests as part of a community. However, she found that Japanese fans in particular liked it for they said it allowed them to experience something apart from their everyday lives and that they also enjoyed the experience of experimenting with another gender.

While less than half of the fans in her study prosumed *yaoi*, it was still something Hashimoto chose to pursue as a point about Visual Kei fans. One big difference she found was the non-anti-social nature of Visual Kei fans, who in contrast to the stereotypes she presented about otaku, had good social relationships with friends and family and had experiences of 'real' romantic relationships.

Kato Ayako provides an exploration of the expansion and popularity of Visual Kei abroad. While she notes that there are there have been Japanese acts that have found some success (though rarely long-lasting) abroad, the case of Visual Kei differs as it enjoys popularity as a whole genre, and a specifically 'Japanese' one at that. That it is liked as a Japanese cultural product was unprecedented, especially given that Visual Kei did not find success by localizing its content for the consumer.

Her study explores the background of the emergence of this phenomenon to which she sees the role of the internet as pivotal in having established the foundations via which Japanese culture became popular. The internet also allowed for Japanese musicians

to eliminate much of the promotional and media exposure costs that previously were a factor that hindered their ability to go abroad. Thus, there was already a market ready to consume Japanese products abroad due to the popularity of anime, manga, and other pop-culture products. Therefore, a genre like Visual Kei, which is not intentionally marketed or made to appeal to the local scenes abroad is prosumed (although Kato does not use such terminology) and enjoyed precisely for its 'Japanese' seeming sensibilities and aspects.

Kato also notes that the grouping of Visual Kei with other Japanese culture products (anime, manga, games, cosplay) underneath an umbrella of a type of related pop-culture set is something that can be observed abroad namely in the form of anime festivals. This is not something that can be witnessed in Japan (Kato, 83, 2009).

Reyes Navarro's (2021) study of Visual Kei as a subculture in Chile provides a well-presented example of a study of how Visual Kei is practiced, transformed, and understood beyond its Japanese context. She accounts for how it is a product of Japan and consumed as such, but situates this within the context of the history of subcultures in Chile. In doing so, she avoids the pitfalls of depicting this as a 'lesser' or inauthentic form of Visual Kei, but reveals how fans of the genre use Visual Kei creatively as a source material or template.

Reyes Navarro makes a rarely stated yet highly important point that I wish to further in this dissertation that pertains to the issue of a youth bias or homologies of youth and subculture as applied or assumed regarding the Visual Kei audience that others like McCleod and Seibt have perpetuated. She states, "Participation extends well beyond their members' adult years, and they continue to identify with the groups, although news reports and magazine articles tend to focus on adolescents when covering them" (Reyes Navarro, 17-18, 2021). In doing so, Reyes Navarro considers long-term participation and

identity over time and shows that subcultures have significance not just to young people and in terms of notions of rebellion, but they can have meaning for anyone in a longitudinal and more banal sense. I extend these ideas in the final content chapter of this research when I look at how Visual Kei has affected both those who have chosen to stay or leave over the long term.

In his study, Chen analyzed the internationalization strategies of Visual Kei bands that went abroad and concluded that two noticeable strategies tended to be adopted— either that of 'standard internalization' or in his original terminology, that which he calls the 'ouroboros strategy' (Chen 2019). Standard internationalization refers to a linear process and is about a mature product (in this case, bands) that seeks to acquire new consumers abroad for an already established product (band/music/performances/merchandise). On the other hand, the ouroboros (employed as a metaphor for circulatory patterns adopted from the symbol of a serpent eating its own tail) strategy is nuanced in its objectives, as it may include cultural goals such as soft power, diplomacy, place branding, etc., is circular, and includes both domestic and international market expansion. It can occur at any time in a band's career and is not necessarily applicable only to mature brands/products/established bands. It also involves a transformation in the cultural and symbolic capital of the product for re-consumption amongst its domestic audience.

Obi Yuko in her study of fan identity points out the difference between group identity (*bangya*) and individual identity (Visual Kei fan) which she says fans apply as an internal logic to solve the dilemma of identification amongst Western fans, depending on the context of consumption (Obi 2016).

2.8.5 Socio-Historical Approaches to Music, Genre Studies

One of the few works that directly pertains to one of the main arguments I will attempt to make on the topic of Visual Kei as a prosumed subculture is echoed by Kashiwagi Yasunori in his article on the history of Visual Kei. Kashiwagi sees the birth, gestations, and continuity of Visual Kei into the present as a result of no single thing or creditable to one particular band or era. He also feels that by making the common starting point of Visual Kei attributable to the band X JAPAN, as is commonly done, we run the risk of overemphasizing the importance of one actor when instead, what should be highlighted is the totality of many small actors, the media, the fans, and the other trends in music of the times that are of influence. In other words, it is the on-going prosumption of Visual Kei that keeps it alive and creative. While he does not refer to this as prosumption, to him it is a cultural phenomenon that is constantly being reproduced by a multitude of actors (Kashiwagi 2011).

Kashiwagi (although only in presentation as a future topic of investigation) begins to try to answer the question as to why Visual Kei has managed to survive for this long when other genres, movements in music, and music subcultures have died out. He proposes that this may have something to do with the existence of internal dichotomies that co-exist in the form of binary oppositions within the genre that are detectable even from the inception of the genre. He notes that even the most influential actors in Visual Kei possess these dualities and thus Visual Kei is multi-dimensional in the appeal of its contents. It is for this reason that Visual Kei can always incorporate the new into its repertoire all too easily without having to deal with issues of authenticity. He ends by saying that, while Visual Kei may be a method of music, it goes beyond genre and is a form of Japanese culture (Kashiwagi 2011).

I will expand on some of these ideas in my proposal for a method for

understanding Visual Kei in terms of its cumulative culture as a template that will be introduced in Chapter 5. I will also argue along similar lines that authenticity of content in terms of sonic or visual elements is not a major concern within the genre (although authenticity is still important in other contexts) and that this in itself is a characteristic of Visual Kei. Furthermore, by understanding Visual Kei as a prosumed subculture that is still on-goingly reproduced, this will allow for a better understanding of Visual Kei in the long term, both in terms of over the life course and as a genre/subculture with a fairly long history that extends even into the present moment.

What is absent in the extant literature is a comprehensive study that links artists to the music industry as well as to consumers, that also accounts for the diversity and eclecticism of its contents and characteristics, the sociality it engenders and its solidification and continuity as a complex (sub)cultural phenomenon. There is a lack of study of any aspects on the side of production, performers, and the industry, as research has focused on consumer reception and consumer-focused subcultural participation. Most of the analyses of performers or products have been textual and have not involved much of the actual voices and perspectives of the artists. Most importantly, there is no research that looks at Visual Kei from the perspective of the work of the artists and how this effects their lives. Also, while fan practices and culture has been researched, often times the relationship between fans and artists is overlooked or treated as a distant one in which contact, communication, and co-production is avoided in favor of fan-centric activities such as cosplay and musical reception. Though fans are also credited as productive of culture, they are not linked back to the actual flow of ideas and practices that inform the overall development of Visual Kei.

2.9 Definitions and Descriptions of Visual Kei

The most common route scholars have employed as a means of defining Visual Kei is to describe it as simply being musically too diverse to qualify as a genre sonically and so they believe the link among Visual Kei bands lies in the use of visualelements that accompany the music.

For example, this is present in Adamowicz's definition of Visual Kei where, while adopting a broad definition, she points towards it not being a genre of music but instead a 'style' in Japanese music: "bands which belong to this style can represent very different genres of music and they can change it during their musical career. The distinctive feature of the phenomenon is that all bands use visual effects understood in a very broad sense." (Adamowicz, 16, 2014). Similarly, Koizumi also highlights it as a category applied to the aesthetics of style: "Visual pop/rock originally meant rock bands which attach great importance to visual as well as musical aspects. However, this term has been used recently to refer to a genre of Japanese popular music in which male band members put on theatrical make-up and dress" (Koizumi, 110, 2002). Such definitions refrain from emphasizing it solely as a musical genre and suggest instead that the main unifying factor lies in the realm of appearance. The above descriptions still adopt a somewhat broad enough approach in which no one particular style of aesthetics is favored. Although a bit lacking in the department of the actual discussion of the musicality, this is a safe and inclusive enough definition that allows for a variety of styles to be subsumed under the category of Visual Kei.

However, there are scholars who adopt a similar approach, but highlight what they see as non-normative gendered aspects of appearance. Chen, for example includes androgyny as a characteristic element:

"Performers dress in elaborate costumes that convey a gothic, androgynous aesthetic. While visual kei is usually characterized by hard rock music, it is common for visual kei musicians to perform in other genres including electronic, popular ballads, and *enka* (traditional Japanese songs). Thus, it is one of only a few music genres in the world that are not necessarily defined by acoustic forms, but rather, the appearance of the artist" (Chen, 3–4, 2019).

Instead of androgyny, Gagne chooses to highlight what he sees as 'cross-dressing' as a common element of Visual Kei's content. Here, he describes Visual Kei as not simply a genre of music but as a kind of aesthetic "that combines fantastical imagery, flamboyant costuming and performance, and frequently an element of cross-dressing by mostly male band members" (Gagne 2013).

In addition to sonic diversity, visual emphasis, and gendered performance aspects, there are also those who adopt a more pastiche-like approach by linking visual kei's aesthetics to other forms of pop culture. "The most pronounced aspect of visual kei is the elaborate gender-crossing cosplay of the band members, typically inspired by the visual and thematic elements of Goth, Punk and Glam Rock as well as by Japanese manga, anime and computer games" (McLeod, 309, 2013).

What often happens, as McLeod has demonstrated in his attempt to summarize the characteristics of Visual Kei, is that the most exotic or provocative aspects to the person who reads it (here, that of a non-normative gender performance that he terms cross-dressing) becomes the quality that defines Visual Kei. Furthermore, the attempt to understand the multitude of contents becomes tied up with any sort of commonalities one can draw the aesthetic to— in this case manga and games. Manga and games may very well and do function as inspiration for artistic and aesthetic output, but they should not be assumed as the most pronounced ones simply because they are known to be 'Japanese'

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and therefore, in the mind of the researcher, become the logical basis for the tools of the artist. If this is to be done and taken as a norm within the definition of Visual Kei, evidence that reveals the majority of bands do see a link between their artistic output with that of games, manga, and anime should follow.

There is yet another problematic method of defining Visual Kei, which is to translate its content into a perceived or assumed Western equivalent of style or music genre. Whether consciously, condescendingly, or simply because it is not their focus or they have a particular point about Visual Kei they wish to make, some scholars have adopted this narrow approach. Skutlin, for example, calls it "a form of mainstream Japanese glam rock with some Goth trappings" (Skutlin, 42, 2016) and Steve McClure has written that it tends towards "gothic theatricality" (McClure, 120, 1998). This is also a common method employed in non-academic journalism. Dave Gibson, on describing the band X Japan, wrote that "the band's androgynous looks can be attributed as much to contemporary Japanese pop music as to the eccentric costumes of '70s David Bowie and '80s hair bands. It is precisely this hodgepodge of international styles that makes visual rock such a noteworthy new genre." (Gibson, 1998). Because this is often done for the sake of quick clarity for an assumed readership, which is understandable when the focus of the subject is not Visual Kei, but this approach remains problematic for it perpetuates the myth that Japanese music forms are merely localized versions or inauthentic versions of their global or Western counterparts.

There are also scholars who include what they deem to be the function of the use of visuals into their definitions. Seibt is one of the many who make the seemingly 'logical' jump to understand Visual Kei as having emerged as a localized form of glam rock and other forms of rock citing Kiss, Twisted Sister, Hanoi Rocks, and Motley Crue as heavily influencing the scene (Seibt, 250, 2012). Other misunderstandings by Seibt include his

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brash categorization of the entire genre as split into two generations which he sees as not only different in their musical origins (the first as straight-up localized forms of Western rock), what he deems as the second generation is defined by historically inaccurate and conveniently vague factors such as the second generation making "gender ambiguities… [of] central importance for their stage (and off-stage) personas" (Seibt, 251, 2012) but just exactly how this is of importance to them oof-stage is never elaborated upon. Subscribing to the commonly held belief that it is the visual elements that define what it means to be a Visual Kei band, he sees the use of aesthetics by bands as "the main instrument to evoke those fantastical imaginary worlds that for their fans serve as an escape from their everyday lives" (Seibt, 249, 2012).

While Seibt adopts a functionalist logic that implicates the audience, Matter also sees the visuals as serving a function, but one that he deems superficial. He begins his definition by highlighting that there exists a broad variation of musical and lyrical content. Then he goes on to say that "the raison d'etre of the genre itself is the desire to "shock" the audience visually with pomp and pageantry" (Matter, 117, 2008), which he sees as evident in the use of aesthetics that he believes function and exist only at a superficial and ornamental level, as artists "perform neither theatrical shows…not violent stage acts" (Matter, 117, 2008). To him, such a performance lacks attractiveness to the Anglophonic audience who he believes prefer to watch bands in which members "actually act out their personas" (Matter, 119, 2008). While I do not mean to glorifying the use of violence or self-harm, several bands such as Dir en grey and d.p.s have performed live acts which include self-mutilation. Furthermore, bands like Malice Mizer are highly theatrical in all aspects of their performance beyond the realm of costume. I believe this shortsightedness on the part of Matter has to do with the fact that he included mostly only *Datsu-V* and *Soft-Bi* bands into his analysis which is fine, were he aware of that, but he takes them to

be representative of all of Visual Kei.

There are also scholars who attempt to come up with a more holistic definition. Reyes Navarro, for example, describes Visual Kei in the following manner: "It is characterized by theatricality in the artists' images that is heightened through makeup and clothing, high emotionality in the music and its rendition, and close ties to their fanbase" (Reyes Navarro, 39, 2021). Although it is a bit unclear what these close ties to the fanbase consist of—indeed some bands or individual band members would qualify—what she attempts to do here is to come up with a definition broad enough such that it can be applied to any point in the history and to any subgenre or substyle within found Visual Kei. I believe this is the beginning of a more thoughtful attempt at defining and describing what Visual Kei consists of and I will expand upon this line of holistic reasoning to include more of the socio-historical aspects in the developing of a working definition which is discussed later in Chapter 5.

Finally, there is one more definition that is worth mentioning, for it touches upon the sonic aspects in a manner that others have yet to pick up on. While Johnson and Kawamoto mainly agree with the aforementioned emphasis on visuals being the main uniting feature, they (or rather more so Kawamoto) also hint at there being some musical elements as being distinctive in the genre. "These musical elements…are present in many Visual Kei songs, and the audience might recognize such songs as visual-kei without actually seeing the performers visual and characteristic appearance" (Johnson and Kawamoto, 209, 2016). This is a point that is often rarely made in studies on Visual Kei, as researchers have tended to see the genre only in terms of a visual emphasis. I will pursue this idea which says that there is a reason Visual Kei can be sonically identified despite the eclectic mix and presence of a variety of genres more in Chapters 5 and 7 by proposing a yet-to be discussed framework for analyzing Visual Kei. In Chapter 5, I will

introduce the definition, and empirical examples of its application and how it is used in the actual practice of a musician's craft and work will be given in Chapter 7.

As with the overall goal of this research project, a more comprehensive definition or framework that can account the diversity and eclecticism of sonic and visual content, sociohistorical applicability that accounts for change and continuity, acknowledgment of the role of prosuming actors (music industry, artists, fans) and something of its qualities as a subcultural phenomenon, will be developed to avoid some of the pitfalls of description and definition as have been shown in this section.

The clear focus on consumer reception, textual interpretation of contents, and gender and fan culture shows that overall, most of the existing literature on Visual Kei is focused on consumption, and while consumption will continue to be an important aspect of understanding any subculture or leisure-based activity, the lack of any studies on production or the perspective of the artists skews this view of Visual Kei as socially relevant as a kind of play. This is indeed a vital aspect of it, but by focusing on prosumption, this enables us to understand how it is also for many, not just play, but very much work and an activity defined by creating marketable products, yet embedded in notions of play and consumerism. Focusing on prosumption also allows us to understand that for many involved, whether fan or musician, both are equally involved with emergent and now established forms of the means of prosumption on the internet and in such spaces "are neither producers (i.e., artists) nor consumers (i.e., viewers or audiences) but facilitators of the very process of prosumption" (Nakajima, 565, 2012).

Chapter 3 Methods and Methodology

I work towards building an empirical base that consists of a framework that encompasses a larger set of actors to account for a more holistic picture of how Visual Kei is assembled. The qualitative methods used to gather information and source data from for this research can be divided into three main components: Ethnographic methods, (in particular participant observation, auto-ethnography and digital ethnography), one on one personal interviews (with both consumers and producers of Visual Kei) and music media analysis. In this chapter, I will discuss how these methods were employed, their validity in terms of this research, as well as some of their shortcomings.

3.1 Ethnographic Methods

3.1.1 Auto-ethnography

I begin the exploration of methods with auto-ethnography because this is literally where everything that informs the rest of my methods and the going-about of this study begins; the majority of the insights and basic information and the initial interest for embarking on this research was based largely on my own insider knowledge gained over the course of my own long-term, personal involvement with Visual Kei. While the more formal aspects of data-gathering began in 2011 with the MA research project and continued up to about the end of 2018, I have supplemented this with my own reflections, involvement and knowledge of the scene which begins in 1997, first, simply as an avid consumer of alternative music scenes. This was at a time when Visual Kei was at its height, consumed as 'contemporary popular culture' in a very much mainstream fashion.

While much has changed since then and it is now better described a subcultural niche market segment, I was from the years between 2004 up till the present, involved in Visual Kei in a very different way through my work at an entertainment events and artist management *jimusho*. For the most part, my work consisted of three main tasks; I was an

assistant to the main artist manager and I also served as a translator/interpreter when necessary. Also, I was asked to edit and write print and digital media content as well as to provide consultation for lyrics whenever French or English was to be used.

These experiences have allowed me to understand both the sides of production and consumption, although I will say that my fan/consumer experiences have become deeply affected by my own sense of profession that I had to or have come to cultivate. Despite understanding, experiencing and being able to relate to much of what fans tell me, I am not able to relate to them in a truly egalitarian or earnest way anymore because of how my work has come to shape my understanding of things from an at times, oppositional point of view.

I do not at all mean for this to sound condescending or elitist, and perhaps I therefore will also add that my work experiences have by no means made me better or more knowledgeable about the entirety of Visual Kei. There are indeed many passionate fans or scholars who have amassed a library of knowledge and know more than I ever will. But what I wish to express here is that whatever I do know has been filtered by whatever experiences both pleasant and unpleasant that occurred throughout my working life.

Furthermore, as someone involved directly in artist management, much of my work required me to actually keep fans at arms-length and this meant that for the entire time until I began doing this research, I avoided becoming close to fans and had to treat their friendly gestures and attempts to talk to me with caution. I still believe that the majority of fans are respectful of boundaries and do not intend for problems to occur, but being in artist management sometimes meant dealing with the ones who did go 'too far'; stalkers, threats to harm either the artist or themselves if they did not get what they wanted, propositions and bribes for all kinds of opportunities to meet with the artist, fans who

would lie or cheat to somehow gain something 'better' or to be closer to their stars, these are just some of the issues to name a few. Neither am I defending management either, who in my experience can be very dismissive of fans and abusive in their own working practices. Work for me was only as enjoyable or pleasant as the artist I was assigned to and their management team were. When it was a team of honest people who were professional yet able to be kind, who treated fans and staff with respect and enjoyed what it is that they do, then work itself was a joy. But when the team believed themselves to be on some pedestal of greatness and felt the need to exercise that by being abusive to whoever they felt was 'below' them, then work was a nightmare.

Treating fans with caution is a position many in the entertainment industry will find themselves in, regardless of genre. This happens whether by outright instructions or by subtle coercion by your peers and the atmosphere of general working culture. Even revealing things that may be normal or understood as natural to insiders to fans can be akin to a breach of trust, especially to the artist with whom I worked directly with. Perhaps this is true of any position, but all the more so when you are in direct contact and communication with the artist and doubly so in a scene like the Visual Kei one where secrets are abundant and egalitarianism is not the norm.

I can easily illustrate examples in other music scenes where relations between staff, bands and fans are far more egalitarian. For example, it is common for the audience in other scenes to talk to the bands and have casual uchiage (drinking parties) together after lives where there is no party in charge regulating and monitoring communications. In Visual Kei this does not take place unless it is turned into a regulated paid event in which management will be organizing how communication is delegated or it is happening off the books eg. the fan has found a way through mutual acquaintances to attend some kind of gathering or worse (from the point of view of management), the fan has paid

someone for an introduction. Even *irimachi/demachi* (waiting for the band to enter or exit the venue) is either formally banned by the live house[7] or the *jimusho* as having to attend to fans in this unplanned for manner not only causes lapses in the time schedule, it is problematic in that in that moment, the artist is in between private and work modes, yet obligated by fans to provide them with 'service' (attention, conversation, accept their letters and presents). Also, because no contractual understanding or exchange is made (as it would if this were an instore event where in exchange for the purchase of a CD one gets to shake hands and converse very briefly with the artist while management monitors the time and content) it becomes a battle of the boldest and the fan who wants to take up as much time as they dare to, will. For these reasons, the once common practice of irimachi and demachi have been banned by many with the justification that it is a *meiwaku koui* (nuisance causing behavior/action) to the surrounding tenants of the venues and that the band are 'working' and need to move quickly. While I delve into these issues more later, what I wish to make clear here is that egalitarian face to face communication in a casual manner is not the norm in Visual Kei by any means. For in this business, the artist is made to be an exclusive, elusive commodity.

Out of ethical caution and in order to avoid a conflict of interest, I have not interviewed or included concrete examples with the artists who I worked and continue to work for. I have tried to be quite general in my representation of examples, even using artists who I may not like or know personally. However, I would like to clarify that as I received salary for my work and am expected to guard the privacy of those whom I had a professional relationship with, they have been excluded from this research. I do use my

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[7] When the live house bans these practices, it is more likely because this has a direct relation with traffic or crowding problems that could result in accidents or complaints by the neighborhood/residents. However, they are also working in tandem with management to eliminate any interruption, unregulated or informal opportunities for conversation to take place between artist and fan.

work knowledge towards this research in a more general sense, just simply not as concrete case examples. I do use some examples from cases or information I obtained during my work that do not concern artists to whom I was professionally obligated to.

There is another way in which my perspectives are informed by my working experience, in that I understand quite well how production is as much an artistic endeavor as it is a commodity and if anything, the industry, its structures and normalization of the commodity logic is overwhelmingly able to shape the art such that the final product that ends up in the hands or for the consumption of the consumer is often a result of heavy compromise.

Thus, the final product that reaches the fans that they attach meaning, significance, invest their time, money, emotions and effort towards may be something that artists themselves feel at odds with. Fans are deliberately, for the most part, left out of the struggles, politics and process of production. They may be given selective glimpses into production at times as band members show images and write blog entries or from articles or post tidbits from the 'still in production' phase of a product and there are 'behind the scenes' footage and documentaries, but they are rarely aware (sometimes perhaps only years later) of the actual ways in which a product is made and assembled in the entirety of the process and this is as normal as it is intentional.

Ultimately the success of Visual Kei is partly due to the performers ability to elevate themselves into 'artist', something desirable and fantastical and therefore, revealing every human flaw and error that goes into the labor of this is almost counter intuitive; to the producers, an ideal consumer is one that is kept happy, one whose support can always be elicited upon who is not armed with the knowledge of any 'injustices' and will attempt to meddle on the side of production.

However, fans are by no means ignorant or unaware. Perhaps most of the time,

management and producers continuously underestimates the ability, willingness and the navigational skills possessed by fans (I would say increasingly so due to the internet) to 'find shit out'. Furthermore, producers have little power to actually control fan readings, networks and practices that fans may generate outside of specific areas where management may have some power. This is of course not unique to Visual Kei, but I would argue that the un-egalitarian nature of its fan-artist/management relations and the nature of it as a product of otherworldliness aggravate this disjuncture as much as it may seem to be a norm in a variety of entertainment fields that sell the product that is desire. Artists and fans are therefore perpetually balancing various roles and positions; performers are always caught in between the presentation of themselves as artists who are human yet 'superhuman' in their artistry, they are also commodities who sell their labor and themselves as part of the product. Similarly, fans also walk the line between consumers of leisure, connoisseurs of music, informing themselves to the best of their abilities, investing their time, effort, money and sometimes even more than that, into a product in which they have little say in the process of.

Yet, despite this, both fans and bands continue to devote much of themselves to this scene, presenting and communicating themselves to one another in ways that they continue to find of importance, of meaning and value. Yet outside of the subculture, they are demonized and trivialized for their choices to partake in it. It is in this sense that there is nothing 'leisurely' or 'playful' about their dedication to Visual Kei.

> "Choosing to devote time and effort to what many may simply see as what was supposed to be an activity done for 'fun' was stressful, filled with tension and the need for justification. Participants can often feel a lingering sense of uneasiness and the need to be reconciled with the self constantly. Subcultural participation can be both a source of pride and shame at the same time' (Malick

2013, 24).

I myself know this feeling all too well; it is so much easier to say I work in the music industry then the Visual Kei industry, because this way I don't have to explain myself or be subjected to any sort of judgement that I suspect will come.

In many ways, that was the catalyst for this research. Why did we feel ashamed or why were we made to feel that shame about something we actually saw value in? I quote at length from my MA thesis here because all of this still holds true to this investigation and still captures my thoughts and feelings on this matter well:

"What was the source of this pathologizing of something that deep inside of me I felt was actually a progressive source or stimulus for various facets of self-exploration? Had Visual Kei not brought to my life some of the people I call my best friends, broadened my perspectives and allowed for me to empathize with the very real struggles of people who did not fit so easily into the system? It was from these very personal and immediate feelings that I decided to look more deeply into investigating these issues using the most straightforward means possible, by conversing with these people themselves and by examining why they do what they do." (Malick 2013, 25)

Thus, while I have listed (later in this chapter) as an ethnographic method "participant observation", which I did conduct, a lot of the background information that led me to the investigation of these issues was not so much a result of participant observation, but is perhaps better termed 'observing participant[8]' as they were not obtained upon entry into a field of investigation, but that a slightly different dynamic of relations to field and subject informs my position with regards to my research. I consider

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[8] I thank Gulin Kayhan for her suggestions for this methodological approach and John McCreery for introducing the idea to us, although I am aware the concept is not one he conceived on his own.

my position along the lines of the notion of a critical insider, one in which "researchers may sometimes find themselves positioned especially close to those they study and enables the tentative development of valuable common lessons about the probable implications of researching from such a position" (Hodkinson 2005, 134). I believe that this position not only allows me to better situate a sense of what might be a historical or cultural context where there is a lack of one, but it also allows for a particular kind of critique to emerge regarding previous research that has been written on Visual Kei by researchers who develop an understanding of the genre's history mainly via text or ones doing participant observation in a more classic sense of the word. Furthermore, as expressed by a fellow alternative leisure insider, this "close positionality enables me to write something *meaningful, yet, be critically evaluative* about those scenes and genres and their relationships to…leisure and culture" (Spracklen 2014, 4).

I would like to add too that if readers believe that my insider status will lead to this being some kind of 'in defense of' type study of Visual Kei then they are quite wrong. As much as I wanted to convey what was meaningful about it to the people who it mattered to, I have not done the job of white-washing its image by conveniently shying away from topics, incidents and elements in the subculture that I have suspected some other researchers conveniently left out. I endeavor to show as far as tangible data will allow me that like any deep investigation of a field should generate, shared culture, consumer activity and the economies in which these exchanges take place are rife with tension and 'problematic' behaviors. I believe it was very necessary to bring up topics that fans or bands may not even want outsiders to know about for they may end up making them look bad, especially in the case of individual incidents which of course, should never be taken as representative. Rather than trying to strike a balance between both positive and negative aspects of the scene, I believe it was more important to simply tell the truth;

that these practices and the problems it caused occurred and these of course do not translate into a necessary cancelation of anything that is of value and meaning to prosumers on a whole.

3.1.2 Participant Observation, Fieldwork

Live houses, concert venues and *senmonten* (specialist stores), are the main physical sites in which Visual Kei is performed and consumed. These are not just sites in which a passive audience witnesses and active stage spectacle, but an interactive presentation that is prosumed together by an assemblage of interacting parties; fans, artist, various aspects of stagecraft, lights, effects, security personnel, management, the particular nature of the different venues all come together to make the moments of the show. Live after live, performance after performance, this is how subculture is created, enacted and where it comes to life.

This is also where people present themselves, enact their visions and desires, attempt to come close to the sublime and interact with one another. For the performer, performance can have a very personal and emotional dimension to it, for these are the moments that their artistry and skill are on display, in the flesh. The stage and performance for some are not just about entertaining and being entertained, but outlets for crafting meaning, testing one's limits and reaffirming one's existence.

At these sites, I conducted participant observation and had informal conversations. These then functioned as tangible evidence to the collection of narratives gathered via interviews and provided a window to view what kind of behaviors and practices are undisclosed or perhaps difficult to verbalize.

Fieldwork at these performance sites is also vital in providing ethnographic data for the representations of the consumer practices within the live space. What kind of face to face performances and interactions between performer and audience occur, 'everyday'

rituals and norms, the kinds of expected behaviors and tacit agreements that form the live-house going and participatory culture are best viewed here.

In addition to concert fieldwork, I also conducted participant observation at other social, production and performance sites in order to show how Visual Kei is not merely a temporal leisure activity, but one in which extends beyond the moments of performance and well into other areas of life for prosumers. This is all the more apparent in the case of band members and other producers for whom Visual Kei is also labor, career and livelihood.

3.1.3 Virtual-ethnography

There are two types online resources that I reference, the first in the form of social networking/media, individual account type platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Ameblo, YouTube, niconico Live, Instagram etc. and the second in the form of the anonymous internet boards 2ch and tanuki[9]. As previously mentioned, while interviews generate a very conscious and self-reflexive kind of narrative due to the nature and setting the interview may induce, online spaces, though not void of this, engender different kinds of opinions to emerge and the purpose of analyzing them is to depict in a more holistic sense what people feel and think about the music scenes they are involved in through a different filter. Thus, combining these various sources provides a more well-rounded, richer variation of data from which I can then begin to attempt to analyze via discourse tracing (LeGreco and Tracy 2009).

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[9] Tanuki an anonymous internet board that contains thousands of threads and is used exclusively for Visual Kei related topics.

3.2 Interviews and Gathering Statements

Building upon the initial interviews I conducted during my MA research which focused more on consumers of Visual Kei, including those, I have completed a total of 76 semi-structured interviews. 34 of these were with fans and 42 with producers of Visual Kei. I increased in particular the amount of interviews with Visual Kei artists and people who work in the Visual Kei industry including roadies, artist managers, magazine writers, tour managers, eventers, hair and makeup artists, costume designer, an inhouse copyrights lawyer and an Artist and Relations executive (some of these people were once artists themselves). This was necessary, as while I did interview some from the side of production previously, the MA research was focused more on consumption and therefore interviews with fans outnumbered those on the side of production (for interviewee details please see Appendix A).

These interviews took place in a number of places; cafes, restaurants, bars, once in karaoke room, private clubs, offices, sometimes in the homes of informants where they showed me the things like collections, memorabilia or their equipment, tools and gear etc. Some of these were recorded when I was given permission but there were several instances I simply took notes because the interviewee had either specified that they did not want any physical evidence left, although they did not mind talking to me. Aside from where I explicitly mention the official band member name, band name or company, all traces to the actual person themselves has been obscured through the use of pseudonyms (either chosen by interviewees themselves or when non-specified, I came up with).

In an attempt to gain a wide understanding and presentation of the evolution of the subculture, the ages of the interviewees and eras in which they were active in Visual Kei were never limited as I welcomed prosumers from all generations and demographic backgrounds. This made sense in terms of the research project which was to understand

generational and experiential differences and changes in the fandom and music industry. Also, because I do delve into some class issues (with regards to how this shapes leisure and life choices and experiences, particularly that of the influence of the family) I included people from a variety of backgrounds in the sample group in terms of social class, education, work experience and family composition. I also did not limit it only to people who were currently participating in Visual Kei but those who had left the fandom or quit the industry. This was done to highlight how subculture affiliation affected them and whether it was relevant over the space of a life course.

The majority of fan interviews were attained through snowball sampling where I started with fans I had already known and I then asked those fans to introduce me to more. The same thing happened with interviews with artists, but as for music industry staff, I secured some of these interviews through contacts I had made from my work experience. Overall it was never difficult to find candidates to interview, especially for fans as most people were more than happy to talk about their interests. I would say though that there were definitely some topics they may have been shy or hesitant to reveal their thoughts or opinions on[10] and I would not press them to speak on the topic if they did not show an interest in going there, but for every shy fan there was, there were easily others who would talk about such topics as well.

Interviews with fans more or less were done according to a guide I made, for I intended to go through the chronological process of their fandom which began with how

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[10] This occurred sometimes with regards to usage of anonymous internet boards or their knowledge rumors or scandals. With one producer interview, I had to exercise caution as to not go into examples or issues concerning a particular company he had personal problems with. With some band members, I also had to act like I had not heard or known of scandals or rumors concerning them. I would say this was not an intentional act of 'playing dumb', but rather a deliberate exercise of caution out of courtesy. So rather than putting myself in the position of having to act like I did not know, I avoided bring up the relevant concrete information about such issues unless they did so first.

they became fans leading up to their present state. The goal of the interviews was to find out what they valued or found vital about Visual Kei, how they consumed it (both in terms of their material practices and in terms of their time and efforts), their feelings about performers, fans and the subculture and fandom, as well as to understand how their consumption effected their lives or influenced their perspectives.

Interviews with producers differed in that while there was some topic overlap with the fan interviews, the point of these was more to understand their roles in whatever realm of production they occupied and to understand how and why they had made the choice to work in the Visual Kei industry. I also inquired into their feelings about music, their labor, how they felt about consumers, and I tried to understand their particular career or path struggles. Like the fans, I was also interested in seeing how subcultural identification/affiliation effected their larger sense of self outside of their work.

In some cases, I was able to conduct follow-up interviews, which also provided the data for analyzing prosumption over time, revealing how subculture effects people in a longitudinal sense. Most of the interviews averaged around two to three hours long, with the longest one running for six hours. The first official interview I conduced took place in 2011 and the last was in 2018.

In addition to interviews, I also include narratives from more casual conversations I had with some people as well, some of these were attained on site during participant observation sessions and during presentations of my research. These were never formal, structured or even intentional, but arose simply when these conversational opportunities presented themselves. I have included these in the sampling of narratives, because I believe they are a vital source of information in that they are a bit more spontaneous, the subject's thoughts and words therefore differently filtered and slightly freer from the constraints or particular pressures that a one on one interview can have.

Because these narratives cannot be considered as interviews, it is for this reason that I have listed in the title of this section 'gathering statements' as that was quite literally what I did with the bits of conversations that such opportunities brought.

Interviews of course allow for issues to be probed at a deeper level where the subject is allowed to explain things as clearly as they are comfortable with or able to. Interviews may be one of the best sources of information as they allow us to understand people, their perspectives and feelings about themselves and those around them, but I do believe that the information and insight they provide us should be treated as a viewpoint or particular public presentation of an individual as they are willing to disclose, as opposed to seeing them as simple, factual truth. I have therefore tried my best to frame these as evidence of individual experiences and feelings rather than to use them as *the* explanations for the state of things.

3.3 Music Media Analysis

At the previously mentioned sites, one can listen to music, watch live performances and experience Visual Kei in action, and even though they are vital sites of Visual Kei, they are not the only tangible aspects of it or the only means by which people prosume Visual Kei. Therefore, in addition to concert and event fieldwork and participant observation, I also conducted music media analysis both the formal (official) and informal (fan-made, personal/private use) formats. This consists of video footage (television programs, documentaries, music videos, live footage, YouTube channels, fan made videos etc.), music publications (such as magazines, newspapers, biographies, autobiographies, free-papers, flyers, mooks[11], pamphlets), product analysis (music, lyrics, visuals aspects and other aspects of 'style' that produce affect) as well as looking at non-academic

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[11] A mook is a combination of book and magazine in appearance and format.

publications and internet resources such as blogs, websites and various social media platforms. As these form the basis by which Visual Kei is consumed, I believe they function just as importantly as other traditionally thought of as first-hand sources of reference and meaning. They are also important to look at for many prosumers may not always be attending lives or attending them in the same capacities. Some people may be listening, watching, reading and talking about Visual Kei avidly without even going to lives often, which is likely the further from city centers one is, and all the more so for fans abroad. They may not be the focus of this study, but they are important in the larger picture, especially given that virtual ethnography was an important method in this research and the virtual life of subcultures is becoming increasingly inseparable from the 'real' in person happenings and events.

By utilizing these three methods in combination, I have gathered a variety of views and 'histories' to show how Visual Kei has developed, is reproduced and is lived through the products and people who prosume Visual Kei. With this, we now turn to an exploration of the very beginnings of these histories.

Chapter 4 What is Visual Kei?

4.1 What is Visual Kei?

Because Visual Kei has yet to be vigorously researched, this chapter attempts to build an empirical base by addressing its contents, the actors and institutions involved in the phenomenon, and how and why it is prosumed. Here I aim to answer the questions: What is Visual Kei, how has it evolved, and why has it endured? How and why do people engage with it? I also attempt to investigate some new ways in which we can conceive of this phenomenon in addition to existing concepts such as subculture, participatory culture, scene, etc.

As has been mentioned in the literature review section, what is absent in the extant literature is a comprehensive study that links artists to the music industry and to consumers that also accounts for the diversity and eclecticism of its contents and characteristics, the sociality it engenders, and its solidification and continuity as a complex (sub)cultural phenomenon. There is a lack of studies that focus on the side of production, performers, and the industry, as research has thus far tended to center on consumer reception, attempts at interpreting its performative meanings through the lenses of gender and identity, and on its media products. Given this, I work towards building a framework that encompasses a larger set of actors to account for a more holistic picture of how Visual Kei is assembled and prosumed and of how it shapes the lives of those who invest something of themselves into this music-based culture.

While the meanings and processes of how and why Visual Kei is prosumed will be investigated in detail in Chapter 5, I will begin to use this term from this chapter onwards both for consistency's sake and because this is how I see the on-going creative process of Visual Kei from its inception as inhabiting qualities of. Prosumption captures well how music and its surrounding cultural practices are never developed in isolation

and always drawing from various sources, gestating their characteristics and qualities, and the recirculating of these as new products to be consumed.

4.2 History and Characteristics of Visual Kei

Visual Kei began as an aesthetic movement in Japanese rock music in the early 1980s, which has its roots in the band boom[12] (Minamida 2001; Stevens 2009), the diversification of rock genres, and popular transgressive aestheticism (Morikawa 2003). It achieved mainstream success in the late 1990s and presently is one of the many niche subculture industries that exists in Japan's highly segmented consumer market. Visual Kei can also be thought of in terms of its sociality or as a 'sonic practice' as the term also refers to the consumption and production practices of its performers and fans. This concept is an approach to the "active, embodied practices involved in making sound meaningful" (Hankins and Stevens, 2, 2014), and while this includes the actual production and reception of sound, it is in interactions that sound comes to have a relational meaning, "through on going practices of contextualization that produce sounds as well as the social and spatial contexts in which they come to have signification" (Hankins and Stevens, 2, 2014). Significance is never simply an effect of audition, nor is it universally channeled or received, thus the concept "necessitates an examination of the production of social and spatial relations alongside any examination of the production of sound" (Hankins and Stevens 2014, 3).

4.2.1 The Emergence of Visual Kei: 1980s Era Rock Music in Japan.

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[12] The 'band boom' refers to four periods in Japanese music history where rock music marked the zeitgeist amongst consumers of popular music both in terms of listening to and (in this particular era I am referring to, which took place in the latter half of the 1970s) playing music in a band as well (Minamida 2001; Stevens 2009). A time when "the paradigm of cool was long hair and a blistering solo on lead guitar." (Condry, 373, 2001).

Amidst the aforementioned band-boom, a particular type of band emerged that did not necessarily cohesively fall into one identifiable, particular genre of sound. Playing music that ranged from heavy, power, and speed metal to post-punk, new wave, and gothic rock to name a few, what these bands had in common was that within the specific genres of music they played and performed in, they were outcast for their questionable use of 'extravagant' aesthetics. Flamboyant, provocative costumes that were adorned with too much finesse and intention and, the application of heavy dramatic makeup and hairstyling that were too 'glitzy' for punk but not 'tough' enough for metal (Dunn 2008) — it was this skewed aesthetical presentation of the self which set them apart from other more clear-cut forms of genre-belonging. Rather than these bands themselves choosing to emphasize their appearance over their music, it was the sheer in-your-face intensity of these visuals that were hard to ignore, leading critics to cast aspersions on their musical ability, dedication to a particular musical genre, and their motives which were thought of as superficial and gimmicky.

It is worth mentioning at this point that specific aesthetic motifs expressed through makeup and costume had already been used in rock in several notable scenes both abroad as well as in Japan (Kashiwagi 2011). This is often the reason why Visual Kei, especially bands of this early era, are mistakenly labeled as a Japanese version of Glam Metal or Shock Rock and are often compared to them (Seibt 2013; TV Asahi 2017). However, the style of application and reasons for utilizing makeup in these predecessor scenes differ clearly from what later emerged and for the sake of clarity, it is worth noting some of these differences.

In Glam Rock (sometimes also referred to as Glitter Rock), made famous by artists such as David Bowie and Marc Bolan, makeup, costumes, elaborate stage sets and world-building were used primarily as an expression and exploration to destabilize gender

and sexuality (Auslander 2006). Perhaps the most enduring and iconic example of this would be David Bowie who, through the persona of Ziggy Stardust, the bisexual alien rockstar, put on performances that challenged prescribed gender binaries and notions of sexuality (Waldrep 2016).

In the case of Shock Rock, Kiss, with their distinctive character-style makeup, platform shoes, studded, skin-tight spandex costumes, and use of pyrotechnics, utilized these as a means to perform the supra-self or personas which were separate identities from the members as individual people. The performance was meant to function as both a form of respect to the grandeur of the stage and performance itself, as stated by its front man Gene Simmons. "Getting up onstage was almost a holy place for us, like church, so being on stage looking like a bum wasn't my idea of respect. That's where the makeup and dressing came in" (Simmons 2020). This costuming continued on as the band grew as a form of commodified, spectacular entertainment, as he goes on to say, "I like being part of a rock and roll band, but I love being part of a rock and roll brand" (Simmons 2020).

I do not mean to quickly demystify the use of makeup in these genres, for in their time, there was indeed much shock, upset, and confusion caused by these scenes, but what should be emphasized here is how aesthetics were used with the aims as stated by their performers towards particular ends that overtime have attained a consensus understanding surrounding their significance, which does not apply to the aims or usage of aesthetics in Visual Kei. Visual Kei, which only emerged in the 1980s, as scholars like Morikawa concludes, is not directly impacted by Glam Rock or Shock Rock despite popular beliefs (Morikawa 2003). He does this by showing that there is an age and consumer cohort gap between the musicians who performed or were influenced by glam rock in its heyday locally and Visual Kei musicians and he goes on to mention Japanese artists that are instead performers of Glam Rock or at least directly influenced by it as a cohort, such as

YMO, Sawada Kenji, NOVELA, Sekima II, and RC SUCCESSION[13]. He instead suggests the impact could be indirect in that young people in the late seventies and eighties grew up watching television at a time when heavy metal was in vogue and thus wearing makeup and teasing one's hair had become normalized within the understanding of rock as a general genre. This does not mean that glam rock means nothing to Visual Kei, but it does mean that there are other things more directly relevant in terms of real-time viewership and consumption, including the genres of new-romantic, gothic rock, and post-punk, which were also, along with metal, performed by Japanese artists, a view also supported by other scholars (Kashiwagi 2011). I have previously summarized Morikawa's examination as the following:

> "He (Morikawa) shows the impact of television at the time, in that it was increasingly becoming an important visual medium for music and performing artists in the format of the music video as a promotional tool and the sorts of standards for image it set on the consuming public's imagination. This was a time when television was still a major medium for mass-consumption, yet advertising and marketing experts were also beginning to note and craft strategies for increasing market and taste segmentation, thus strategically exposing specialized consumption (subgenres) even within mass-media mediums. He demonstrates the impact the broadcast of amateur band competitions on television has and how this encouraged the 'band boom'. TV

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[13] In Japan, the popularity of these artists also led to an understanding of rock, makeup, and expression in two particular forms— the use of makeup to craft a performative persona/character as separate from the artist as an individual, referred to (as in with Sekima II) *Oni Make* (demon makeup) and the other, *Bikei Make* (aesthetic makeup) as performed by Sawada Kenji, whose chameleon-like manifestations were expressions of beauty and social commentary of the current times/era (Morikawa 2003). '*Bikei*' makeup like Sawada Kenji's was thought to never 'interfere' with his actual features (*genkei*) and therefore was thought to be performative/enhancive rather than transformative.

allowed for the 'iconoclastic' to occur, inspiring viewers and immortalizing artists and producers, thus setting trends and becoming resources in both a creative as well as business model sense. Thus, when what would become Visual Kei arrived on the scene, those musicians had done so coming from a lived history of consumption that is traceable via the materiality, interactions within and relating to multiple resources at a particular point in time, that mean something (albeit multiple readings possible) to and is used by the individuals who consume them. One must find how it is produced, as rock music is after all, as Inoue points out, a product of modernity, global trade, mechanical technology, market economies, urbanism and mass consumerism (Inoue 2003)" (Malick, 184, 2019).

While Heavy Metal may also have more of a direct influence on Visual Kei, this tends to be more applicable on the general level of sound, but upon closer examination, like Shock and Glam Rock, the use of makeup in Heavy Metal has been shown to serve a hyperbolic function and as a result emphasizes the masculine body and ideals. In Heavy Metal, this makeup is used alongside a show of a muscular physique, metal songs contain images and scenes of violence with fear-inspiring titles like Judas Priest's 'Screaming for Vengeance,' 'Killing Machine,' and 'Ram it Down,' all of which also inspire images of brutal strength as they simultaneously convey the band's critique of religion and the sacred by emphasizing innately possessed human power. Other stereotypically masculine aspects of Heavy Metal can be seen in the symbolism of its aesthetic properties— leather, studs, chains, and fingerless gloves that bring to mind scenes of industrial sites and heavy machinery. Even the makeup they adorn themselves with (smoky eyes, smeared red lipstick, heavy rouge) is meant to evoke images of prostitutes, thus emphasizing the outlaw, rebellious danger they represent as not simply dangerous men, but dangerous men

gone very wild and untamable in their quest to liberate themselves from the rational social norms imposed by modernity[14] (Walser 1993; Inoue 2003).

Returning to Visual Kei, in the same sense that it is not a manifestation of Japanese Glam Rock or Japanese Shock Rock due to the genre having established itself locally with artists who are comfortably defined by themselves, peers, and the public as belonging, Heavy Metal in Japan is its own distinct scene. The representative Japanese Heavy Metal bands being LOUDNESS, 44MAGNUM, and EARTHSHAKER, to name a few.

Given that Visual Kei bands had ruffled feathers in the respective sonic scenes in which they were active, it is therefore apparent that their presence in these scenes at this stage cannot simply be treated as localized versions of established forms of genres of Western/Global rock music, which is what Seibt does in his historicization of Visual Kei when he states, "+Following their Western role models, bands of the first generation played straight-forward hard or glam-metal…" (Seibt, 250, 2013) but it should be instead the reactions to and interactions with other genres which we should zone in on in order to understand the context as it was, rather than how it could be easily interpreted to have been via such easily explained translations.

Often credited as a key person in the establishment of Visual Kei, here is what Yoshiki, the drummer and leader of X Japan says:

> "I used to think of rock as freedom, but unexpectedly it wasn't. I was told if you
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> want to do heavy rock it has to be done in this specific way, the more I was told

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[14] This is a very brief reduced summary of the function of violence in Heavy Metal and the use of violence in Visual Kei will be explored more in the coming chapters. What I wish to emphasize here is that often in Heavy Metal, makeup does not end up de-stabilizing ideas about gender, in particular surrounding masculinity, but can instead be amplified, glorified, and idealized under the name of liberation.

this, the more I wanted to go against it, that's why I wore a wedding dress on stage, to break the mold and I kept on doing more and more things like this…then I gathered those others who also did not fit in elsewhere together and that became what we now know as Visual Kei" (TBS Terebi, 2018).

While this is a condensed retelling and omits much, what Yoshiki has highlighted here is that for these pioneering Visual Kei musicians, there were ideological boundaries over what constituted appropriate behavior in conveying a genre and they quite obviously, with their displays of aesthetics, failed to fit the mold.

Another factor that led to their in-genre ostracization was that while the fans of other rock genres were largely male, these bands had managed to attract a large number of female fans. Thus, it was (and still is) perceived to have a male-performer, female-fan division of gender that characterizes the scene, which also leads to the perception that it has a 'feminized' orientation due to its largely female audience and tropes associated with its aesthetic inclinations which contain elements of transgendering. However, this is a stereotype that is formed without taking into account the presence of gendered modes of prosumption, an argument I will expand on in the coming chapters where I reveal and explore more about how, while the live attending audience may be dominated by women, men who consume it may do so either less visibly, in that they are private listeners, or more visibly in the sense that they embark on performing it as career or as 'serious leisure' (Stebbins 1992).

Another reason that is vital to the coming together of these bands into a collective scene has to do with the thematic content and expressive style that they explicitly projected and performed. Reflecting their bold appearance, lyrics, and sound also took on a dark, decadent, and dramatic tone or nature. Therefore, while Visual Kei cannot be defined sonically by a singular definitive trait, as musically, it encompasses a highly

eclectic repertoire of sounds, there is a strong emphasis on iconoclastic aesthetics that function to convey an atmospheric, affective, or thematic world-view through the use of audio-visual elements, makeup, and costume and performance. There exists a constant evocation through their performances and music of the following (though not exhaustive) list of hallmark thematic ideas: a dark sensuality, destructive fatalism, decadent romanticism, grotesque realism, parodic pageantry, affective *Japonisme*, marchentic[15] nostalgia, pathetic ephemerality, and a stark/frank sexuality[16]. The use of such visuals and affects are also intertextual in that they are present in a variety of products, media, and commodities. Any of these themes in isolation may not be unique to Visual Kei per se, however in combination, the extremity of appearance, sound, and liberality of exploration of these thematic contents makes Visual Kei bands unique in a way that is unprecedented in the Japanese rock scene.

4.2.2 Visual Kei, The Birth of a Label

The term Visual Kei is believed to have its origins from the catch-copy written on the sleeve of X's 1989 *Blue Blood* album that reads 'Psychedelic Violence-Crime of Visual Shock.' This slogan was coined by the late guitarist of the band, HIDE[17], in order to portray the band and its musical presence as one that was aggressive and shocking both in sound and appearance. It was never an explicit attempt to name the particular scene or

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[15] Marchen (*meruhen*) is German word that refers to fantasy, folk, or fairy tale-like stories from the past.

[16] Some of these themes and how they are conveyed through performance and products are explored later in this chapter, as well as in subsequent chapters.

[17] The flippant stylization of his name between HIDE (all upper case) and hide (all lower case) is not a typo but is used following the official stylization of his name to differentiate between his work with X (all upper case) and his solo work (all lower case). Similarly, X will be referred to sometimes as X (1982~1992) and other times as X JAPAN (1992 to the present) depending on the period of the band's career I am referring to and the differences correspond to the official name of the time.

genre that was beginning to emerge. However, the band's explosive popularity[18], coupled

with the growing usage of the term in a variety of media formats (Kashiwagi 2011),

notably the magazine publication SHOXX, whose founder was inspired by X's use of the

word, carried the tagline 'VISUAL AND HARD SHOCK MAGAZINE' (Hoshiko 2018),

to describe the rise of these impactful aesthetic tendencies in music, led to the term

becoming a useful label[19] to describe rock bands that appeared to fall into such categories,

despite the diversity of musical genres they performed or had their roots in.

Magazine editors like Hoshiko Seiichiro, the former editor and founder of

SHOXX, had intended for the emphasis on using 'Visual Kei' as a term to capture a vital

element of this new genre, highlighting that as it was live performances, which are visible

and visual, that made a musician's career, the visual and musical aspects were equally

important to performers. Terms such as *Okeshou Kei* or *Kamitate Kei* simply reduced

their impact to makeup and gave license to critics to ridicule both the masculinity and

musicianship of band members (Hoshiko 2018).

However, band members and fans have also pointed to how the term Visual Kei

was also applied mockingly or negatively for the very same reasons that Hoshiko felt it

was necessary to avoid using *Okeshou Kei*. For example, SUGIZO, the guitarist of the

band LUNA SEA has stated,

"To me Visual Kei is a derogatory term. Even now I feel like puking when I'm

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[18] *Blue Blood* was the second studio album of the band (under CBS Sony) and in 1989 sold 600,000
copies in Japan and went on to be certified gold by the Recording Industry Association of Japan upon the
millionth sale of the album. With the success of the album, the band won the 'Grand Prize New Artist of
the Year' award the following year at the Japan Gold Disc Awards.

[19] Prior to the established use of the term Visual Kei, other labels to describe these bands were *Okeshou
Kei, Kamitate Kei* and *Tanbi Kei*, the first implying a focus on the use of makeup, the second on big or
teased hair, and the third on the emphasis of the use of aesthetics. It was only around the mid 1990s that
Visual Kei became the standard label (Kimura and Tanigawa, 2005).

insulted with it. Being influenced by artists like JAPAN, it was only natural to me to take to the stage with makeup on. But no one called Bowie 'Visual Kei.q' The quality of our sound therefore did not meet the vision we had in mind for it" (SUGIZO 2019).

Such a feeling of not wanting to be reduced to merely one's visuals was so strong that the band L'Arc~en~Ciel refused to continue playing on a television appearance of NHK's popular live music program POP JAM[20] after being referred to as a Visual Kei band by the program's emcees. Music critic Ichikawa Tetsushi adds that the standardization and acceptance of Visual Kei as a term also became normative with the growing popularity of the genre and what he perceived to be inevitable 'spoiling of the broth' with the mass proliferation of bands that were motivated by its niche fashionable presence of the moment, and not so much concerned with musical skill and composition (Ichikawa 2013).

The authenticity of musicians aside, fans too reported feeling the negative brunt of things, as the need for a label was also because the movement had become cause for a 'moral panic,' a state in which "a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion," (Cohen, 1, 2002). The mass-media sensationalized the phenomenon by presenting Visual Kei as deviant; a subculture centering on bands with a superficial emphasis on gender-bending aesthetics that played loud music with risqué messages and inspired an unhealthy devotion amongst youth 'fanatics' who not only emulated band members' outlandish styles[21], but also participated in violent live

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[20] This performance was recorded on the 19th of November 1999.

[21] Further testament to the term Visual Kei becoming a standard term was when in 1997 it was added as a new entry to the *Nihon Zokugo Daijiten* (Dictionary of Japanese Slang and Colloquialisms) as an emergent element of popular culture amongst young women (Komekawa 2003).

performances and a fandom that demanded inordinate amounts of time, money, and effort in pursuing these to the point of unwholesome obsession (Amamiya 2006; Menma, 2012). In reality, these fan practices were not so different from ones found in other music fandoms or entertainment (Higashiyama 2010) but the fear generated by the moral panic was largely inspired by readings of what the 'image' of these bands was presumed to represent— that is non-normative, subversive visions of gender, behavior, and values.

The moral panic surrounding the potential dangers of Visual Kei was exacerbated when in January of 1990, a junior high school student was crushed to death in an accident at a live house during a live of the band COLOR. After this incident, COLOR never fully regained their popularity and could not shed the image of having incited the accident even though the investigation into the matter revealed that the live house allowed in an over-capacity number of fans to the venue and did not have the manpower to deal with the crowd. Furthermore, the victim's family has also mentioned that the live house staff were slow to respond, even after the victim's situation had been made apparent.

The frenzied mob inspired by craze-inducing rock musicians is not a new stereotype that depicts fandom as a community of deviance with latent destructive capacities. Writing on the death of 11 fans at a concert of The Who in 1979 at Cincinnati's Riverfront Coliseum, Jenson shows how, rather than focusing on structural inadequacies, the press and even scholars on fandoms have often pathologized prosumers of rock music whereby "popular interpretations of "The Who Concert Stampede" which focus on the hedonistic attributes of young people and the hypnotic effects of rock music…an interpretation consistent with the iconic fans-in-a-frenzy image historically developed in connection with musical performances…crowd contagion are invoked to explain how fans become victim of their own fandom, and so act in deviant and destructive ways"

(Jenson, 13, 1992).

Today there exists mixed views regarding both the vagueness and variation such a label allows. In particular, musicians who belong to the third and fourth generation of bands even express a sort of oppositional or underdog type of pride in being Visual Kei. Bands like NIGHTMARE and MEJIBRAY openly talk during lives about their like for Visual Kei and others like the gazettE thank their fans for 'protecting' Visual Kei with their continued support of the bands and the scene and by doing so, acknowledge the stigma that comes with associating with Visual Kei as experienced by fans. It should be said though that rather than an outright sense of pride, this is configured alongside a sort of underdog awareness that is partly comprised of feelings of burden that come from subordination but also a sort a pride in having subcultural cache that allows one to express a non-hegemonic or alternative 'cool.' However, this should not be taken as a mere generational difference, but rather one that individuals may express with varying degrees of pride or shame that is situational. Though this is sometimes strategic, this could be evidence of the difficulty that comes with identifying with or being associated with Visual Kei, all the more so for those whom it is an integral part of their sense of self due to the way in which it is marginalized regardless of what generation or era they may hail from[22].

For example, while SUGIZO in the earlier example mentioned that the thought of being called Visual Kei made him feel ill, the vocalist of his band and generational cohort, Ryuichi, has expressed thankful feelings to younger bands who continue to pursue Visual Kei. Similarly, LUNA SEA and X JAPAN (two bands that SUGIZO is the guitarist of) were two of the three headliner bands that sponsored the 'VISUAL JAPAN SUMMIT 2016' which, in all its official forms of media promotion, proclaimed itself the 'largest Visual Kei fest in Japan.'

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[22] Examples of stereotypes and stigmatization against Visual Kei are discussed in detail in chapter 5.

On an episode of Kanjam Kanzen NenSHOW[23] in which a guest panel that consisted of Visual Kei musicians were invited to discuss the characteristics of Visual Kei, one of the guests, Kiryuin Sho, vocalist of the air-band Golden Bomber, set the tone by proclaiming that "it was never a musical genre to begin with" (TV Asahi, 2017), which he saw as evident in first generation band's diverse musical styles (X JAPAN as metal, BUCK-TICK as new wave/gothic rock, COLOR as punk). The discussion then turned to how Visual Kei bands never identified themselves with the label, but it was the media that described bands who had shared aesthetic emphasis with this tag. Kiryuin Sho then goes on to declare that what Visual Kei really is is a 'culture' (Malick, 176, 2019)

Views accepting or embracing the term are perhaps only ones that can be held with the solidification and establishment that time has allowed. The third and fourth generations (and from then onwards) musicians, having grown up liking Visual Kei as an already developed genre may have developed a better sense of what its subcultural properties and sensitivities are and willingly and consciously identify with these, as opposed to the genre's founding pioneers who, in their quest for avant-garde experimentation, may have had different visions for themselves and thus have mixed feelings about being labeled or described as Visual Kei.

Describing it loosely as a culture, as Kiryuin Sho has, can lead to conveniently vague and problematic notions which will be explored later on in this dissertation, but for now, another reason why it should not be taken simply as a culture[24] is because there

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[23] A weekly hour-long variety television program on TV Asahi that features a jam session and talk session format with guests hosted by Kanjani Eight. This particular episode aired on the 8th of October, 2017.

[24] Here I do not mean to imply that niche industries are distinct or bereft of culture, but rather, I refute the point that Kiryuin Sho is making by highlighting that Visual Kei is not simply a set of shared sub(cultural) customs or practices, but a genre that has over time become standardized also through networked institutions within the industry such as labels, *jimusho*, print and online media, creative

exists surrounding Visual Kei a *senyou* industry— a system and network of production that consists of record labels, artist management, production companies, publishers, live venues, print and online media, CD, merchandise, and associated product retailers, hair, makeup, and costume design specialists, photographers, music video production companies, instrument and equipment manufacturers, and vocational school courses, that all specialize, cater to, and produce for Visual Kei. The industry is socially structured and maintained in that it is the relations, including hierarchical ones, between actors that form the links within the network which is nestled within the larger music and entertainment industry in Japan. Bands operate both at the major and independent levels and there is a vast difference in the scale and level of production which can range from major label, stadium-class, household name types to low-budget, D.I.Y production, independent bands. There are also regional differences that are not only stylistic, but have to do with the differences of regionally based industry subsidiaries.

4.2.3 The Origins of the Industry: Independent Labels and the Senyou Industry

The emergence of the *senyou* industry was born out of the need for self-preservation, as within the music industry, aggravated by the previously mentioned moral panic, Visual Kei bands had difficulties finding record labels to sign them and security companies to take them on[25] as noted by Yoshiki: "In the beginning, the music industry hated us, we were like the black sheep of the family completely, nobody even wanted to

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directors, recording engineers, photographers, etc. He may not have meant to exclude these, but his explanation of culture was left intentionally vague and hinted much more along the lines of what is publicly visible, such as fan practices and performance styles, which ends up privileging the position of practice over the power of institutions.

[25] When the CEO of TOTAL EXPERT SECURITY *Kabushiki Kaisha TEXS* Itoh Hideto first received the call to take on security at a Visual Kei live he was advised by his colleagues from other event security companies that it was to be avoided and not taken on lightly, as fans and bands were violent and dangerous (Itoh 2012).

interview us. But eventually we sold 20 million albums, so they had no choice" (Dunn 2008).

Scholars like Morikawa and Inoue and music critics like Ichikawa and Fujitani have written about how the role Yoshiki played in the 1990s music scene has contributed to the establishment and solidification of the Visual Kei industry. By starting the independent label EXTASY in 1986 as a means to put out his band, X's music, Yoshiki, who was already the person in charge of booking, scheduling, song-writing, composing, lyric writing, and the band leader, slowly began to educate himself about the structure of the music industry, in particular how major labels operated and were able to sell and market music. Early on he realized that in order to achieve a large volume of sales, media promotion via television, magazines, and advertising was essential. He also realized how profitable it was for artists themselves to hold the publishing rights to their own music and quickly formed a music publishing company on top of his own label. He also registered EXTASY records as a corporation in order to possess full ownership of the master copy rights (recording license) in order to prevent unauthorized reproduction by any other parties or the transfer of these rights to another record label or *jimusho*, should the band go major. While continuing to learn about various aspects of the music business, from finances to marketing, he began to plan his own sales strategy for *Vanishing Vision* with a particular goal in mind: to sell 200,000[26] copies of the album.

When *Vanishing Vision* came out in 1988, within the first week of sales, the first

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[26] This may seem like a modest or arbitrary number, especially today, with the knowledge of an era where million-sellers in the latter half of the 1990s were numerous and in the present era where album sales are no longer *the* barometer of an artist's success, but to put this into perspective, Japan's top selling Heavy Metal artist at the time was LOUDNESS and their record was 100,000 copies of their album (on a major record label). Thus, in the case of X as newcomers on their own indies label, the goal they set for themselves was double what the top band in a related genre had achieved.

When Vanishing Vision came out in 1988, within the first week of sales, the first press of 10,000 copies had sold out and was (at the time) the first ever album from an indies label to rank in on the main Oricon chart, which caused quite the shock amongst music executives at major labels. Following the selling out of the first press, the band then released a second press and this version contained slightly different contents, which was not only already in demand amongst people who could not buy the first press, but also made fans who had already purchased the first press to want to buy the second press for the novelties. X quickly reached their goal of selling 200,000 which by the last rank in week of the album on the charts had soared to 410,000 copies; a feat never achieved by an independent rock band in Japan.

Needless to say, one successful band, however popular or outstanding, does not give birth to an entire scene that has lasted into the present. Due to their success, the following year X went major under CBS Sony, but Yoshiki continued to expand his enterprise under his independent label EXTASY records by scouting and signing younger bands who he felt he could help develop. Under his guidance as a producer he helped launch the careers of household names like LUNA SEA and GLAY. In order to showcase the bands under the EXTASY label, Yoshiki planned EXTASY SUMMIT events, the largest at Nippon Budokan in 1991 and 1992 to much success, once again not just in that it was a sold-out event, but the publicity planning surrounding it as well was executed at a scale that was unheard of by an indies rock label with heavy promotion on TV and in magazines and subsequently, the VHS recording of the event released for sale further promoting the EXTASY brand.

LUNA SEA differed from X in that instead of the dramatic hysteria that X's energy at lives and music inspired, their approach was far more collected. The band had a kind of calm reverence, an almost regal like unshakable atmosphere that was apparent

in their consistency and evenness of skill and balanced stage presence between the members when they performed. This coupled with the evocation of religious imagery (examples found in song and album titles such as ROSIER, JESUS, BELIEVE, Providence, EDEN, MOTHER etc.) and sounds that ranged from gothic, alternative and post-punk with metal influences, heightened their aura of unattainable distant majesty. While they have an impressive sales record and were so popular that in the 1990's their single 'I for You' that was featured as the tie-up lead song with the Fuji Terebi 9pm slot drama '*Kamisama, mou sukoshi dake*[27]' starring Takeshi Kaneshiro and Fukada Kyoko, went double platinum (RIAJ) and led to their first Kohaku Uta Gassen performance, LUNA SEA are best known for the live atmosphere that they inspire which this fan, Miyuki, describes:

> "When people hear good music it makes you want to move right? LUNA SEA in the flesh were so powerful and impressive, all we could do was watch and wait for them to tell us what to do. I didn't know where to look at times, my heart would pound so hard I thought it would burst."

GLAY's success on the other hand, elevated the consumption of Visual Kei to yet another level of mainstream appeal. Their debut single released on EXTASY records (produced by Yoshiki) went on to sell 100,000 copies and their album REVIEW is the 5th best-selling album of all time by a domestic artist. Their souring popularity had little to do with the aura of solemn grace of LUNA SEA or the grandeur and aggressive aesthetics found in the powerful sound and performances of X, but instead rested in their

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[27] The drama which by the last episode had drawn an audience viewership of 28.3% is best remembered as the first Japanese drama to have dealt with HIV as its main topic. Although it did not contribute to an accurate understanding of the actual lives of people who have been affected by HIV, it was a very bold, almost sensationalistic depiction instead of youth, consumerism and fandom and today instead is appreciated for capturing something of the Heisei-era (Kimura 2018).

accessibility. Catchy pop-rock numbers with relatable almost 'everyman' style lyrics allowed them to be appreciated by a wide audience. GLAY were relatable, sometimes almost 'folksy' in their lyrics depicting the snowy countryside of Hokkaido, one's first love experienced during school days, etc. which resulted in million seller after million seller and the GLAY EXPO's which at its peak drew a crowd of 200,000 people.

Like GLAY, another band who were also gaining popularity for their mass appeal around the same time was L'arc~en~Ciel. Also playing almost easy listening pop-rock style numbers, their poetic yet easy to palate popular gothic style possessed a pleasant transportive quality without the sort of emotional heaviness that bands like LUNA SEA and X carried in their music, in that it was inoffensive and easy to appreciate, yet just interesting enough that it was not bland or square. Like GLAY, although the band sported makeup and were stylishly coiffed and dressed, it was never such that it obstructed their natural features and this too was a point of appeal to many; their visuals were never over the top or 'offensive'. With each release, one can also see both bands shifting further and further away from the heavy makeup, long hair, dark costumes look, to a simpler 'trendy' or chic style of dress.

By the end of the 1990's both GLAY and L'arc~en~Ciel had attained the status of *kokumin teki na bando* (nation's bands) and their success in some way was interpreted both by the music industry and by band members to indicate this; Visual Kei gets you a foot in the door, but in order to really be successful you have to not actually be *too* Visual Kei.

In the same year that Yoshiki founded EXTASY records, in the Kansai region the vocalist of another Visual Kei band, Dynamite Tommy had begun the record company Free-Will to put his band, COLOR's, music out. COLOR was initially a punk rock band but came to be labeled as Visual Kei also because of their extreme use of visuals. They

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were however far more an acquired taste with their strong punk sound and aggressive almost dangerous at times live performances. Their music style continued to evolve incorporating techno sounds at one point even. While they never reached the popularity of any of the abovementioned bands partly due to the nature of their music which was nowhere near the mainstream approachability of any of the bands mentioned previously, several separate incidents which involved both the deaths of a fan (as mentioned earlier in this chapter) and one of the band members led to many pauses and changes within the band. Following these incidents, the band who had gone major, went back to performing activities under their own indies label.

Their popularity (and notoriety) at the time led to the birth of the saying '*Higashi wa X, Nishi wa COLOR*' (East is X, West is COLOR) as both bands with their independent labels, managerial efforts and tutelage shaped the careers of younger bands and in doing so created a larger scene now with different centers emerging across the country[28]. Free-Will is still an active label today and in the years to come would actually be more influential in shaping the Visual Kei scene, producing some of the most influential acts who are still active today. Figures like Yoshiki and Dynamite Tommy in effect, shaped the genre especially in the public's imagination through shaping a niche industry where there wasn't one before for their kinds of bands[29].

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[28] Formed in 1981 L'arc~en~Ciel's *jimusho* MAVERICK (now MAVERICK DC GROUP) predates the establishment of both EXTASY and Free-Will. While L'arc~en~Ciel are their most famous artist, they are also still today a very active and powerful Visual Kei *jimusho* but they are not headed by a public charismatic musician figure and much of the details and operations of their company differ from other independent labels in Visual Kei. Under MAVERICK DC GROUP which are now officially a music production company, are several umbrella labels (MAVERICK, ENTERTAINMENT and MOVING ON). They initially started as a *jimusho* and a record production company but the record production element of the company is now an independent branch under the name DANGER CRUE RECORDS.

[29] At this time many small *jimusho* began to sprout all over the country, mostly centered in the *toumeihan* (Tokyo, Nagoya, and Osaka) circuit and there are too many to go into here in detail but I will discuss

In a similar spirit of DIY, *senyou* print publications also began because there were none to be found as expressed by Hoshiko Seiichiro, founder of SHOXX:

"When I watched X Japan at the Budokan stage in fall of 1990, I felt something that I have never felt or seen before and was surprised that there was a rock industry like this in Japan. So the next day, I started searching for a magazine that gathers these types of artists—there wasn't much. So I thought, "Well if there isn't one, why don't I just create one?" It was a really huge risk that I was willing to take, but I had the spirit to fulfill it!...However, that didn't mean I wasn't scared. My former company even told me "A normal entertainment magazine like that will never succeed. If you want to launch it so bad then do it on your own". When people told me how this was impossible, it got me motivated to do my best and overcome the impossible." (Hoshiko 2018).

SHOXX, published under the company Ongakusenkasha, which put out it first issue in October of 1990 soon became known as a 'Visual Kei magazine'[30] and thus the bands that it featured regularly came to be known as Visual Kei bands (Morikawa 2003). The magazine ran from 1990 to 2016, first beginning as a bimonthly publication and then in 1997 turned into a monthly issue. It put it out its last issue in September 2016 when the parent publisher Ongakusenkasha filed for bankruptcy.

Hoshiko did not stop at just a magazine but also can be credited to shaping the scene through the organizing of now annual live event tours SHOCK WAVE, stylish

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more about small independent *jimusho* in this chapter as well as throughout this dissertation as these in the following years have become more central to the scene.

[30] While there were many magazines that followed that focused on or featured exclusively Visual Kei artists, SHOXX was the first to, in addition to the standard interview format, introduce special focus exclusive photoshoots and was therefore also very popular with Visual Kei fans abroad who may not have been able to read Japanese but enjoy the long-spread photo rich publication (Malick 2013).

wave[31] to showcase new up and coming bands, the distribution of free papers Gab. and MAG, the first pay per month Visual Kei mobile website (POKE SHOCK)[32] and hosting a program on Visual Kei on Saitama TV. Throughout this all, Hoshiko expressed that in order to authentically showcase bands for their quality and maintain a standard that he had personally set, he insists that appearances that are financially tied be totally refused. (Hoshiko 2018).

By the late 1990's other publications like FOOL'S MATE, ARENA 37, Vicious, V-SHOT, PATi-PATi, some of which were originally simply music magazines had come to be fully or de-facto Visual Kei *senyou* magazines.

Magazines alone were not the only form of media responsible for shaping and contributing to the establishment of Visual Kei. At the same time elsewhere across the country, bands that were Visual Kei in appearance and atmosphere were popping up on television, a phenomenon the late night tv program 'BREAKOUT', which began airing on TV Asahi in 1996, helped to spread to the public. While the program did not actually overtly intend for this to happen, the sheer volume of the amount of Visual Kei bands appearing on it were perhaps a testament to just how popular and relevant the movement was to young people consuming music at the time. The shows format was such that it was initially only meant to show amateur bands across the country that were up and coming in their local scenes. The show's producers relied on the recommendation of small local live-houses for who to feature and the majority of these turned out to be Visual Kei bands. Several of the program's 'graduates' whose success the show helped launch went on to go major[33] (Fujitani 2018).

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[31] These events are still held, but due to the Covid pandemic, the planning of such events is currently paused and their future undecided.

[32] These have now evolved into apps like club Zy., and club Zy. Channel.

[33] FANATIC CRISIS, SHAZNA AND La'cryma Christi, PIERROT, Janne Da Arc and D-SHADE to

Between the bands dubbed *Shitenou* (Four Heavenly Kings) Fanatic Crisis, La'cryma Christi, SHAZNA and Malice Mizer and older bands like BUCK-TICK and KUROYUME, plus newer ones like ROUAGE, Laputa, PENICILLIN, Janne Da Arc and PIERROT, these bands combined presence, appearances in the above-mentioned media formats, popularity and sales achievements contributed to the establishment of Visual Kei as a distinct genre. BUCK-TICK, LUNA SEA, L'arc~en~Ciel and GLAY were playing and selling out at Dome class venues[34], GLAY had back to back million unit selling releases and were at one time the best-selling Japanese artists of all time, Visual Kei bands songs were used as prime time drama and anime theme songs, NHK *Kohaku Uta Gassen*[35] appearances by X, LUNA SEA, GLAY and L'arc~en~Ciel, regular appearances by various bands on mainstream music programs like Music Station, HEY!HEY!HEY! MUSIC CHAMP, and Pop Jam, in 1999 Pierrot set the record for quickest artist to play at the Budokan after their major debut[36]; all these achievements and many others indicated that Visual Kei had indeed become a mainstream 'genre', one that was the center of not only rock and youth cultures in Japan, but an incredibly lucrative one at that. Major music labels rushed to debut any Visual Kei band that were labeled up and coming and the charts were dominated by Visual Kei releases.

By the mid late 1990's there were no shortage of other Visual Kei *senyou* services; Visual Kei only CD shops (stores like Brand X, Like an Edison, Club Indies), live houses, costumers (ID JAPAN), hair and makeup artists, photographers like Miyawaki Susumu, stage craft experts to name a few. Some began their careers in Visual

name a few.

[34] Capacity 42,000~55,000 tickets.

[35] The annual end of year large scale song contest event broadcast on NHK in which those dubbed as the representative Japanese artists of the year perform.

[36] Within six months of their major debut under EMI Toshiba, the band played their first Budokan live.

Kei, others had evolved from first providing other rock subcultures with goods and services into Visual Kei only business' due to how lucrative it was and also sometimes out of their own interests. Today, all in one type *senyou* companies such as Timely Records exist. They have several different bodies under the company such as record label, artist management and production *jimusho*, recording studios, *senyou* CD and goods shop (that also doubles as an exhibition space) and event circuit. These allow them various platforms to promote artists under their labels at once. This is not the only combination format, for example today under the Misshitsu Noiroze label (3.14 Co., Ltd.) one company functions as a record label, event planner, merchandise production and music production business at the same time, but in this case specializes more in goods/merchandise production.

Recognizing it as an industry and therefore as a body of collaborating organizations also allows for the investigation of the emergence or origins of what could be taken as cultural customs. Take for example, elements of live participation culture or *sansen* [37] as it is called by some, that are taken for granted today as things that simply occur at Visual Kei lives. The style in which certain movements such as the when and how members stage dive as well as the styles in which fans head bang did not emerge organically, but are actually the result of the intervention of individuals like event security and safety expert, the CEO of TOTAL EXPERT SECURITY Kabushiki Kaisha TEXS, Itoh Hideto.

As one of the few companies willing to take on the safety and security of Visual Kei events, Itoh can be credited to have implemented a vast number of safety measures which over time due to their practical properties, have become standard in the Visual Kei industry. Prior to Itoh's input, accidents were much more common at lives and fan

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[37] The details of *sansen* will be investigated in Chapter 5.

participation and movements were by no means as uniformed as they are today. Itoh instructed band members to remove accessories and sharp objects before stage diving and thus the visible stripping of these items also allowed fans to anticipate when they would stage dive, but also became a sort of style in of itself. He also developed methods for safely throwing things from the stage, a practice common towards the end of the live (e.g. The drummer's particular method for throwing their drumsticks into the audience).

He also implemented many rules for fans such as places in a live house where one should not head bang[38], keeping clothing on[39] and stopping them from taking '*ottaku*' taxis[40]. However functional or practical this seems, without acknowledging or knowing of his actual involvement, the manners in which people move habitually nowadays would become mythologized as organic styles, sometimes even seen as evidence of 'Japaneseness' if such things are not historically contextualized and the role of the entry of organizations such as TEXS security into the Visual Kei industry are not accounted for.

Furthermore, the social relations (peer and rivalries) between bands that developed regionally or as part of a live circuit, as well as through bands setting up their own labels and signing other bands, and the growth of several specialist media platforms,

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[38] Immediate head injuries were therefore lessened as a result of his efforts.

[39] It used to be very common especially during encores for female fans to begin removing articles of clothing, especially their tops. Things escalated as fans would take band members *aori* (speech/emceeing to rile up the audience) such as "*Hadaka no tsukiai wo shyouze*! (Let's get naked)" literally and remove even their undergarments. The line was only meant to indicate 'becoming closer' but somehow managed to rile people up in the moment to the point of them taking it literally.

[40] *Ottaku* (which is no longer in existence) was the practice of jumping into a taxi to chase members after lives or events. It was particularly dangerous for it led to a black market of fake taxis targeting fans by waiting outside venues. As in such cases, Itoh actually changed common practices with his security measures. Today if anyone were to do this they would potentially be blacklisted by artist management and the practice would be ridiculed and shunned by fans.

including magazines and television programs that featured those already within or aspiring to enter this circuit emerged, thus contributing to the solidification of the appearance of a genre.

4.2.4 Mainstream Era: Datsu-V Tendencies

With an increasing number of bands achieving mainstream popularity and commercial success, the moral panic which Visual Kei had initially caused had morphed into a pattern often observed with other subculture scenes as they turn into "trends and fads as the shock and awe subside and subcultural styles are domesticated" (Kidder and Williams 2011, 66). By the end of the 1990's, Visual Kei had become normalized within the frame of Japanese popular music, which is not to say that the practices and behaviors exhibited by its fans and performers were seen as hegemonically desirable or acceptable, but more so that its contents had come to be recognized as a particular market within the larger framework of the many music-based subcultures or participatory fan-cultures of Japan.

One thing that had aided this normalization was the sheer variances of styles found within the genre, one in particular that was alluded to earlier was that of the *Datsu-V*[41] phenomenon; the watering down and casualization of transgressive elements of sound, look and performance which resulted in a significantly lighter more approachable style that had a much broader appeal as it was easier to appreciate by a general audience.

As previously mentioned, as popular and mainstream as many other Visual Kei bands had become, the particular success of bands like GLAY and L'arc~en~Ciel had actually contributed to the logic that *Datsu V* was perhaps a requisite for mainstream success. Both bands had over time toned down and moved away from many of the aspects

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[41] While this literally translates to 'to leave or escape V', V here refers to Visual Kei. *Datsu* does indicated leaving but it also connotes a sense of 'toning or watering down'.

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that had come to be associated with Visual Kei such as heavy makeup, long colorful hair, dark and dramatic or thematic costumes. Musically too, they played mainstream pop-rock that contained little elements that were overtly transgressive or any sort of darker themes or topics were always palatably presented and never offensive.

Their success showed to some that Visual Kei can open a door for a music career, but in order to become a *kokumin* (national) level band, some sense of transcending being a Visual Kei band might be necessary. Put otherwise, *Datsu-V* could be thought to have been a requisite part of a formula for mass success.

Changing one's look and toning down musical content aside, bands like ROUAGE began to do-away with *furitsuke* (coordinated/choreographed participatory forms of movements of the audience that in Visual Kei are distinctively of the genre[42]) adopting styles seen more commonly in indies or mixture-kei rock. Janne Da Arc meanwhile pursued not only wearing almost no make-up, but began to emphasizes theirs as a band of technical skill (*jistsuryokuha*).

There is debate that Datsu-V should not be seen as simply a phenomenon to occur in Visual Kei, but rather one that follows a natural progression in many forms of rock when as the career of the band progresses, it is only normal for bands to change or 'mature' into toning down their youthful and more flamboyant styles. As this fan, Haruka expresses:

> "I think it happens to all bands right? Not just Visual Kei. Like the Beatles too changed over time. Nobody said they *Datsu Beatles* or something? It was rude to the bands to say that to them in the first place, labelling them Visual Kei arbitrarily then accusing them of leaving it."

Says another fan, Yuka: "The media said they are Datsu-V, not the bands

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[42] *Furitsuke* is explored in detail in Chapter 5.

themselves. They just changed their fashion with the times. Don't most people do that?" On the other hand, there are those like Satomi and Yuu (quoted below) who feel that while not a keyword overtly used by bands, the behavior and utterances of band members did indicate that Visual Kei was a thing they avoided or left behind:

> "*Datsu-V*, yes this word I think we can associate with bands like GLAY and KUROYUME. One of the GLAY members on TV said shamefully "We used to be Visual Kei" and laughed like it was something to be made fun of and the audience laughed along. Fans maybe know they are bigger than Visual Kei alone, but a statement like that is another step further. Like Visual Kei was not good."

> "Whether they consider, themselves Visual Kei or not, KUROYUME went from being a Visual Kei band to being a punk band. Their looks, sound and direction totally changed from what they started with. Also, in their concept you could see (lyrics) kind of bashing or problematizing certain kinds of celebrity or trend chaser's types who superficially do music."

While some fans of bands that had appeared to *Datsu-V* defend the band by pointing to Visual Kei as an arbitrary label from the get-go and adopt the natural progression/maturity point of argument, these statements also reveal that some other fans felt a kind of betrayal or confusion about these shifts.

Whether it was an overt strategy or simply a natural process of maturity in music genres, an observable diminishing and change was indeed occurring that said much about Visual Kei as an undesirable label by not only the media, but from band members and management themselves. This situation left some fans feeling a sense of betrayal when they expressed a kind of felt distancing from a scene they had come to profess feelings of affinity, enjoyment and identification with. Having liked these bands for being different

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and offering them a new form of imagining that fans had felt was meaningful, this distancing made them then feel at odds with what they could see and feel happening before them.

Fans who distanced themselves from following a band once having seen them *Datsu-V* were then labeled as *Kao-fan* (face-fan), a term that implied they had only liked the band for their looks in the first place. Accusations of superficiality aside, there were more complicated feelings experienced by some fans like Remi that made the distancing not something that could be simply chalked up to preferences in looks:

> "I was happy that they had become successful. But at the same time, it was so different from the band I had supported up to now, it felt cold. Also, I felt watched and judged for my own taste (by other fans). I still liked them and I listen to their music sometimes but it's just wasn't the same anymore. It lacked punch (*hakuryoku)* to me, that original magic that it had. They used to be really special and now they became kind of normal."

Datsu-V, whether taken as a media made-up hoo-hah, a much a-do about nothing natural progression of the maturing of rock bands, or a conscious marketing strategy, was an observable and felt reality. Many bands had shifted gears towards a much lighter direction of that which no longer possessed the punch of aesthetic aggression their concepts once had[43]. Their's was a now a Visual Kei that allowed for an increasingly emerging form of masculinity to be expressed, one that at that time "widened to include a greater diversity of physical styles, with beautification as another component of masculinity…informed by female desire, while it concurrently symbolized resistance to

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[43] While some bands appeared to be actively strategizing to Datsu-V, some were never toning down to begin with and started out with a softer look and pop-rock sound from their inception. These bands as well as those associated with Datsu-V are sometimes referred to their own subgenre as *Softbi*-kei, which is short for 'Soft Visual-Kei'.

the 'salaryman' folk model (Miller 2003, 37)." Miller further notes that the popularity and visibility of Visual Kei was indeed part of what pushed the envelope towards this form of presentation of the male self that vastly differed from other mainstream masculinities that had come to dominate post WWII Japan. The mainstreaming of such practices here however refers to these palatable forms as presented by artists who were associated with *Datsu-V* and this by no means meant that it was acceptable in most daily social situations to adopt the more intense Visual Kei styles as noted by Tomoya:

"I went to Disneyland. At the time (year 2000) I had long hair that was bright red and it was long, almost down to my waist. I was told at the gate I cannot go in. They thought I would take attention away from Mickey Mouse (laughs)."

4.2.5 Divergence and Subgenres in the Mainstream/Golden Era

Even fairly early on, variation within the genre contributed to complicating the meanings surrounding Visual Kei. On one hand it led to the criticism that it was nothing but a sales gimmick, a catchphrase one could operate under as there was a market for makeup wearing bands that could be used to make a name for oneself. Indeed, Datsu-V potentially exacerbated this belief, as it made it seem that Visual Kei bands would leave it behind to become 'rock bands.' What this indicates is that there is an imagined separation between 'Visual Kei' and other kinds of 'rock music'.

As revealed in the previous section on Datsu-V, interestingly enough, to 'leave visual' was not merely about makeup and aesthetic accoutrements, but also expressed as an observable change in sound, attitude and in a band's worldview. Therefore, following this, Visual Kei to those who identified with or consumed it, was not just a look, but something that although difficult to express concisely, seemed to exist along with an accompanying aesthetic. It is in this vague sense and difficult to essentialize characteristic of Visual Kei that allowed for the creation of an increasingly established space to make

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and perform a variety of aesthetically oriented forms of music that was sonically quite liberal and free of ideas of an essential authenticity that were rampant in the metal and punk genres from which some of the earlier Visual Kei bands had found themselves shut-out of.

At the very same time that Datsu-V was occurring, other bands appeared to be heading in the opposite direction. Subduing, sanitizing and aiming for broader market appeal was not the norm amongst or ultimate goal for all bands. With more and more bands emerging on the scene, there were also more experimental, avant-garde approaches. Some upping transgression and performing at new levels of creative extremity, taking Visual Kei into new realms of artistic expression. It was during this time that perhaps one of the most influential bands to ever come out of the Visual Kei genre, a band called Dir en grey, who formed in 1997 and began their careers in the Kansai region, emerged and an incident dubbed 'The Music Station Incident' (*M-sute jiken*) involving them unintentionally became a milestone moment that was symbolic of a turn in Visual Kei towards what would become a new era of subcultural solidification.

Dir en grey, who were managed and signed to the previously mentioned indies label Free-Will (under Dynamite Tommy), in the very short space of less than two years had racked up a huge fandom and even played the Nippon Budokan while they were still an indies band in 1998, had in the summer of the same year set the record for the highest chart-in position by an indies band into the main Oricon top 10 singles chart for their release "I'll". Following the release of their 3 major debut singles (which were produced by Yoshiki), they were set to perform for the first time on the popular TV Asahi program Music Station[44] or (*M-sute* as it is commonly referred to). This now notorious Music

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[44] Music Station, which began airing on Terebi Asahi in 1986, is the longest running nationwide live performance television program to be aired during the 'Golden Hour' time slot in Japan (TV Asahi).

Station debut performance in some way captures the beginning of the eclipsing of Visual Kei from more mainstream media channels. While immensely popular within the independent scene for their effective, emotional and well executed use of grotesque artistry, the average television viewer of the 8 to 9 p.m. time slot that included families with young children was not prepare for the shock of the visual onslaught of the bands dark and volatile music and live performance that they were about to experience. This shock was made worse because Music Station is preceded by the broadcast of anime programs popular with small children, Doraemon and Crayon Shinchan and therefore attracts a large amount of younger viewers, including small children to this time frame of viewership.

During their set, where they performed the song 残 -ZAN-, a noise-core style song which was the heaviest out of their three debut singles, suspended human bodies were hung upside down from the stage and would spasm violently as if experiencing some form of possession or torture. Adding to this, was the use of *shiranuri* (white face and body paint) and hybrid like creatures that would emerge from out of the walls of the set, these figures performing with increasing intensity in tandem with the escalations and crescendos of the song. In terms of the vocals, the song alone already featured gasping, screaming, maniacal laughter and other non-melodic vocal techniques and the song featured lyrics like 'wound you as you smile' and 'a short life, rotting into impermanence,' that while were not officially rated as explicit, threaded the line quite provocatively.

All in all, it was not exactly the kind of music that Music Station would regularly feature. Following the performance, the station received an overwhelming amount of complaints from viewers, particularly those who were parents of young children who reported their children had cried and had experienced various forms of discomfort. These parents were stunned and upset by the airing of such a grotesque and 'inappropriate'

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performance during the prime-time hour[45]. Zan went on to sell 140,000 copies and was certified gold by the Recording Industry Association of Japan.

For a while, a rumor had falsely circulated that due to this performance, Visual Kei bands were banned from performing on Music Station. Dir en grey actually performed a few more times on Music Station on separate dates after the abovementioned debut performance, but this indeed marked the beginning of a shift in mood and tone that saw younger emerging bands like Dir en grey and Pierrot upping the ante with an artistic vision that leaned more towards transgressive extremes by using aesthetic violence and provocative performances and content in their repertoire that were not intended to please or court a general public consumer. Thus, the meaning of Visual Kei was all the more complicated given the variety of styles and approaches taken by bands that began to represent divergent ideologies which appealed to different audiences and exceedingly appeared to be geared towards non-mainstream tastes and preferences.

If Dir en grey had offended viewers with their set and sound, Pierrot had offended the public with their lack of 'common social sense'. On an episode of HEY!HEY!HEY MUSIC CHAMP, hosted by the beloved comedy duo Downtown, after failing to ride on the wave of the conversation and sometimes stall the flow of the banter with their one word answers and 'low tension attitude'(as described by the hosts programs in real time) the band were half-jokingly on air told by the hosts that they "had never met pierrots (clowns) with such a lack of service spirit," meaning that they had failed to give anything deemed TV worthy in terms of conversation as they could not read the room. While I will return to analyzing the reception of such incidents in later chapters, for now

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[45] It should be noted that Tamori, the host of the program, actually warned viewers right before the band went on that what they were about to witness was on the extreme side. He did not give details or suggest that it was inappropriate for younger viewers, but a warning was nevertheless heeded.

the point to be highlighted here is that Visual Kei bands like Pierrot and Dir en grey were not seen as appropriate 'general entertainment' material. While it is indeed normal for comedians like Downtown to make fun of their guests, the joke only works because what it implies has to be apparent enough to elicit a general agreement.

Pierrot seemed to ride with this label, crafting an almost anti-hero reputation for themselves with their refusal to please the audience, which in effect delineated clearer lines between those who identified and liked Visual Kei with those who didn't. The latter understanding the bands responses not just as fans, but out of dislike for the moral high ground the mass media adopted and found the bands responses simply honest, relatable and refreshing and the latter finding them at best awkward if not outright rude, unnecessary and foolish.

The clear presence of multiple boundaries is illustrated in a now infamous incident that involved the bands vocalist Kirito's emcee in 1999 during the Japan leg of the Beautiful Monsters[46] tour when Pierrot performed and Kirito said the following:

"Let me introduce myself to all the fans of Western music here. We're the kind of Japanese Visual Kei band that you all hate. We came here today aware of how you feel. For Western music fans this is probably your bathroom time (laughs); are you casually fucking foreigners as usual? I guess it's inevitable since you hate Japanese? So, what is your nationality then? How many of you have gotten backstage passes from staff with the intention of having sex with foreigners? You probably really hate me right now, don't you? (laughs) Are you listening Pierrot fans? The Western music magazines and critics that kowtow to foreigners will probably highlight us in a bad way, so we're going to perform for a long time so that even the people who stood up to go to the bathroom will

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[46] The tour, headline by Marilyn Manson, took place on Aug. 7th and 8th 1999 at Fuji-Q Highland Conifer Forest and showcased foreign and Japanese acts.

be like, "You're STILL on stage?" and we're going to show you how crazy we can get."

There are multiple issues that are raised here: fandom boundaries, cultural insecurities, nationalistic biases, genre credibility, provocative humor and homologies that link musical taste to identity to name a few. One could unpack each of these in detail and it would yield a bevy of topics to further comment upon, but what I wish highlight here is that such utterances are clear examples of the existence of the perception of distinct boundaries cast and enacted between Visual Kei and other genres of music (Malick 2019, 179-180). There is a clearly aggressive appeal on the part of Kirito himself towards the shut-outness of Visual Kei from other genres, one that some fans found a sense of admiration in and in doing so contributed to a stronger developing sense of us vs. the rest[47].

Meanwhile in other prefectures, regional styles with their own distinct characteristics had begun to develop. Nagoya-kei was the subgenre associated with bands that played at the live houses Bottom Line and Electric Lady Land in the city of Nagoya. This was a style in which a strong atmospheric worldview was expressed in lyrics and sounds that could be described as brooding, dark, somber and melancholic, in which depression, mental illness and emotional dissonance formed some of the main topics. Costumes were heavy on the use of black suits and leather, often combined with the use of gauze eyepatches and bandages which were bloodied with paint. Suicidal acts were incorporated in to stage performances, in particular that of rope nooses and hanging. Some of the well-known bands associated with this genre are KUROYUME, GARNET, Laputa, ROUAGE, kein and Merry Go Round.

In the Kansai area, the subgenre which Dir en grey (themselves originally a Kansai band) popularized known as *Kote-Kei* which would later become *the* standard

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[47] According to Kirito, the band were officially banned from Music Station for they refused to follow the scripted banter and for their 'excessive' smashing of instruments during their set (Kirito 2003).

style recognized as Visual Kei, was strongly associated initially with the Osaka area. Short for *Kote kote no visual kei* or *Kotteri* Visual Kei (Heavy Visual Kei), aesthetically, costumes borrowed from both gothic and punk elements, often made from black PVC enamel, the mixing of items with lace and feathers with metal studs and spikes. Strong dramatic shades like scarlet, magenta, violet and platinum blond were the hair colors of choice. Makeup was heavy and the bands often played aggressive, metal-based music. Erotic grotesque, the bizarre, highly introspective themes were explored musically and lyrically which allegedly attracted a different audience from that of the fans of bands like GLAY, SHAZNA and Siam Shade(this is not to say there is no overlap), one that was attracted to worldviews and themes thought to be commonly expressed in the subcultural underground worlds of the *chuunibyou* (arrested development), the mentally/emotionally ill and the *ochikobore*[48] (notions of the stigma surrounding these labels are explored in the next chapter). Dir en grey, Pierrot, Matina and Soleil are the representative *Kote-kei* bands of the 1990's.

While not the main focus of this thesis, one other subgenre that emerged out of the 1990's Visual Kei scene is that known as *Tanbi-Kei* (Aesthetical/In pursuit of beauty). MALICE MIZER and LAREINE who both perform in detail-rich operatic/theatrical costumes that harken to the romance and grandeur of the aristocracy imagined to be found European fairytales, perform Visual Kei almost as characters within a particular fantasy world. Makeup is used to enhance and create an immaculate, 'perfect' kind of beauty. Stage sets are also filled with the same flowery majesty and music features baroque, romantic and classical music elements with the use of piano, harpsichord and string instruments. One characteristic that separates *Tanbi kei* bands from other subgenres of

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[48] The word is usually used to refer to dropouts and underachievers in school or those left behind by the system.

Visual Kei is this idea of 'characterization' that while is assumed to be separate from the individual who plays the character, is not in that it is never actually made officially separate, thus the individual band members and their characters they enact are supposedly shrouded in a veil of mystery. This is an extra source of entertainment for the fans of these bands who enjoy it for the display of dedication to the artform that these members pursue to the point of obscuring their private selves in order to achieve effective and thorough characterization[49]. It is not always serious, sometimes done in a tongue and cheek and also comedic fashion. What should be noted here is that in the case of *Tanbi-kei* bands, members do often if not always play 'characters', whereas other Visual Kei bands are comprised of musicians who are not overtly playing characters, but displaying on stage and in their activities their individual selves as musicians who they tend to see as not apart from or but one part of themselves.

4.2.6 End of an Era, Subcultural Solidification

In addition to the branching out into a variety of darker and more transgressive subgenres and the parallel occurrence of Datsu-V/*Soft-bi* tendencies, several successive incidents can be seen as leading towards the decline of Visual Kei from the mainstream market and public imagination. The first was the dramatic breakup of X JAPAN which was brought about when their vocalist Toshi, joined the cult 'Home of the Heart' and married a fellow cult member, singer Moritani Kaori.[50] They disbanded following their final live at Tokyo Dome on the 31st of December 1997, and their final *Kohaku Uta Gassen* performance later on the same night.

In the same year, LUNA SEA went on a break that saw its members performing

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[49] This is more so applicable to MALICE MIZER than any other band.

[50] They would later divorce when he left the cult and X JAPAN have since re-formed. In his autobiography as well as in many other media appearances, Toshi has claimed that he was brainwashed and controlled by the cult's leaders (Toshi 2014).

solo activities. In particular, vocalist Ryuichi pursued not rock music, but had a series of sentimental pop ballad hits and delved into acting, which then led to regular appearances on television and commercials. This allowed Visual Kei fans to see a much more 'normal' side to him, not just as a person, but this normality was regarded with some ambivalence in that he seemed to be little different from any other 'regular' *tarento* (talent, tv personality or multi-entertainer).

Then tragedy struck on the 2nd of May 1999 when the charismatic and beloved guitarist of X JAPAN, hide, who was 33 at the time, was found dead at home in what was reported to be a suicide[51]. His former band members and other close friends till today continue to deny and contest any possibility that it was a suicide, stating that he had all kinds of plans in the works and was not the kind of person to do that.

Following the split of X JAPAN, hide was at the time an enjoying an incredible amount of popularity as a solo artist whose work had the rare ability to appeal to both Visual and non-Visual Kei fans, while also enjoying critical acclaim. Following his death, it was reported that two fans who were deeply grieving committed suicide and many other suicide attempts had been made which led to Yoshiki making a public plea to the media to stop sensationalizing these acts. The members of X JAPAN also pleaded to their fans to refrain from hurting themselves. His funeral was attended by over 35,000 people and

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[51] His body was found with a towel tied to his neck suspended from the doorknob of his bedroom. Some suspected that instead of suicide it could have been sexual asphyxiation. His brother who had driven him home the night before said that hide was incredibly drunk when he had dropped him off, but that he was not in a suicidal state of mind. The towel he was found with was very soft and given that it was a doorknob, it was indeed a rather strange method of suicide. Yoshiki and hide's brother (who is also his former manager) also deny suicide as a possibility and believe instead that it was a neck stretching exercise as it was something he often did, that may have gone wrong, all the more so if he was drunk and jetlagged and that it had turned into an accident. Another theory was that he was actually practicing for a hanging scene that was to be performed on stage and he accidently killed himself as he was practicing for it (Nakajo 1998).

as some grieving fans were so distraught, this led to several outbreaks of fights and mass-fainting leading up to the funeral. Over 180 members of the police and an additional 250 security members were on site at Honganji Temple in Tsukiji on the day of the funeral.

Another dark cloud was cast when LUNA SEA who had resumed group activities in 1998, announced just under two years of their regrouping that they were going to disband for good, playing their final two day lives 'LUNA SEA THE FINAL ACT TOKYO DOME' at the very end of 2000. Some fans believed that part of the breakup was due to the success Ryuichi had experienced while pursuing his solo activities, once again showing that Datsu-V while bringing wider fame and a more general level popularity meant that the fans that liked the band as a Visual Kei band would support their band and see them achieve success only to have to lose them to normalcy. The words 'going major' or 'beginning solo activities' became almost traumatic and were often received with mixed feelings as fans had begun to see a pattern, one that repeated itself when Gackt, the vocalist of MALICE MIZER left the band to become a *tarento* following the same pattern as Ryuichi and with even more success.

Even bands who did not Datsu-V but continued to pursue a more consistently extreme or transgressive artistic vision found themselves and their fans the target of jokes and ridicule on television shows. The popular variety program on TBS, 'Gakkou e ikou!' that was hosted by boyband V6 which ran from 1997 to 2005, had a Visual Kei corner where instead of focusing on music, highlighted the 'weird and crazy' aspects of fan behavior and their participatory culture. Meanwhile on other shows, instead of being asked about their music, bands were constantly ridiculed and asked about their hair or why they didn't seem '*genki*' (well/energetic) or 'lacked tension'. One incident even saw the host of a music program telling a band member that if he wanted to sulk and be 'sleepy' he could still qualify to enter a low tier university and just sleep through the classes as

that would probably be a healthier lifestyle for him[52].

At this time, a *shojo* manga (girls comic) called KAIKAN PHRASE serialized in Sho-Comi (published by Shogakkan) that began publication in 1997 centered around the story of a high school girl, Aine and her romance with the vocalist Sakuya of the fictional Visual Kei band, Lucifer. Featuring episode after episode of highly improbable situations involving Sakuya saving Aine from preying men and Aine then saving Sakuya by acting as his muse and giving herself to him sexually, the manga, which sold very well, basically monetized off the popularity of Visual Kei and this premise which was assumed to be relatable to its younger female audience: a regular girl's (which Aine is presented to be) fantasy is to possess and be possessed by the object of everyone else's desire (Sakuya, a popular Dome-class Visual Kei band vocalist). While going by its sales, it indeed enjoyed quite a level of popularity, observe what these fans had to say about it. Says Mina: "I read it. Everyone was reading it right? (laughs)…like in school. Well, I mean it's kind of *okazu* (fantasy fodder) you know?"

While some like Mina may have taken it as light entertainment and mentioned that even her non-Visual Kei liking classmates were reading it, others like Eri had stronger feelings about it:

> "That was a bit insulting (the manga). It did not at all show what we like about Visual Kei and instead made girls appear to be interested in Visual Kei artists just as men (in a romantic or sexual way). Even if I thought so and so was cool or I liked them, I also liked the world that it presented and connections I had made. That was what made it special to me."

No longer new or novel, seemingly prone to the normalizing powers of commercialization and having already survived slightly under 15 years as a scene, these

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[52] Hey! Hey! Hey! Music Champ episode aired on 4th December 1999, Fuji Television Network.

dark events during the period heading into the new millennium even for Visual Kei fans seemed in more than one way, the end of an era.

4.2.7 Subcultural Solidification: (Decline from mainstream) Hyougaki (Ice-Age)(2001-2004) and Neo-Visual Kei Boom (2004~2016?)

While the bigger *Soft-Bi* or Datsu-V acts continued to enjoy mainstream success presenting themselves as rock bands, as already shown in the previous section, experimental types were proliferating across the country, supported by the establishment of independent *jimusho* and small *v-bako*[53] (visual kei live houses), Visual Kei only media (magazines, *mooks*, *minikomi* (zines), and free-papers) and Visual Kei CD *senmonten* (specialist CD stores). This trend of proliferation into subgenres and the development of new styles continued into the beginning of the millennium giving birth to a vibrant and active indies/underground Visual Kei scene.

Rather than aiming for a general audience appeal, these younger bands seemed to instead be more concerned with experimenting and pursuing artistic eclecticism with content that was introspective and more 'local' in its form, borrowing from home-grown subcultural contents that spoke directly to the sentiments of their generational peers. This is not to elevate what they were doing into an 'art for art's sake' type argument, but phrased differently, rather than having the goal of watering down to please more, they were more aware of and concerned with their own segment of prosumers.

In this section I will briefly elaborate on some of the new emerging styles of the time, their significance in terms of the market, networked-subculture industry and then I will go on to briefly introduce how the proliferation of internet use and technologies begins to alter fan practices and the subculture itself[54].

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[53] This term has somewhat fallen out of use.

[54] The topic of internet use and how this affects and completely changed the Visual Kei scene is discussed

Sonic and aesthetic variation within the scene continued to proliferate while the aforementioned subgenres also continued on in evolving capacities. cali≠gari are known as the founders of *misshitsu kei*. The band were actually already gaining popularity in the late 1990's but are relevant to this period in terms of the contributions of their style of band dubbed *misshitsu kei* (secret/hidden basement, sometimes also called *chikashitsu kei* or basement/underground style) after the independent label, Misshitsu Noiroze set up by the guitarist of the band Sakurai Ao.

Bands signed to the Misshitsu label like MUCC and some of those who they invited to their label sponsored event, *Tokyo Chikashitsu*, like Guruguru Eigakan, Inugami Circus-Dan, are associated with this style, which often sees band members wearing makeup where their eyes are blacked out and lipstick that is also black and smeared around the mouth. Makeup here is not used to look beautiful as it is with *Tanbi-kei* and some *Kote-kei* bands, but rather is to create an ill-feeling aura and evoke discomfort and fear as if accentuating a state of illness. As indicated by the name of the subgenre, the music and contents are of the 'underground' both in terms of inspiration from Japanese *angura* (underground) and *ero-guro* (erotic and grotesque) art and movements but also underground in the sense that it is dark, discomforting and lacks the 'healthy' bright atmosphere found in mainstream popular music. It is rich in *aishuu* and in effect can sound nostalgically melancholic, and while it is sonically highly eclectic, it is thought to borrow a lot from *kayokyoku* (modern popular Japanese music) in terms of the emphasis on melody. It is for these reasons that *misshitsu-kei* can be considered as introducing a consciously domestically developed element of sound and content into the Visual Kei repertoire.

Shiranuri-kei has some overlap with *misshitsu kei*, but refers specifically to

in detail in Chapters 9 and 10.

bands that use white face paint to cover their entire faces and is associated with bands like METRONOME, SEX-ANDROID, Himitsu Kessha CODOMO A, and Dokusatsu-Terrorist. There are pop-art and punk elements to the aesthetics, and it borrows inspiration from a variety of school-era tropes (for example elements from sports festivals).

Baroque who are considered the originators of *Osare/Oshare-kei* (Stylish/Trendy style) caused a splash in the scene with their never heard before eclectic mix of post-rock, mixture and shoe-gazer sounds which they coupled with an equally novel 'rougher' street-wear style of dress and makeup. Their style was considered revolutionary at the time and their popularity evident in that within just 2 years and 3 months of their formation, they were able to play at the Nippon Budokan, setting a new record for fastest to reach that achievement benchmark. Baroque aside, other bands associated with this style are Charlotte, An Café and Tokyo Stripper. Colorful and casual style clothing was introduced, making the fashion accessibly worn and rather than stage costumes that were made by specialist companies and designers, *Oshare-kei* bands wore off the rack Harajuku-kei brands which also contributed to the appearance and overlap of many of these bands appearing in street and teen oriented fashion magazines, in particular KERA. Items like hats, scarves, border socks, harlequin/heart/star motifs, rubber sole sneakers and wristbands were often incorporated into the look. Makeup is used more lightly compared to older more decadent styles of Visual Kei, but not in the same toned-down natural manner of *Soft-bi* bands, but more so in a cute and playful way. Musically a shuffle rhythm, post-rock and *dokupop-rock* sounds were commonly found in compositions.

Oshare-kei's contribution also extends to lyrics as rather than the intentionally vague, complexly metaphorical or fantastical images that older Visual Kei bands crafted through the use of words often by utilizing more obscure kanji, *Oshare-kei* bands wrote

easy to read/understand lyrics that felt closer to the feelings and experiences of youth[55]. Sometimes lyrics were written officially (found in the album sleeves) but not actually sung live, during which they would be instead hoarsely spoken, sometimes ad-libbed or made into a moment of spontaneous hyping up the audience type sessions. In this sense, *Oshare-kei* also casualized the style of performance of Visual Kei in terms of staging and how the audience and bands would play off or interact with one another live.

This is not to give the impression that *Oshare-kei* was more liberal as a subgenre for as much as it differed from previous forms and subgenres of Visual Kei, some people found it gimmicky and highly fickle and as it was tied very much to Harajuku-kei brands and style, the overlap with these commercialized subculture fashion brands also made it seem in a way, overtly consumer centered or oriented.

Kote-osa, as the name indicates is a subgenre that features a blend of *kote-kei* and *oshare-kei* elements both in look and sound. It is generally dark, but sometimes makes fun or hyperbolizes its own '*kote*' elements both as a form of self-mockery and in order to intensify or edge emotions. Images, themes and the style can feel *mijika* (familiar) like they do in the *oshare-kei* sense where the content and topics are close to home and relatable, but they are still *kote* in the sense that they often contain grotesque elements as well that are dark, depressing, often depicting in songs the experience of both victims and aggressors of various kinds of abuse which is thought to have a *chuunibyou* appeal. Bands like Kagerou, NIGHTMARE, Ayabie and the gazettE are associated with this genre.

Loud kei (Loud-rock/Loud-metal kei) refers to bands that play loud-rock, metal-core and nu-metal style music. Dir en grey are often thought to have introduced this element into Visual Kei with their constantly evolving sound and in particular with their use of nu-metal influences beginning in their 4th album VULGAR. It is particularly

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[55] The topic of lyrical reception and different styles of lyrics is covered in Chapter 5.

popular with male fans, as (cliché as this will seem) it emphasizes technique, is heavy and does not really contain *furitsuke* in terms of live audience participation, but tends to contain more standard metal audience participatory elements that emphasize strength, stamina and toughness such as headbanging, fist-pumping, moshing and crowd surfing. While makeup is still worn, it is not 'pretty' or 'cute, but while still heavy, is dark and meant to look frightening or tough by accentuating eyes and 'edges' like bone structure and glistening skin. Clothing is dark and 'masculine' but it is distinctly Visual Kei in that it is not as plain, still has accoutrements when compared to dress worn by bands that play strictly nu or metal core. The use of several distinct nu-metal/loud rock vocal and musical elements like Drop C tuning, shouting, death voice, pig squeals, and screams is common. What also separates it from nu-metal is the use of other subcultural Visual Kei developed elements such as a particular kind of grotesque aesthetic and other references that developed in Visual Kei. Bands like Dir en grey, DespairsRay, lynch., Matenrou Opera and girugamesh are of this subgenre.

Bands that are considered *wafuu-kei* (Japonisme) wear *wafuku* (traditional Japanese clothing) inspired costumes and utlize *wa*-print motifs. In addition to including traditional musical instruments into their compositions, they also employ traditional cultural tropes likes seasonal references, *Kaidan* (traditional horror stories) and Japanese concepts in art to describe emotions. Sets, props and other traditional cultural objects are included in *wafuu-kei* band's repertoires. Band members 'genji-names[56]' are written in Kanji and there is no use of romaji or katakana for song and album titles. Kagrra, are the representative band of this subgenre.

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[56] A Genji name is a name that (within a system of specific naming conventions) one takes on, inspired either by a character or content from the Tale of Genji. Its contemporary meaning however, is used more so to indicate the glamourous kinds of pseudonyms taken on by people who are involved in nightwork in Japan. In Visual Kei this would also be of the latter-kind.

While I do not have the time to go into them in detail, other subgenres with some overlap to the ones above also emerged in this period such as *decora*, *eroguro*, gothic, etc. The previously mentioned Nagoya-kei too and other regional styles in Sendai and Fukuoka continued to evolve, Kansai meanwhile was becoming the center of its own type of opulent *Kote-kei*, sometimes also called *Matina-kei* or *Chikasen-kei* after the labels headed by Kisaki who was responsible for developing the careers of many independent bands, most notably his own bands Syndrome and Phantasmagoria but also that of Vidoll, 12012 and SIVA.

Another label that was gaining momentum during this time was PS COMPANY, a Tokyo based Visual Kei production *jimusho*, headed by a former Visual Kei fan herself, Ozaki Tomomi. Her company became known for its good looking 'idol' like bands and for its particular brand of marketing strategies which have become the norm today. Rather than actually inventing these strategies (multiple versions of the same CD release and consecutive release campaigns), their bold and effective advertising and blatant sales campaigns stood out in a scene that while already had such practices in circulation, did not approach these sales strategies with such openness out of not wanting to resemble pop idols. In short, Ozaki is seen to have contributed to the beginnings of this aggressive 'idolization' and commoditization of Visual Kei artists.

Other notable labels and *jimusho* of this era are Loop Ash, Timely Records, APPLAUSE Records etc. which each featured or expertized in a different 'color' or style of artist. Also emergent were a new wave of Visual Kei indies magazines, pay sites and internet media sites such as Zy., CURE, Neo genesis, ROCK AND READ to name a few. Database user-centric websites began to grow both in and out of Japan which led to the creation of (albeit not easy to navigate) kind of data base of basic information of the formations, dissolutions and histories of band members.

Through the birth of these subgenres in particular in the short period between the years 2000~2004, we see Visual Kei bands more concerned with consciously performing Visual Kei for a Visual Kei liking audience. It should be noted that there were almost no underground Soft-bi bands emerging and the eclectic gestations that emerged were comprised of artists inspired by Visual Kei and other forms of domestic music. Another key characteristic that they share in common is that of subcultural content with their borrowing and referencing other subcultures which are also local in nature. This content is often described as having *chuunibyou* or *menhera* qualities to it connoting that they are not of the 'healthy' of mind or lifestyle. What we see here on a general level is the solidification of Visual Kei as a distinct subculture with its own expanding tropes of subversive eclecticism that had an industry and network to operate within, an expanded and established independent scene of operation and distribution. Together the prosumption of these contents by fans and bands was become increasingly local in that it was firstly supported not by major networks but local ones; small live houses, *senyou* magazine, nationwide circuit tours and small *jimusho*, secondly, was based on the popularity of previously successful Visual Kei bands and fan-cultures and thirdly, gestations were locally referential/inward looking which would separate Visual Kei even further from its already tenuously loose connections to global forms of rock making it no longer so easy to just pass off as 'j-glam' or 'j-metal' but instead simply a genre; just another thread in the local fabric of the niche subcultural music industry.

This style of Visual Kei music as made by musicians who consume Visual Kei shares much in common with fan-created text in other studies of fandoms where instead of consumption for a general audience in mind, such creative products have "distinctive interpretations, evaluative criteria and alternative identities made manifest in the texts that fans themselves produce" (Lewis 1992, 5), meaning, the scope of appreciation and

understanding of its references are narrowcast. I would describe all Visual Kei creations from this era onwards as possessing this quality in varying degrees.

Finally, it was also during this period that the proliferation of internet usage began to intensify. Today the effects of this proliferation on the music scene are already well known; illegal downloads, ease of file sharing, information is made more accessible, constant and frequent. But at the same time, it alters fan practices and band-fan interactions as new forms of anonymous surveillance, exposure and communication become available[57].

4.2.8 Neo-Visual Kei and Globalization of V-Kei

While the previous section may have depicted Visual Kei as fading from the mainstream imagination and going 'underground', at the same time the demand for Japanese pop culture commodities abroad which had grown steadily beginning in the 1980's was reaching new heights of popularity, fueled in particular by the popularity of manga and anime. Anime in particular created the side effect of popularizing Japanese music as Japanese artists provided the opening and closing theme songs for these series. File sharing technologies made the illegal spread of audio and video formats rampant which caused music industry sales to begin falling as sales of CDs began to decline across the globe, but at the same time, allowed for new forms of publicity and exposure never seen before on a global scale for artists, in particular smaller niche or independent artists. Amidst this background, Visual Kei began to grow increasingly popular with global audiences.

In my M.A thesis, I wrote about the effects global consumption had on the Visual Kei industry and its local (Japanese) fans, focusing on the unevenness of transcultural flows and different readings, interpretations and meanings Visual Kei had for different

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[57] These issues are examined in detail in Chapter 9.

audiences. I then went on to show how this effected Visual Kei's own positioning and consciousness of itself as a 'Japanese' product on a new level, that despite it being marginalized and stigmatized within Japan as subculture, it was also simultaneously seen as inherently, essentially and quintessentially Japanese by a wider global audience. Meanwhile *jimusho a*nd artists although directly impacted by these new global markets expanded their scale of activities abroad with tours, overseas releases and other global market-oriented activities, this did not lead to an actual larger sense a shared or truly deterritorialized (sub)culture of Visual Kei beyond the level of consumption of its fans. Despite some breaking down of prejudice through frequent interaction was observable, the global audience and this renewed sense of a wider gaze also became the catalyst for re-territorialization of Japanese-ness as it complicated and invited a new form of self-examination on the part of those who produce Visual Kei. Furthermore, when Visual Kei was produced outside of Japan it often faced criticisms regarding its authenticity, one that was seen as indispensably located only within the grasps of those who were either ethnically Japanese or within the context of Japanese production (Malick 2013).

It is amidst this period of global demand that the Neo-Visual Kei boom occurs. Just as the term Visual Kei originally entered the public lexicon, at the time it was not something bands actually used to concretely describe themselves or their style, but one that emerged in use on the part of magazines and television/web media (MUSIC JAPAN) which may have also have been due to the release of a MIYAVI song in 2007 titled '*Saki hokoru hana no you ni- Neo Visualizm-*' (under UniversalJ) which also contributed to the popularization of the word. What these media forms wanted to capture was that while there were no longer new *kokuminteki* Visual Kei bands, it was a vibrant and active indies scene with artists that had amassed large enough a loyal fandom to chart steadily, play fairly big venues and even go major and that these were not just a handful of artists like

a previously seen 'big four' but part of a now well-developed nationwide subculture, in other words, it had its own popularity as a particular market segment.

Furthermore, the bands in this scene, unlike their predecessors, generally embraced their own presence and acknowledged themselves as Visual Kei. While these artists were still concerned with their musicianship and I do not mean to downplay their skills or abilities or any tensions they may feel with regards to this, there was also a sense that music aside, there was an idol-like element to their activities evident in the sales and marketing practices that were increasingly about individual band members as commodities themselves (Oricon News, 2006). The media also used this the term 'Neo-Visual Kei' to capture its popularity abroad in its attempts to explain its appeal.

This idea that Visual Kei was experiencing some kind of renaissance was also aided by the reformation of several big-name bands who had previously disbanded such as D'erlanger, X, LUNA SEA, PIERROT and Kuroyume as well as many other smaller bands who also came back together even if not permanently then for a one-off reunion during the years between 2007 to 2014. Several large-scale festival events such as the Jrock Revolution in Los Angeles in 2007, V-ROCK FESTIVAL in 2009, 2011 and 2012, LUNATIC FEST in 2015, VISUAL JAPAN SUMMIT 2016 Powered by Rakuten, also took place, many of them being the first of their kind. While it was nowhere near the popularity it had seen in the 1990's, there was a slight renewal of consciousness regarding the presence of Visual Kei as a form of Japanese rock, even if this was mostly a kind of act of self-recognition. It is difficult to pinpoint when the Neo-Visual Kei boom ended, but the consumption of Visual Kei both in and out of Japan has been on a steady decline since the early 2010's.

4.2.9 The Post Neo Visual Kei Era

While I will revisit some of the issues facing this era in my later chapters, for now I will briefly mention some of the newer characteristics that have entered the Visual Kei scene and touch upon the context in which Visual Kei is operating.

The indies scene continued to be active under its established system of operation. As before, many of these services and *senyou* business were operated by former band members. These began to extend to forms of digital media as well, as formats like television viewership have been on a steady decline. Digital/online formats not only proliferated, but are particularly suitable for segmented markets and catering to fandoms for they allow for immediate and direct access to information for particular bands. Some former print media formats have completely switched over to digital formats and new Visual Kei programs appeared in online form. Streaming platforms are now common, but continue to be used along-side physical formats for consumers for music consumption and even in Japan where CD sales have continued to be strong even after they began declining in most other parts of the world, domestic CD sales are at an all-time low (Ando 2020).

Even in the immediate pre-covid era, the international leg of bands tours have been growing increasingly smaller. While it is not the main reason, this decline parallels the massive growth of Korean popular culture, which has taken over many former Japanese culture imports in terms of global popularity, in particular that of music, drama and film. It would seem superficial to simply think that there is only room or capacity for one 'foreign market' to capture the attention of the global audience at a time, but I have noted that many of the former Visual Kei fans I interviewed for my MA thesis project have become more interested in Kpop and Korea as well. I was also asked to compare Kpop or draw comparisons to Kpop throughout my entire time during the course of this

research by seminar attendees, which I at first found very puzzling but later came to realize that while it was not my own research concern, the curiosity actually said much about what people felt was relevant as popular culture. Kpop therefore functioned for many as a go to reference to which they used to understand Visual Kei, its commonalities although being vague, were nevertheless seen and felt by people around me who listened to my presentations as they perceived 'East-Asian popular culture figures outside the realm of macho masculinity' to be the immediate take away and indeed, as my interviews showed, there was an overlap more so in the case of global consumers.

At the beginning of the 2010's evolutions of *Kote kei* and Nagoya kei bands like Diaura, MEJIBRAY, Arlequin and bands managed under B.P Records and Resistar Records (and umbrella division of Free-Will), enjoyed popularity. There was even a new self-proclaimed four heavenly kings (R-shitei, Kiryu, BugLug and Vistlip) who banded together not simply for the sake of a joint tour, but as an attempt to invigorate the scene (Stuppy, 2017). As for new trends within Visual Kei, the emergence of the following several new subgenres reveal an intensified self-awareness of Visual Kei as a genre and its current status within the larger music industry.

Kirakira Kei: It is considered to have evolved from *Oshare/Osare kei* in the sense that its aesthetic is based on general current trends in fashion that enjoys a popularity beyond just Visual Kei. In the case of *Oshare-kei* it was from Harajuku street fashion trends and in the case of *Kirakira kei* it shares an aesthetic overlap with that of hosts and particular male idol singers (who in their own particular groups may have a member or two who also tend to have the host aesthetic). What this refers to is highly groomed hair and eyebrows, a slim svelte body, longish hair that does not go past the collar line and makeup that is light but still visible. The '*kirakira*' here is thought to come from their sparkly and 'beautiful' looks that differ from that of darker/heavier styles of Visual Kei.

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On top of that they tend to wear brighter more colorful and 'shiny' costumes and the music is upbeat and fun, sometimes featuring the use of synthesizers. Musical compositions are catchy and written in a progression that is in particular enjoyable from the audience's point of view e.g. it is suitable for *furitsuke* that features a range of choreography and may not be about the technical difficulty or complexity/originality of the composition itself. There is also *Kote-kira kei* and as the name suggests, it is a hybrid, which mixes the above elements but it is darker and heavier musically and in aesthetic.

Marchen-kei (*meruhen kei*) bands incorporate fairy-tale-esque elements into their visuals, sounds and worldview. Instead of the dark gothic romance of *Tanbi-kei*, here the atmosphere is dreamier and fantasy like. Styles and makeup are cute, soft and have a fairy/elvenesque charm to them, which function to evoke otherworldliness. Bands like Grimoire, Pentagon and Yumeleepu fall into this category.

Owarai/neta kei (comedy/gag): While not completely new, bands that play at being Visual Kei bands or incorporate comedy routines, skit segments, costumes with the intent to parody or for humor, fall into this category and the proliferation of these kinds of bands or bands incorporating elements of comedy into their performance have indeed gained popularity. Topics and themes that are used as '*neta*' (material/references) are not limited to Visual Kei and fan culture but tend to be centered around these. Once again, the presence of this subgenre shows an increased awareness or Visual Kei as a distinct genre, so much so that there is an entire career to be made out of parodying or poking fun at it.

Wa-horror kei is an evolution of *Wafuu kei* where the same elements are employed (*wafuku* inspired costumes, references to traditional culture, heavy use of archaic kanji in titles and lyrics and *genji* names, use of traditional instruments) but the concept tends to have a horror element to it be it through the use of grotesque imagery

that overlap with horror and monster movie tropes.

While the style of Datsu-V whereby a toning down of visuals into a *soft-bi* look accompanied by the playing of pop rock genre music is no longer apparent, there is instead another sort of exchange happening between the *Loud-kei* music scenes and the *Loud-kei* Visual Kei one where certain bands who were pursuing a certain direction change direction to turn into *Loud Kei* Visual Kei bands. For example, NOCTURNAL BLOODLUST who were originally a metal core/death core band, decided they could better their situation (by gaining more fans) by taking on a more Visual Kei like aesthetic and entering the Visual Kei circuit. A somewhat reverse situation is also evident especially amongst *Kote-kei* bands or dark-kei bands where their music and look has also become more death core/metal core/*loud kei* in style.

Instead of the awareness of Visual Kei as fans of Visual Kei enjoying Visual Kei and making it for their fellow prosuming peers, it appears the intensified awareness of Visual Kei of itself today is of its status as a subculture of marginalized experiences and individuals. While there has always been a shared sense of it as a subculture for non-hegemonic expressions, there was more of a pride or celebration in that alleged 'shamefulness' that was imposed on to it. One of the things that has brought about this change is that the marginalization is no longer simply some imagined 'other' (eg. the *panpi*[58], regular people, who dislike the contents) as it once was, but one that comes from within as well, that both fans and bands are problematic and to be weary of. I will investigate how this plays out in interactions in the latter half of this thesis but for now, I will say that one of the main enabler of this has been the internet and communication technologies which have allowed for the spread of information, infiltration of privacy and

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[58] *Panpi* is short for *ippan piiporu* (normal or regular people), meaning those who dislike, don't know or are not interested in Visual Kei.

levels of surveillance on an anonymous level that has had some big repercussions on interactions on all fronts. These issues will be explored in Chapter 9.

Another factor that I have already alluded to with the introduction of the *kirakira-kei* subgenre that has changed the scene is that of the *mizushobai* (the 'water trade' or nightwork) industry. While even in the much earlier days of Visual Kei there was some overlap, it is publicly perceived to be at an all-time high at the present. While this is applicable to all genders, in particular the number of hosts who are band members on the side and vice versa, has increased due to the growth of the hosting industry as well. In the past it was mostly female fans who in order to fund their interests in following a band closely or out of wanting to support a particular band member, may have taken up work in the *mizushobai* industry, today it is also band men who take up hosting work in order to support themselves.

This is not a neutrally perceived notion and band men who host are generally not open about it and are perceived to come with all the bad qualities associated with hosts; as swindlers who seduce women for the sake of money, who are incapable of 'real' working responsibilities and not the objects of societal respect. Furthermore, even for those who are not hosts, various host-like strategies are employed (explored in detail in chapter 8) in various situations with fans with the aims to sell more products/gain loyalty through the production of intimacy.

Overall, there has been an increasing overlap in the host/idol/Visual Kei bandman world of *eigyou* (service) strategies that consumers, even Visual Kei ones, perceive as superfluous and external to the ideal that is music as an artistic endeavor, even as they simultaneously participate in and perpetuate it. Another thing that has become rampant and that has somewhat changed the scene is the ease and mass proliferation of cosmetic surgery procedures. This may seem at first to be a non-issue as Visual Kei is all

about aesthetics and transforming the body aesthetically, but cosmetic surgery actually complicates notions of the levels, possibilities and meanings of transformation into new realms that are not as easily justified or accepted as makeup and costume is as they become tied to different reasons and understandings of transformation that are not possible without a large amount of capital not simply for the initial procedures themselves, but for the lifetime of maintenance they require and the 'permanence' they imply.

This self-awareness and internalized acceptance of Visual Kei as a thing of stigma and a world of mutual deceit is evident even in songs such as DADAROMA's '*Watashi, bangya[59] jyanaiwa*' (I am not a band girl). The song depicts a *bangya* who is pretending not to be one so as to seem cooler in order to bed the bandman she actually desires. This song points to several issues; that *bangya* know that a *bangya* identity is not desirable, even to (or more so especially to) a Visual Kei band man and that such *bangya* are a thing and to be weary of as they are deceitful and cannot live honestly with themselves:

Watashi, bangya jyanaiwa

Good evening, nice to meet you

I listen to western music (I like this) lalala

Are you a band man?

You wear makeup? That's scary, I want to see lalala

We get drunk, drunk on now, tonight another random love hotel

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[59]In Visual Kei female fans are called bangya which is short for *bando-gyaru* (Band girls). Male fans are called *gya-o* which is short for *bando gyaru-o* (Band girl-boys). This not only at once reveals how the standard of fandom in Visual Kei is predominantly female oriented, male fans are 'feminized from the get-go' for simply liking it. I have however heard many male fans call themselves *gya-o* without much hesitation and *bandoman* refer to themselves as 'former *gya-o*' when they refer to their pasts when they were enjoying Visual Kei as fans.

Adding up on meaningless status

When I date someone I'm the good loyal type

I'm not a bangya, Headbanging is scary

Can we meet again, just the two of us?

Love me? Love me? (panpi girl)

"Hate you! Hate you! Liar"

I'm not a bangya, Moshing is scary

I was just going along with my friend

Love me? Love me? (panpi girl)

"Hate you! Hate you! Liar"

Why hide? Are you ashamed of subculture?

What are we even?

If you like it then say you like it

Have confidence in who you are and why not live with that

(DADAROMA, 2017)

This is but one of many songs that have emerged in this post Neo-Visual Kei era that have explicitly depicted band men and *bangya* as aware of their negative reputation, (an issue I further explore in the chapter 5).This is not just limited to an in-subculture negativity, as despite the subculture already having survived over 30 years now, mainstream media channels continue to treat Visual Kei artists like a curious objects of ridicule, even when it is all done in good humor.

When the drummer of the band The Black Swan took in a stray kitten he found in his neighborhood and went viral on Twitter for his actions, a television show on TBS decided to feature this incident[60]. While they meant to feature this as an act of kindness,

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[60] This program "Ikimono ni Sankyuu!!" was aired on 2016.02.23 on TBS.

the framing of how the drummer, Ren, was presented says much about the public perception of Visual Kei. First, they contrasted the 'cute and kind' act of fostering a kitten with his 'scary appearance' which had the hosts of the programs eyes wide and bulging when he opened the door to his apartment. When they asked him to elaborate upon how he found the kitten, he then went to take off his makeup in order to make himself 'easier to talk to'. When his makeup was removed, the programs hosts exclaimed "Hey he is actually cool looking (without the makeup)". Even though this is all in good humor and clearly involved Ren's own agreement to appear (it was even meant to promote the band), the assumption here is this: this weird looking, scary person has a kind side. What does this imply? That someone who looks this way or is involved with Visual Kei is somehow assumed to not be able to show care or kindness? Also, given how long Visual Kei has been around at this point, the presentation of Ren's first appearance on screen was framed such as 'What on earth could someone be doing looking like this?', which for consumers of Visual Kei aside, is slightly infantilizing to the viewers on a general level.

This is not a one-off thing as whenever any Visual Kei band appears on television, this remains the go to formula for their framing. When Golden Bomber ranked in at the top of the Oricon Charts and appeared on the morning show 'Hanamaru Market', this was what happened:

> "When the band emerged on stage, the hosts first commented on the band's make-up and costumes, with one host even exclaiming, "Scary!" Yet following this introduction, much of the commentary was more lighthearted. The band themselves appeared to be having fun, and even struck a "dramatic" pose after announcing they were a visual kei band. However, when the band and the hosts discussed the results of the Oricon charts together, one emcee exclaimed, "You're really number one?!" to which a band member replied, "This is

seriously the real ranking." (Pfeifle, 2011).

Golden Bomber may be an *owairai/neta-kei* air band, but these jokes all stem from the fact that they look a particular way; that of a Visual Kei band.

This is not just the media presentation of Visual Kei, but one that musicians feel in a less humorous way at times:

"This social stigma of visual kei being seen as a "lesser form of music" is one that hangs over the entire genre and has been mentioned by many artists over time. ShuU of girugamesh explained, "In Japan there is still some kind of discrimination against visual kei. If you say: 'I play in a visual kei band' they would answer: 'Oh, it's ok…' And we would like to dispel that." (Pfeifle, 2011)

While I have mostly only included data up to the year 2018 as applicable to this thesis, I will briefly state that the Covid-19 pandemic has indeed made this rather unhopeful negative atmosphere in the scene all the more apparent in ways that have impacted the livelihood of those in the music industry in some devastating ways. It has been very difficult to have concerts, touring and any sort of events with a live audience given that large (and even small) scale gatherings of groups of people have been difficult to hold under these circumstances, although they are recently improving. Many small to medium size live houses have been forced to close permanently, the touring business has stalled due to cancelations and changes in the rules surrounding public gatherings. I do not have the capacity or ability to list all the ways in which Covid has devastated the music industry, especially for smaller independent acts whose livelihood is dependent on touring, events and lives. There have been many attempts to make up for these losses in the form of online concerts and events, but they have their limitations, downsides and in short, do not bring as much profit and new exposure to the majority of Visual Kei artists. A majority of *senyou* CD shops have also permanently closed as more and more people

switch to streaming services and without the ability to hold and have instore events regularly and safely (premiums attached to the sales of CDs, discussed in chapter 8), the demand for physical albums plummeted even further.

Other differences that exist today are generational, with bands from its formative era to the present still active today. These differences concern the nature and norms surrounding consumer-producer relationships, ideas about authenticity and performativity etc. All of which are tied to larger consumer trends, viewpoints surrounding intimacy, commodification and sociality, which of course differ according to the individual but are never simply of the individual alone.

This chapter attempted to provide a brief history of the changes and developments of Visual Kei over the years. Over time, what can be seen is that prosumption factors greatly into how a scene evolves and survives through the consumption of new ideas and styles and the reproduction of these using the subcultural template and support of the *senyou* industry that is Visual Kei. The birth of subgenres and the very continuity of them is contingent upon an on-going culture and practice of prosumers continuing to find relevance in the idea of Visual Kei.

In this sense, Visual Kei itself is a platform of music prosumption that allows for the incorporation of new concepts easily due to its very liberal approach to genre, a topic which will be explored in detail in the next chapter that focuses on how fans and band members prosume the various objects and ideas that constitute and re-constitute the becoming of Visual Kei.

Chapter 5 Prosuming Visual Kei

5.1 Introduction: The Objects of Prosumption

This chapter examines the how the meanings, ideologies and identities surrounding Visual Kei are prosumed by both fans and performers. I pay special attention to how this manifests and circulates with regards to the prosumption of three products in particular, music, aesthetics and live concerts. The exposure to the aesthetic experience found in Visual Kei is described by prosumers as the psycho-somatic experience of 'Visual Shock,' which I suggest could be interpreted as evidence of The Sublime (Lyotard 1984, 1992). This quality is also present in the music and in live performances, which are also analyzed as spaces and portals to experience the affect of otherworldliness; sites where prosumers can craft a variety of potentials to posture and express ideas surrounding differentiation. I highlight both the shared meanings as well as some of the ruptures of conflict surrounding prosumptive practices present at live concerts. The analysis then turns then turns to music and lyrics that are also shown to depict images and scenarios that connote a sense of otherworldliness. The reception and prosumption of Visual Kei music is revealed to have emotive dimensions that allow listeners sonic spaces to experience, process and articulate otherwise difficult to express, 'negative' or suppressed emotions. However, due to the nature of the topics and extremity of emotions depicted in the music (which often deal with taboo subjects), the prosumption of Visual Kei is stigmatized both within and outside of the subculture. It is not publicly perceived positively and the ideas and images it puts forth through the music surrounding the non-normative subjectivities, inclinations and identities of its prosumers is pathologized and rendered as politically impotent superficial play by outsiders.

What are the objects that are being consumed? First, there is music and the audio-visual formats that the music takes form in; promotional music videos (known as PV) and

their accompanying promotional materials, *asya* (conceptual artist pictures and images) and *eizou* (promotional and live videos).

Then, there are the live performances of this music in the form of concerts (lives) which take place all across Japan as well as tours abroad which as previously mentioned, concerts outside of Japan peaked sometime around the years of 2007/2008 and have since declined in number. A very active band can perform up to 80 times a year[61] and will release anything between 3-7 releases (albums, singles, EP's DVD's, books) a year. Accompanying these releases are also other kinds of events such as meet and greets, instore events and media appearances. Then there are commodities such as tour goods, artist merchandise and other merchandise. Related subcultural material objects of consumption such as fashion, cosmetic goods and other services and commodities that are not directly endorsed by artists are also produced and consumed, but I will not delve into these at great length, as there is great variation between what artists and fans consume individually, ever more so in recent years where distinctly or rather exclusively Visual Kei fashions are actually no longer widely adorned outside of the realm of actual stage wear. While a study of these practices will certainly generate more insight into the subculture, that would be its own study beyond the scale of this research project. I will instead focus on the prosumption of music, lives, interactions at events and select examples of goods/merchandise.

Consumption is not limited to material products alone and the sensory, interactional and social experiences that emerge within the spaces of consumption also become part of the product itself. Some have attempted to investigate the meaning and significance of these acts of consumption, asking what it is that fans seek through Visual Kei. A good place to perhaps start would be with the initial feelings of attraction towards

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[61] In 2007, the band Dir en grey played 121 live concerts in a total of 12 different countries.

the provocative music and expressive aesthetics of the subculture that is often described as 'Visual Shock'.

5.2 Expressive Aesthetics and Visual Shock

Often credited as a key person in the establishment of Visual Kei, YOSHIKI of X Japan has talked about how he combined various things he liked and was influenced by while he was growing up (classical music, heavy metal, rock aesthetics, anime, Japanese pop music) as materials for his music, "So we started combining everything…the critics…people couldn't define our music. Like, "What's that?? What are you guys doing?!" A lot of rock people hated us because we were playing sometimes heavy, super-fast music, but dressed like anime characters" (Yoshiki 2015). He goes on to talk about how while others with narrow views of genre continued to criticize X, there were more and more people who came to watch them and enjoyed the confusion they presented. YOSHIKI believes it is precisely this confusing quality of Visual Kei that attracts an audience who enjoy the eclecticism for its strangeness and novelty they find to be provocatively stimulating. He himself was inspired to perform and produce precisely to challenge confined and narrow views surrounding the authenticity of rock and genre belonging. "That's why maybe I'm testing to see if I can break down those weird biases and fixed ideas in music. So, I think that overlaps with X's musical structure of adding a beautiful melody to destructive lyrics and how we are full of contradictions and parts that seem out of place" (TBS Terebi 2018). Here, Visual Kei is depicted as a means to deconstruct fixed and rigid notions about musical genre through the use of juxtapositions and the melding of extremities of sound and aesthetics.

Mana, the guitarist of the band MALICE MIZER, who is often written about as performing *josou*[62], has this to say about his perceived gender identity and use of Visual

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[62] I am aware that there are many interpretive dimensions of *josou* as it is practiced, but I am utilizing it in

Kei:

> "There is a bias against Visual Kei in society, but I don't care about that. The new world of fantasy that I want to create may be quite removed from the real world. That's of no consequence to me. Each of us has a world of our dreams. If it's too different from normal society, we get viewed strangely… Society looks at me and thinks is this a man? A woman? I am not particular at all about that. Everyone has their own world they love. If something seems different and removed from normality, please don't worry about it. Japan is somehow or the other conservative with these things. All you need to do is sense the world you want. Like what you like, I think that is best!"

While the focus here is more on the topic of gender, what Mana's statement has in common with Yoshiki's, is that Visual Kei represents a space where experimental, open-ended forms of expression can proliferate. For Mana, while it is a performative world, it exists as a separate other world, where societal conventions surrounding the boundaries of definition need not apply and people can create what they wish to.

A notion similar to the one given by Ren, who I introduced in chapter 1, where he talked about how makeup and costume enabled him to do something his regular self could not, which he expressed as "it's like my 'switch' comes on and I can transport everyone, myself, the audience, somewhere new, somewhere I don't even know exists," was also echoed by Shindy, the vocalist of the band Anli Pollicino. He describes makeup as necessary in order to express things which cannot be done simply by a person as they are. To him, makeup allows for him to access a sensitivity both as a man expressing matters that may be sensitive to a man and to also take on or relate to women and their point of view which he feels makeup helps facilitate (Shindy 2017).

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a very simplistic way here to indicate some level of cross-dressing.

Present in Visual Kei are performative transgressions of everyday norms and notions of bodily propriety: self-mutilation and scatology, lyrics that speak of subjects such as rape, depression, suicide attempts, bullying, sonic combinations that evoke discomfort. Another musician, Yuya says:

"It is not easy to bare such emotions whether through song or performances on stage. It takes guts to do this, but when you pull it off, even if you embarrass yourself or people think you look stupid or they make fun of how you look, if you do not care what others think, you will have shown that there is nothing to fear in the end."

From these narratives of performers, what we can detect is that these widely eclectic performance aesthetics are not simply used without thought or reason, but are meant to challenge a variety of fixed or confined ideas, definitions and boundaries that concern propriety and normalcy be it of musical genre, gender or emotional expression. These exist within the space of Visual Kei as portals of 'otherworldliness'.

5.2.1 Visual Shock

Musicians themselves speak of 'entering' such worlds as a psychosomatic transformative experience. Daisuke says:

"When I first saw BUCK-TICK on TV I was like 'What is this? What's with that hair and makeup? How stupid!' I watched and I made fun of it. But after that I kept thinking about it and it wouldn't get out of my head, like something came into my body and wouldn't leave. I ran to buy the record and I listened to it secretly in my room with headphones on, I didn't want anyone to catch me, my brothers or family to think something was wrong with me for liking this. There was nothing like it at the time that I had heard or watched up till then, like those typical love songs that anyone can sing. Here was someone singing 'I'm going

mad, I'm going mad' and I would feel it too. I would listen to the album from start to end and my legs became stiff from just sitting in the same position. I was afraid if I moved, somehow, I would miss something" (Daisuke 2004).

Narratives like this of experiencing 'Visual Shock' are common amongst fans and musicians. I suggest one way of understanding such narratives is to view them as experiences of 'the sublime'. Summarizing Lyotard's writings on the sublime, I have defined this as "the feeling of confusion or disruption that arises when one is confronted with something that one lacks the ability, means, vocabulary or capacity to fully understand. A combination of pain and pleasure arise from this experience: the former from the inability to grasp, and the latter from the newfound realization of the existence of that which cannot at this point be comprehended" (Malick 2017, 696)

This attraction to this otherworldliness is also present in the words prosumers evoked when I asked them what it is they liked about Visual Kei, they would use the following words and expressions: *fushigi na kuukan* (strange atmosphere), *hinichijyou* (extraordinary), *betsujigen* (another dimension), *dokutoku na sekaikan* (presenting a unique worldview), and that experiencing this was always ephemeral as Akane expresses: "Lives are…sometimes they feel like illusions. It makes you want to dedicate everything to that feeling of fragility. It is so special and important." Says Atsuhiko on the band Kizu's music, "Listening to Kizu's music, for a moment it feels as if something beautiful is being expressed. Raimu's way of singing has such a knife-like sharpness, it's enough to make one think, surely his strength will be all used up by the time the song ends."

While it may not be described or expressed as clear messages, it is precisely this fleeting and difficult to define quality of only being able to grasp at what is being viewed that I detect as the presence of the sublime. These narratives were not simply ones that came to the fore in interviews, but as a discourse in circulation, it seems apparent that the

otherworldliness here is not simply an enjoyable fantasy, but something that because is difficult to comprehend and convey is felt to touch upon or impart a sensitivity that changes the person who comes into contact with it whom it *moves*. Upon coming into contact with Visual Kei music in this way and experiencing these feelings, other music would then seem fans to become too 'normal' or '*nurui'* (tepid). As one fan, Satoko explains:

> "Before I listened to Visual Kei, I listened to band music but mostly popular artists like Mr. Children, Yuzu. The first Visual Kei artist I listened to was GLAY I guess but does that count? (laughs) I guess if we are talking about actual (*oudou*) Visual Kei, the band that made me more interested was actually Pierrot….because their music is very heavy and dark, especially compared to more mainstream Visual Kei bands, you sort of bask in a mood through their worldview. After that, if you suddenly go back to listen to pop music like the kind that is used in commercials, it just seems tepid in comparison. It just wasn't enough somehow (*monotarinai)*."

Naoko, was a fan who came into contact with Visual Kei through television programs like Music Station and Breakout. On one program she recalls the first time she saw the members of Dir en grey, in particular drummer Shinya and the bassist Toshiya who she says she found beautiful in a previously never seen before manner:

> "I thought they were so beautiful. Really beautiful, like girls but also not totally like girls. They looked androgynous…I'm looking back now and I think this is what is so shocking about the first time you see a Visual Kei band. It's expressed in the body and you compare this to your own body or those around you. You think something along the lines of 'What kind of men are these?', it was so interesting and exciting".

What such narratives point to is that through Visual Kei, which in this case was impactful in Naoko's case in terms of gender presentation, viewers could come across new forms of imagining gender which differed greatly from ones found in their daily lives. While there may have not been any clear revolutionary or actual call to a concretely conceived transformative politics[63] with a consistent message presented in most Visual Kei performances, what a fan like this is given is an invitation to imagining differences in a broader sense.

This is further illustrated by another fan, Sei who had told her classmates that she liked Visual Kei only to find out that they thought it was 'gross' and 'weird', negative qualities attributed to the fact that they were men wearing makeup and singing songs that 'made no sense'. While she did not pursue the conversation any further, Sei told me "If all it took was a man wearing makeup to make them feel disgusted I felt like these people were immature". The immaturity or childishness here that Sei is referring to is a one-dimensional view of masculinity and an inability to accept alternative forms of expression which these classmates treated with disgust and shunned. I summarize as I have written elsewhere:

"There exist some 'triggers' for becoming a fan and that the attraction to Visual Kei is often justified and described in contrast to various notions of conformity or normalcy, be it to gender, commerciality or other forms of control. Visual Shock is therefore not merely a reaction to 'outlandish' gender bending, but images and ideas loaded with the potential

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[63] I mean this here only in terms of a consistent and clear message-centric notion of politics and do not mean to imply that Visual Kei songs are apolitical. In fact, more than apolitical, I would suggest that are indeed political but by and large impotently so. While anything can indeed be politicized, for songs that are actually clearly critical of the political climate in Japan and politicians, see Merry's 'Chiyoda-sen democracy', DADAROMA'S 'MONEY' and R-Shitei's '*Aikoku kakumei*' for some examples of critiques on the misuse of public funds, nationalism and the status-quo.

of resistance to hegemonic culture" (Malick 2013, 83)

5.3 Prosuming The Sublime

While the immaterial product of consumption is this ephemeral otherworldliness, what is also consumed is the person who makes the music; the persona and the joint experience of sensory engagement with the artist who approaches the sublime. Because both consumers and producers contribute to the realization of this 'worldview' and the circulation of ideas that surround it, it is in this sense that the dichotomy between production and consumption is not always clear. Both parties 'prosume' Visual Kei.

Prosumption is not uniform. There are fans who identify with artists, feel an affinity to the messages and themes of non-normativity, there are those who enjoy the physicality of lives, feel catharsis or receive what they feel is a revitalizing energy from going wild at lives, there are those labled *gachiko*i: meaning they have foolishly fallen in love with the persona of the artist, there are hard core fans who attend and try to collect everything and those who are only listen to the music privately. Fans lives are effected in positive and negative ways; as a result of having discovered something to feel passionate about, some feel inspired to embark on a variety of self-improvement projects. Then there are others who run up huge debts and resort to prostitution to fund their consumption: none of these are absolute or definite. Fandom is a cluster of overlapping contradictory emotions, but it is also one that is centered on an affectively charged intimacy whether with the music, the artist or otherworldliness.

Overtly and actively identifying with these affective experiences comes with certain kinds of stigma and discrimination. This is something that is often brought up amongst musicians and fans. Says Tsuzuku of the band MEJIBRAY on a song entitled RAVEN that he wrote on these negative views people have of Visual Kei:

"I have always wanted to write lyrics using the topic of RAVEN, as a kind of

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minority, I mean like society in general sees crows as harmful pests and amongst birds, it is kind of the target of hate right? I wanted to transpose this on to the human existence…like in terms of the music industry we in Visual Kei are the crows, and in the world of human beings, bangya are like looked at as a kind of crow species I think" (Tsuzuku, 2014).

Visual Kei is a template for sonic practices that involve the use of sound and visual to express differentiation within an already established, accessible circuit of production and consumption. This differentiation is not standard in content, but it aims to create an affect of otherworldliness in an attempt to approach the sublime. Furthermore, it is not overtly anti-capitalist in its nature or goals, but one in which individuals come to cultivate an intimate relationship with the sublime that is never fully achieved. Crafting this affect of otherworldliness involves not just music but the delivery and visual presentation of a self that is transgressing various forms of conformity by utilizing costumes, makeup, employing inversion, aesthetic violence and testing extremes of sound. One of the products of which is that the artists display a flashy, risk taking persona and demeanor that audiences find desirable, thus attraction is not simply to the possibility of deconstruction via otherworldliness, but also to the person who pursues this on stage; the artist is consumed as part and parcel of the product. Consumption has many forms, but in each of these a desire to seek an affectively experienced intimacy and engagement with the product is present.

5.4 Lives: Positive Aggression and Grotesque Carnival

Employing a Bakhtinian analysis of Carnival Grotesque on heavy metal live spaces as sites of positive aggression, scholars like Halnon have shown how rather than the anger and aggression found in both metal music and in its lives being "symptoms of pervasive failure of socialization" (Arnett 1995, 17), the violent and grotesque images

and enactments found in concert performances and participation are instead a form of challenge to hegemony via transgressive inversion. This is something that, as Halnon points out, can only be found out by adopting the insider's point of view with regards to their own participation. Put otherwise by asking prosumers of heavy metal carnival what their interactions with cultural products and with one another mean (particularly in the live space) and why this is valuable to them, one can begin to understand that instead of the idea that metal fans are comprised of the alienated, emotionally troubled and disenfranchised, their consumption (and indeed prosumption as they actively perform in the carnival itself thus, creating its socially shared relevance) can be seen as a form of resistance and critique of normality with positive aims. It is for them is a "a creative, liminal utopia of everyday life, a cathartic outlet for everyday transgression, and a medium for experiencing the exhilaration of wide-awake and focused life" (Halnon 2006, 36).

There is indeed much commonality with this analysis to be found in how fans and bands in Visual Kei use the live space during performances to achieve similar effects. While not concretely directed towards specific political or revolutionary change, they are nevertheless thought of as offering a temporal zone, one that can always be returned to, where resistive affective energy can be generated as a challenge to a variety of everyday norms and hegemonies in a limited capacity.

Several aspects of Bakhtinian grotesque carnival that are common in both the Heavy Metal Carnival that Halnon studied and Visual Kei are as follows. First, the use of grotesque imagery that is meant to exaggerate the improper (Bakhtin 1936, 306) which inevitably in its starkness is a challenge to all realms of what is thought to be appropriate. This is achieved by degradation, "the act of displacing all that is sacred, proper and ideal in an appeal to evoke in material form, the fundamental, scatological, aspects of the

human body and emotion that are otherwise governed by the surveillance of everyday hegemonies" (Malick 2013, 66). It is when these rationalized (by manners, ideologies of common sense, modernity) and usually 'hidden' aspects of our bodies are brought to light, witnessing this can remind participants of what is at the base of all human beings. By facing this in a celebratory fashion, participants can enjoy an exhilarating liberating feeling of catharsis which for Bakhtin was an emancipatory invitation "to realize the relative nature of all that exists and to enter a completely new order of things" (Bakhtin 1936, 34).

Second, via inversion—a parading "where those normally excluded from the discourse of power may lift their voices in anger and celebration" (Presdee 2000, 42) is another means by which grotesque expression allows for marginalized or obscured existences to announce their presence by making explicit what forms of subordination they may feel. This is where notions of inequality can be made overt, heard and visible as what is labeled as low or inferior confronts their own status loudly. This active collective participation is anti-spectacle for it is only ever alive in emotionally charged interactions that are "concrete and sensual" (Halnon 2006), removing the barriers of restraint that its participants feel in other arenas of daily life that have "become saturated with ideas of anatomy, profit and individually achieved progress" (Malick 2013, 67).

Finally, catharsis is achieved when one completes the cycle with a 'rebirth'. Thoroughly degraded and inverted, objects are freed of their regular shells of propriety and the principles that hold them together in a rational or instrumental sense, now brought to a lower "zone in which conception and new birth takes place" (Bakhtin 1936, 21). It is this cycle of experience found in Heavy Metal Carnival that Halnon sees as for its participants therapeutic in effect as it allows them to release pent up frustration, is de-alienating as it is communal and tactile and allows for participants to feel 'reborn' through

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the channeling of their positive aggression.

5.4.1 Prosuming Lives: Participating in Sansen

Participating in Visual lives is also called *sansen*[64]. This literally means 'to join in war' or 'going to battle'. While there is no actual enemy to be confronted, what this is meant to capture is the physical and spiritual effort needed to get through the live at the end of which one would emerge euphoric, triumphant and transformed. The potential datedness of the term itself, the feeling and idea that this is indeed a shared and agreed upon experience that one will undergo by participating at lives remains. The metaphorical battle here is also used to capture the aspects of communal aggression, use of strength, tactical organizational skills in executing what is needed to perform and the togetherness that one will participate in in order to enjoy the live to the fullest. It is an expression of the communal ideal that is the live and the live space. There are a number of ways in which this is achieved, but all methods require both band and fans to perform in coordinated tandem with one another. I will highlight two of the most commonly visible rituals of participation by the fans here: *furitsuke* and organized aggression.

5.4.1.1 Furitsuke, Jouren and The Shikiri System

Furitsuke (*furi* for short) simply means choreography that is attached to something, most of the time it is music, but it can also be to anything with a rhythm or sound. In the context of Visual Kei, this refers to coordinated movements in time to music. There are movements that are canon in that they are found across a wide range of Visual Kei subgenres and fans come to learn that particular rhythmic patterns and phrases are

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[64] In recent years, symbols and terms that reference Visual Kei and its distinctive subcultural properties, especially of those used by fans, have become less and less employed even by fans themselves. This could be that as a fandom ages, it has less momentum or overt desire to emphasize its identity with pride and particularly at this point in time when Visual Kei is thought to be in another ice age, fans may not feel particularly enthusiastic about their own fandom and so terms like *sansen* seem to fall out of use.

often accompanied by specific *furitsuke*. Then, there is original *furitsuke* that is only found to accompany specific songs that may or may not involve the use of props.

Here is a list and description of some standard *furistuke* components. There are many more movements aside from these and variations within them as well, but there is no point to be made by describing them in any finer detail. I offer here only some of the most commonly found movements:

Kobushi: This can be described as to form a fist in the air, usually followed by a fist-pumping motion.

Hedoban: Headbanging. There are many variations but in the most basic sense, this involves violent rocking/shaking of one's head to the rhythm or tempo of the music.

Teban: To headbang with your hands.

Tesensu: To perform a fanning-like motion with one's hands towards the direction of the stage according to the rhythm of the music. There are many variations. Generally seen as a genteel motion.

Saki: To 'bloom'. This means to open your arms and raise them (sometimes while jumping) in the image of a blooming flower. It is often seen as a request for attention from the band. It is also sometimes accompanied by high-pitched, affected nasal vocalizations (*kiirokoe*) of the band member's name whose attention you wish to get/wish to cheer on. It is also the move that fans of the guitarist will do during the guitar solo. Some bands really dislike this move even though they may be alright with *furitsuke* in general. Such bands are called *saki-kinshi* bands. Sometimes simply to torment the members for fun, fans will *saki* as a way to tease them and in return the band member will jokingly scold them. Some people think that *saki* is also a metaphoric request to be embraced. This too is seen as a 'feminine' form of participation.

Kime: To move your hands in alternate directions in a quick back and forth movement

matching the sounds of particular elements of percussion, usually to the cymbals.

Mosshu: To 'mosh' which is a kind of violent dancing that can be done in a circle or side to side. Visual Kei moshing is not done as it typically is in other metal scenes and is much tamer in comparison.

Oritatami: This is to bend your body at the waist (while standing) at a 90-degree angle, back and forth according to the rhythm. It is also known as 'hip-banging.'

Korodai: This is a kind of 'diving' that is actually more like the fans rolling on top of the heads of other fans as they attempt to crowd-surf to the front. However, they do not actually surf but roll. This has been banned in many venues and by bands because it is quite dangerous and resulted in numerous injuries. Diving in general has been on the decline since 2004.

Futon: The front line or the line of fans that are closest to a divider/bar will during heavier songs turn themselves into the futon; to hang on the bar by their center/core as if mimicking an aired-out futon over a rail. They do this in order to cushion the surge of fans that will come diving towards them or towards the front of the stage. Part of the privilege of being able to watch from the front row also means you need to be willing to perform this service. This is also done to save themselves from being crushed on the bar. It is much easier to cushion any impact when you are hanging over the bar instead of having it up to your chest or torso. Nevertheless, it can still be dangerous and is quite painful.

Gyakudai/Sedai: This is to dive onto the futon with your back to the futon layer, with your fist in the air. Band members may pull and encourage audience members during such songs where the audience does this kind of diving. It can be very violent and dangerous as waves of fans dive on to the futon[65], sometimes for minutes on end. It requires skill,

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[65] In such cases the first *futon* layer of people would have been reinforced by another few rows behind

strength, good timing and a knowledge of how to dive without injuring yourself or those around you.

Haato tobashi: To make a heart sign with one's fingers and to send this in a forward pushing motion of the hands towards the stage/specific member. This is indeed a declaration of adoration, but it can also be done in jest.

Furitsuke can also range from very simple repetitive hand movements to highly elaborate full out dancing almost. Generally, bands of the first generation have very basic furitsuke[66] and this increases with complexity with the progression towards younger bands. Another factor that influences the style of *furitsuke* is the style of music the band plays, as certain subgenres have music that is more '*furitsuke* friendly' in that it is not only the arrangement of the song that is suitable for complex variations of movement to be choreographed, but the bands themselves welcome it. For that matter, some bands actually do not encourage elaborate *furitsuke* which they will make known in a number of ways. They can either do this very directly by commenting upon it or they can do it more subtly by actually giving the fans choreography cues, guiding them towards simpler *furitsuke* which they do through *aori* or by physically demonstrating how they want fans to participate.

Furitsuke is one of the ways in which we really get to see the productive input of fans. Who choreographs the *furitsuke*? This answer too varies from each band, but generally speaking it is a combination of both the fans and the bands who come together to do this. Some bands completely leave it up to their fans or only start them off on simple

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them to cushion the blow.

[66] Examples of this extremely basic first generation *furitsuke* would be the 'Glay Chop' (hands raised to about ear level and both hands are brought down in a vertical chop) or the "X jump" where X JAPAN fans jump and form an X with their arms. These are both one motion movements that are done repetitively on cue.

cues, leaving the fans to make up rest. Other bands may instead take it upon themselves to choreograph the *furitsuke* in its entirety, requesting that fans rehearse them and even providing fans with tutorial videos on YouTube or on their SNS accounts. Bands have another way to shape the choreography of furitsuke that also provides them with an opportunity to make profit through the sales of goods that can be used as props incorporated into *furitsuke*. For example, the band D have their fans do some *furitsuke* to twin handheld flags, Kagrra, who were a representative *wa-kei* band had furistuke that involved handheld folding fans. Other bands have used towels, light sticks, light up rings etc. in their furitsuke that fans can buy from their *buppan*.

Sometimes the props are not even sold as merchandise, but bought or made by fans themselves that they distribute amongst each other. This was the case for the band Lareine where depending on who your favorite band member was, fans would bring the representative flower of that member to the live to wave in the air. In the case of the band The Gallo, fans would distribute amongst themselves before the live started, paper plates and spoons to use as part of the *furitsuke*. In both cases, these items were relevant to the bands worldview and referenced lyrics and motifs often employed by the band. Therefore, props were not always about profit seeking and even when they were, they added to the fun and unique atmosphere of the band's lives in ways that the fans enjoyed for the most part.

When fans choreograph *furitsuke*, several factors come together to contribute to the final shape of the whole song's choreography. First, they are as I have already mentioned drawing upon the pool of general *furitsuke* knowledge that Visual Kei fans cultivate having attended a variety of lives and seen these moves in circulation, and perhaps looking to the band for any cues. Band cues tend to trump all potential movements. However, if the band does not give cues, then it is usually the *jouren*

(regulars) who will choreograph it. I will return to the topic of furitsuke, but I will pause to elaborate on the *jouren* and their significance briefly in order to explain how it is they come to have the power to choreograph *furitsuke*.

The *jouren* consist of the fans who not only see the band regularly, but more than that, they also travel to see the band across the country, sometimes abroad even, often attending full tours. Particularly within the indies scene, the *jouren* can become somewhat powerful in that people depend on them, sometimes begrudgingly, for information and cues. They accumulate knowledge and expertise usually from experience, and as venues tend to be smaller in the indies scene, they are easily recognized both by other fans as well as by bands. Their constant presence is an indication of their dedication and loyalty to the band. In many ways they are important customers that the band depends on for revenue. Usually they tend to consist of fans that have been around since the beginning of the band's activities (sometimes following a particular member from their previous band, thus making their *jouren* history even longer), but one can become a *jouren* by frequent live attendance and also by befriending them in the process.

A particularly powerful position within the *jouren* is the *shikiri*. This is the person who decides who gets to stand where in the *saizen* (front row) and sometimes beyond the front row as well as this can extend to include any of the most coveted spots in the venue. There are two ways one can become a *shikiri* but they tend to overlap. The first way is that the person who holds ticket number one is the default *shikiri*. However, obtaining ticket number one is the specialty of the *jouren* who employ various tactics to make sure that one of them gets it. Technically the ticket allocation system is fair and sometimes even distributed at random, but the *jouren* are very adept at securing it. In Japan, the audience enters the venue in order of ticket number. Therefore, dibs on the 'good spots' are technically called by people who have the good numbers. The smaller your ticket

number, the better your chances are of standing close to the stage, in a visible spot to the band members or in a spot with a good vantage point.

There are various methods for obtaining ticket number one that involve organization skill, time, money and sometimes outright hoarding. The easiest way to obtain it is by the *jouren* pooling resources together to buy an excessive amount of tickets which they later sort out amongst themselves. Sometimes scalpers or opportunistic fans who compete with them may even sell the good ticket numbers to them (or to anyone else who wants it) for a marked-up price. The other ways *jouren* secure good numbers is by speed and sometimes by cheating. When tickets are on a first come first serve basis according to number, *jouren* will organize amongst themselves to be the first in line to obtain the best numbers as well.

This can upset other fans or competing *jouren* factions as it means that a monopoly on good spots and good tickets is in the works and therefore the system is not fair. Bands and management have tried to make the number distribution increasingly random (the latest being e-ticket applications where only one or two tickets can be purchased per registered mobile phone number) in order to be fair, but when this is done, it requires the signing up of accounts (maybe through a ticket service, a mobile application or fanclub) and so long as the *jouren* create enough accounts, they can still overwhelm the system and monopolize it to some extent. They sometimes even create a situation where the majority of the tickets are bought by only a handful of people who cherry pick what they want and re-sell the rest. E-tickets have somewhat restricted this re-selling as in order to enter the venue one needs to show the ticket that is sent only to the account holder's mobile phone, but even then, jouren have found ways to switch phones amongst each other, using several numbers etc.

It should be noted that not all *jouren* are like this. Sometimes *jouren* are simply

older fans who have been around longer and do not participate in any of this ticket hoarding. Sometimes these people can be so liked and respected they simply get dibs on the good spots by sheer respect of the other fans who see them as suitable to lead things like *furitsuke*. I will say that this is a very small minority however and you will find that *jouren* are usually more proactive in marking their territory.

The second way the *shikiri* is decided upon is by elected seniority. The *jouren* amongst themselves decide who this is regardless of the actual ticket number and who it becomes when this person is not available. Sometimes a particularly well organized and trustworthy individual becomes it, sometimes this is because a person exerts their will to want to do it, sometimes it is because this person is rumored to have 'connections' whether to bands or some industry people and so people give them the 'honor' in exchange for information. Sometimes the *shikiri* is really just someone who bullies their way into it and gets away with it. *Shikiri* and *jouren* from different bands sometimes cooperate with one another at multiband events to solidify their monopoly and to ensure a smooth transition between bands sets regarding who gets to stand where.

Even if the *jouren* and *shikiri* are engaged in various strategies as previously mentioned, they can still be thought of as 'good' *jouren*/*shikiri* or be seen as 'bad' depending on a variety of things. How they treat other fans is the most important deciding factor. Also, a fair *shikiri* will allocate the good spots in a fair manner, which is by actual ticket number as opposed to putting their friends or other *jouren* in the good spots. However, given that the *jouren* manipulate the good numbers, it often becomes theirs even through the 'fair' use of numbers. Good *jouren* are thought to be considerate, looking out for fans should they get injured or pass out when things get rough in the front of the live house. Good *jouren* also share information in a helpful and professional manner either by posting things online or by word of mouth, they may even use their visibility or

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familiarity with the band to relay important issues to the band on behalf of the fans should there be an issue of concern. Good *jouren* organize events on band members birthdays and include anyone who may want to join. Good *jouren* choreography *furitsuke* that is fun, creative and inclusive. In short, they "ideally function as navigators and organizers of fan communities, particularly in the context of live-going. However, their power does not go uncontested," (Malick 2013, 103). I will later revisit this topic, but for now I will return to the role of *jouren* in terms of *furitsuke* and live participation.

Sometimes, the *jouren* become choreographers by default (as the people attending the lives the most frequently, they will simply know it better from having practically repeated it more) but other times, they take a more proactive position with regards to choreography and usually the *jouren* in *saizen* (front row) and other *jouren* who tend to gather more towards the front of the stage or those who occupy other vital spots in the livehouse, meet up to come up with choreography (often before the live or in the case where they want to make more elaborate types of choreography they will arrange to meet for choreography sessions). Seniority or *jouren* status therefore trumps other forms of fan input with regards to *furitsuke* by virtue of their frequency of attendance and ability to occupy highly visible positions (such as the front line, or the raised bar areas) in the live space. Because they are easily 'seen' they also can function as conductors for other fans attending the live. There is pressure on them to lead in this sense although they are also resented for it depending on how they go about being *jouren* and how fair and considerately they treat other fans.

Depending on how important *furitsuke* is to a particular *jouren*, they may really influence the styles of participation and therefore play an important role in both encouraging and discouraging participation. If the *jouren* value inclusivity they will make *furitsuke* that is 'easier' to participate along to or perhaps *furistuke* that is more 'gender

neutral' and less 'feminine' in its emphasis so that any fans (whether male or not) may not feel deterred by overtly 'girly' styles of *furitsuke*.

However, the total opposite is also visible and *furitsuke* may even be so 'feminized' that it encourages a particular kind of participation, one that is contingent on other displays of femininity. For example, movements that emphasize the point of fingers, or graceful hand movements that are made to look even more outstanding and attention grabbing in a particular kind of dress or manicures, also exist. This was the style that emerged out of the Kansai area in the mid 2000's, in particular amongst *chikasen-gya* (fans of Undercode label bands) who also were often seen wearing *hime-kei* (princess style) or *hime-gyaru* (princess gal) styles of fashion that hyper-feminine in nature.

Furistuke, if made too complex with no reference to what is canon, that is highly original in content can be thought to be elitist and fans do not like it when the *jouren* overdoes this. This is what happened with one of songs for the band Versailles where the *dosen* (this is short for *dosentaa*, smack-center position in the middle of the front row, by default has everyone's eyes on them for *furitsuke* cues) who made the *furitsuke* ended up creating only something that she could pull off and she was heavily criticized by other fans for this.

There are also cases where the rest of the fans, whether out of resentment for the *jouren* or when there are enough members of the audience who dislike the *furitsuke*, simply choose to ignore the *furitsuke* choreographed by them and decide to do their own thing. Usually this can be pulled off when the dissenters default to canon moves that everyone can pick up on quickly enough to overpower what the *jouren* have come up with. This is also something that can happen unintentionally, for when a band is not the kind to give any instructions on *furitsuke* and leave it up to the *jouren*, should the band suddenly gain a large following very quickly or should there be an change or influx of new fans,

they may not be able to even realize what the *jouren* are doing and simply be defaulting to suitable simple moves based on their own general knowledge of *furitsuke*. If these people become the majority, often their sheer numbers mean that this becomes by default, the new *furitsuke*. This of course can upset the *jouren* or any fans that may feel the 'original' *furitsuke* that they worked hard to make is being ruined.

The joy of *furitsuke* therefore in its ability to be pulled off by everyone and the *ittaikan* (feeling as one/sense of togetherness) this produces. Therefore, reasonably lowered barriers to encourage participation are valued as this allows everyone to join in more easily. It still needs to look good and feel fun to do and indeed when one witnesses some *furitsuke* that is fairly complex being pulled off by a few hundred if not thousands of people, it can be a truly impressive sight, not only in how coordinated the fans are, but also in how embodied and natural it comes off seeming, which is something only achieved through repeated and constant participation of lives.

Learning, choreographing and performing *furitsuke* requires work: it is physically demanding, requires the crafting of skills, instills in one the awareness of participation as a group activity and involves balancing creativity with consideration. It may seem like just a bunch of girls dancing in a way that is too organized and therefore counter-intuitive to the 'freedom' that rock or an allegedly liberally inclusive (in terms of musical genre) genre should represent[67]. But it is one of the highlights of the live for fans in Japan and provides them with much enjoyment. It is through mastering it and developing an ease with the execution of *furitsuke* that one also learns how to perform the part of not just a fan, but an involved one ready to do the work it takes to make play a meaningful activity.

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[67] Later in this chapter I will discuss some incidents where this criticism arose.

5.4.1.2 Organized Aggression

The second way in which an audience participates in making the live 'come alive' is through the use of organized aggression, one that mirrors in many ways what Halnon saw present in Heavy Metal Carnival.

In some way, one can think of this as *furitsuke* but one in which elements that require more use of strength, violence and the danger of injury is present. In these acts, bands 'incite the violence' by calling upon their fans to begin moshing, diving or into enacting the Wall of Death[68] which usually occurs either during their harder songs or songs made specifically to be looped for the purpose of waves of moshing. For bands and fans, this segment of lives is sometimes the pinnacle moment of excitement of the live, it is the proverbial heart of the battle that is *sansen*, one that upon completion will allow for rebirth to occur. Towako describes moshing as something enjoyable for these reasons:

> "Going back and forth, you lose sense of your mind at times. Also, of your body too because you are at the mercy of an entire sea of people. You have to have a sense of it, but once you learn this, it is one of the most exhilarating things you can experience. With enough people doing it, sometimes you do not even need to make much effort, it's as if the crowd moves you. It is then that you realize you can be part of something beyond just your own individual efforts and you are actually powerless as a single person. But it is the mass of people, moving together, supporting one another that supports you. If you fall, before you know it, someone will scoop you up. We look out for one another too. When you are a part of this you really feel a connection and a strong sense of togetherness of everyone in the room."

It is in moments like this endless loop that fans are able to feel a very strong

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[68] The Wall of Death is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

connection to one another for indeed, the successful completion of the loop segment is not possible if one is simply thinking of one's own enjoyment. For the loop to occur without accident, one needs to be very aware of the people around you. When accidents do occur, fans are quick to get the attention of security, getting more fans to wave their hands in the air in a particular way to signal that someone has passed out or is injured. When the band notices this, they will stop playing to pause the loop temporarily until security has gotten to the person who needs help. Participation requires that you trust that others will look out for you as you would for them.

The very presence of the element of danger is also what makes it exciting, but it is also one that is cushioned with trust in the collective effort. It's excitement also lies in the kind of contact and slamming into one another that is a physical activity that resembles few other things in daily life. Even team sports where physical contact is high is 'purposeful' and with clear goals set such as to score points, to win a game and ultimately sports are considered 'healthy' activities that regular people are encouraged to participate in. Here, the goal is simply for the sake of play itself. Its joys are not clear in the form of points or goals. So, the sweat, violence, smashing and piling of bodies can seem pointless, dangerous and certainly painful. But for those in the thick of it, it is an exhilarating feeling and it is in the accomplishment of this that is a group effort that one feels a sense of collective pride in for having taken part in its successful completion. An effort that is not simply in the realm of the mind, but one that has tactile proof in the form of pain, sweat, aching and sometimes blood.

"The contact is at once concrete, sensual and performed in time to music, it is a flow unlike anything that can be experienced in daily life. At the end of the loop, if all goes well, and even more so after the lives, fans feel an intense socio-psychological release of energy that is therapeutic through this exercise of

positive, organized aggression." (Malick 2013, 99).

Band members talked about these moments in this way:

The meaning of the live is found in those moments. It is really raw and alive. It's dangerous too but it is because of that you feel "Ah, I am here, I am alive". Fans in their letters to me, they tell me the live gives them energy. It is the same for me. When I read those things I really feel like what I'm doing is worth it and it makes me want to work harder to be able to reach more people and share this with them. The band really cannot do it on their own. Even if we make good music, if people don't react to it like our fans do, then it doesn't matter how good our music is. This is why for us lives are everything. In this era, anyone can put their music online and find listeners. I think that's a great thing. But moving fans to come to your lives and to see how music moves them is another thing completely. (Yune)

If I can make them forget about their troubles, even if for a short while then that's good. When you come to our lives and join in the audience fully, you will feel the magical power that is the true meaning of the live. We crash into one another (band and fans) and create something amazing. It is another world where fans can enter when regular life is too stressful and too repetitive. (Tana)

When you come to our lives, you will be surprised by what goes down (laughs). I know people like all kinds of music and enjoying seeing their favorite artists. But I am confident that at our lives, it is a space that is only we can make. We and our fans, we come together to become one. My fans often say to me that sometimes they are very down or having a hard time when they come into the

live house, but that after the live is over they feel really refreshed. Even though they are physically tired and they become really worn out from crashing into one another or head-banging after 2 hours almost non-stop, after the live they feel like maybe things will be okay. Actually, this really touches me. There was a time I could not have lives for a while because I had to have surgery. I too felt really down and I was worried if I could get back on the stage like before. But I received so many emails and messages from fans reminding me that they are waiting for me. When I finally returned to the stage, after the live I cried. It is as if I am not really alive sometimes until I am on stage and my fans remind me. (Yuito)

You will laugh at me for saying this. But I feel like a god on stage (laughs). Sometimes I feel like wow…I got these people to do this crazy thing…I surely do have some power that other people don't have. I'm only half joking. Yes, this is the power of music I guess. I am really fortunate to be able to do this in my life. I could become a god because many people watched upon me with warmth. Thanks to them, I am a living god (laughs).(Yuma)

These interview narratives are quite representative of things that I have heard band men say whether to me directly or to their fans about how lives make them feel. They sound almost script-like in that they first credit their fans for the co-creation of the live and then use things fans tell them as proof that the live concerts have meaning in their lives. These are described as 'power' or 'energy' and sometimes 'the courage to carry on' or the 'strength to face tomorrow'.

They also speak of these co-created performances as special almost liminal zones

by referring to them as 'other worlds' that have an almost magical like quality in contrast to daily life. These places are depicted as almost oasis like in that they provide the down and out with a kind of refreshing replenishment of energy to keep living. Indeed, it seemed to serve almost as a kind of proof of being alive for some of them. The band members were therefore also consuming what the audience produced, which they then used as motivation to keep performing and as justifications for the shared meaningfulness their performances and music had in the lives of fans and for themselves. In this way, they assigned and reaffirmed the functions Visual Kei performances had in terms of where they stood in the lives of fans and their own in ways that they may not have been fully aware of: that it was meaningful play (even if hard work) for their fans, who had 'other lives' outside of the live space or outside of Visual Kei, but that for band members, it was sometimes their very lives itself. Even that one god I spoke to needed the reaffirmation and service of others to keep on living out his sacred existence.

5.4.2 Sansen, Spontaneity and Authenticity

Furitsuke and organized aggression will vary from song to song and for fans, the enjoyment of the live comes from being able to execute this as a group in a highly coordinated fashion. When Visual Kei bands play abroad, the ways in which fans participate will vary according to the place and one general thing that becomes a topic of discussion when band members are interviewed is how 'spontaneous' and 'free' the fans there are. This is lauded because they see it as an emotionally authentic reaction precisely because it appears to be disorganized and unfiltered through participatory methods like *furitsuke*. What is assumed is the fans abroad are simply reacting based on how they feel in the moment, which therefore 'authenticates' the response. This is rather simplistic reading of prosumption abroad, and I do believe that any deeper investigation will reveal the ways in which fans live participation abroad are also filled with their own rules, ideas

and ideologies of appropriateness and that they use their own specific methods for conveying emotions or appreciation. However, it is visibly true that there is indeed more variation between individuals at lives abroad and that there is more visibly organized movement and reactions/responses from the audience on a general level in Japan.

This difference is also sometimes a topic that becomes used as 'evidence' for the inauthenticity of Visual Kei as a rock form and as proof that their fans are not concerned with the politics of difference that is assumed to come from the 'freedom' found in rock music consumption. A German eventer looking to bring Japanese bands abroad said this to me once: "It's just not rock you know? Like this 'para para' they do. It's so silly. In Europe this is a joke."

At an event that I attended in Utsunomiya 14 years ago, three Caucasian men who were living in the area decided to attend the live not as Visual Kei fans but simply because they lived in the area and were perhaps curious as to what was going on (from what I could gather). Throughout the live they were laughing and making fun of fans, sometimes even filming the fans without permission and ridiculing their participation. They made statements like "Oh god they are actually dancing" "Did you see that shit?" "Dude, this is so lame" "Look at that kid go!" "This shit is so 80's" "These girls are insane" "It's like a fucking little army of pokemon !"[69]

A returnee audience member who understood what was happening and myself reported their filming (filming is not allowed by both the live house and by the bands unless authorized) to the office of the live house but the live house staff were very hesitant to interfere with them as the staff were all women who did not speak English. We volunteered to translate for the live house staff on that day and there was a long discussion

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[69] I was not even standing that close to them and they were yelling these statements very loudly to one another throughout the live.

over what to do, but in the meantime the three men had gone on filming and ridiculing the fans. Until finally the live house manager got called in (he was not actually present on site that day) and when I explained to him what was going on he tried to have a word with the men on his own (although I do not know if he spoke English or if any of the three men spoke Japanese) but he quickly gave up. He then came back to us very quickly and said "They are just here for tonight so I let them film a bit". It was a truly frustrating situation and when I talked to one of the bands later about it they said that they would request to the *jimusho* to have them take down any footage should it emerge online but that's about all that they could do. One of the band members told me that when he asked the live house manager about it on a separate day and he dismissed it saying "Oh those were my friends." This was a total lie because if they were friends invited, they would not have bought tickets but received guest passes to come in with and I saw them buying tickets at the box office earlier in the day. Also, when I first talked to the live house manager to explain the situation, he gave no indication of knowing them, even asking me if I knew where they were from.

What I wish to share from this incident is that to some people unfamiliar with *furitsuke*, it is something that can seem almost 'ridiculous' in a way that is not only based on their own understanding of how rock should be enjoyed, but that they saw such participation in rather sexist and orientalist terms. Belittling it because it seems to them like girls playing at pretending to be rock/metal.

In both cases, (the eventer and this incident with the three men) ridicule was not directed at the performers, but to the fans. Here we see the activity of women which they clearly put a lot of effort into, that is sometimes even dangerous, is not only misunderstood and delegitimized, it is infantilized when they are referred to as 'kids' or a 'pokemon army' doing 'para-para' that is 'lame' and 'insane'. Therefore, it is not only

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the highly organized appearance that is a problem to outsiders which they see as evidence of a lack of individuality and spontaneity (which to them are qualities thought to be exhibited by adults in appreciating music in an authentic, mature way), it is also relegated to 'play' in a way that is made meaningless and trivial.

Scholars have shown that albeit in different schemas of movement, lives in many other countries are indeed filled with their own minute rituals and understandings of 'how' fans enjoy lives. Scholarly work aside, simply recall performances of Queens anthemic 'We Will Rock You' and you will find something very much like a mass participation of *furitsuke* with the same shared feelings experienced by the band and fans of togetherness that comes not simply from a joint activity, but one that emerges precisely because of how overwhelmingly uniform and how widespread the participation of the moment is. Is this simply not the joy of *ittaikan* and the feeling of confusion or disruption that arises when one is confronted with something that one lacks the ability, means, vocabulary or capacity to fully understand in a different context and degree?

Therefore, to address the elephant in the room, *furitsuke* cannot be simply relegated to a 'Japanese female way of enjoying music' although the execution of the details are unique to the Japanese context. Inoue in his study of ballroom dancing in Japan has found that over time older dancers who once enjoyed the 'free' feeling they experienced from dancing, found it was no longer present in newer events as dancing had become very standardized with the introduction of standards in dancing by dance organizations and competitions that have increased over the years (Inoue 2015). However, one generation's understanding of this joy also clashed with the newer in which the newer found the joy of dancing was to be found in being able to "dance without uncertainty" (Inoue 2015); that is without the anxiety that would arise from 'not knowing' what to do next which could result in awkwardness between dance partners. Like *furitsuke* in Visual

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Kei lives, it was in the successful execution and trust between fans (in Inoue's case younger dancers) to know what was going to happen that the enjoyment was to be found in. Here, certainty provided participants with confidence to express themselves, and not the reverse understanding of confidence and joy to be found in individual spontaneity that the non-Japanese viewers of Visual Kei and older Japanese dancers valued.

Another example of highly uniform fan participation outside of Japan can be seen in Kpop fan-chanting where fans insert calls and emphasize certain parts of the lyrics that they learn through either official channels (the groups agency provides them with the chant-sheet) or they organize and circulate on their own, much like how the *jouren* in Japan do. They may not use their bodies, but their voices here are uniformly employed to make the live experience a participatory, celebratory and supportive one for both their idols and the fans. Therefore, rather than Japanese-ness, I suggest it is simply different frameworks of understanding in where enjoyment is to be found

5.4.3 Participatory Disconnect

This therefore creates the impression that Japanese prosumption of lives is so organized and standardized that it results in a kind of disconnect from the actual emotional reading of the fans. Again, a deeper investigation will reveal the ways in which both bands and fans can tell or suspect when people were simply going through the motions or authentically 'feeling it'. One, way band members (and fans) can gauge this is from reactions after the live online. What is written outside the space of the live house can reveal when things were 'off' or if some nights were better received than others. Tsurugi from the band RAZOR, talked about how a good live to the band is not necessarily a good live from the audience's point of view. There were nights when on stage he believed things sounded great and looked great so he was surprised when he read the audience feedback later online. Similarly, there were nights when he thought things had not gone well and

he was shocked to see that fans were extremely happy and raving about how 'fun tonight's live was!'

What is apparent though is that to fans, they believe that participating to the best they can gives the impression to the band that they are indeed enjoying the live. Fans see this a way to signal their enthusiasm, appreciation and dedication to the band that can be visibly recognized by them. It is in this sense that the live is a performative space for fans just as it is for bands, as participating even though you may not be having the best time is behaving like a 'professional' in that you do not let your personal take on the live or any problems that you may view as an audience member in terms of the stage performance, effect how others and the band members see you behaving. Therefore uniform, repetitive audience behavior that is not spontaneous on the outside is actually fans behaving conscientiously and with care for one another and towards the band. It is a show of solidarity and support for the ideal that is the live.

I use one incident that occurred at a live to illustrate this. On Novermber 2008 Sel'm revealed that they were going to introduce a new member to the band and none of the fans had any idea what to expect. They were very nervous as to who this might be as fans had come to love the band as a four piece and were worried that a new person would change the dynamic that they had come to like. When the new member was finally revealed, one fan, Chiaki was in so much shock she began to cry at the live. However, the *jouren* around her told her to get up and participate in order to not discourage the band. Chiaki could not get up or stop crying and around her the fans tried their best to cover her and participate. She apologized to everyone later for the trouble she had cause them and also began to feel bad and wondered if she had upset the new band member. Her closest fan friend even told her "I know how you feel, I was sad too. But you cannot behave that way because the band is trying their best so we must also think of them."

Sometimes fans can get very sensitive about this as they overestimate just how much the band is aware of the details of the fan's participation. When a fan does not want to do *furitsuke* (whether one is not into it, or uncomfortable, unsure and not yet confident to join in fully, there to watch another band, injured or just simply tired on that day), these fans will usually stand at the back of the live house. The main floor area from the front to the middle and just about the beginning of the back of the live house will generally be occupied by 'active' participants. There are times when almost everyone except maybe the last two rows is actively participating in *furitsuke*. In general, the vast majority of people watching a live are more likely participating actively then not.

While this accommodates for different modes of participation, if there are too many people in the back not participating, sometimes fans assume that on these days the band will not be happy or this will demotivate them. In reality while the band also enjoys the sight of a live house of nothing but fans having fun, they are more likely to simply be happy to have the live house full of people there to watch them, no matter how they are watching them, whether 'actively' or 'passively'. A ticket sold after all, is a ticket sold. Moreover, sometimes the venue is so dark that the band cannot actually see the majority of the audience and floor space most of the time. As previously mentioned, some bands in an attempt to shed their Visual Kei image sometimes even do away with *furitsuke* by showing their fans that they want them to participate in more simple or general ways as found in mainstream rock scenes.

Even if they are not attempting to Datsu-V per se, sometimes bands also may try to simplify the *furitsuke* because they become tired of having a particular image and may want change their style. They do this by giving the fans physical cues on how to participate. This sometimes upsets fans as they feel the band does not appreciate the efforts they have made. Also, from the point of view of the fans, sometimes variation of

furitsuke can simply be fun to do and so simplifying it kind of taking out the fun from their participation. When *furitsuke* is too simple or has become simplified to canon movements only, fans sometimes complain that things have become too 'one pattern' (one dimensional).

When fans do not participate but watch quietly, sometimes they can even be seen as suspect and targeted as having ulterior motives[70] by other fans. Male fans may also prefer to watch from the back out of self-consciousness of their height, their very presence as a minority or out of not wanting to do *furitsuke* that they may view as being too 'feminine'. 'Active' fans read their own activity as a sign of willingness to perform the role of fan and therefore sometimes misread the 'passivity' of others, equating them with being half-hearted in their approach or somehow less 'worthy'. They may even see them as not there to be fans but to try to get the attention of band members for other purposes. This is not something talked about face to face, but something that comes up in gossip between closer fan friends and something that often comes up online. While I will delve into net-surveillance on a more detailed level later in the dissertation, what I wish to make clear here is that participation signals socially to fans that 'this is a fan' and is important to fans in ways that may not be as important to the band.

Prosumption of lives is seen to provide its participants with a different way of interacting with their bodies and senses in a way that can unify body and mind such that participants become aware of their 'aliveness' in a way that they may not usually be. Although, there is thought to be some kind of power or realization that arises from this experience, there is no collective opinion or actions over how to proceed with this in a way that can be directed to changing other circumstances in their lives on a collective level. It is in this sense that their 'battle' that is *sansen* is simply one with themselves, but

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[70] More on fan surveillance will be written later on.

one that never escalates into 'war' and therefore seems politically impotent as much as it is an invite to embrace alternative approaches, which is already politics in of itself although rarely seen that way from the outside. What does seem to end up happening is that they develop an affinity to the feeling it produces and therefore come back to it to participate in lives and to re-live this affective state once again. What is born though is a knowledge and what is prosumed is a kind of knowing of position/identity/subjectivity as a person who is able to feel this way, the self- and mutual acknowledgement that whatever enjoyment or meaning they create has a place to go and a space where it is not shunned.

5.4.4 Erotic-Grotesque Bodies

As much as the audience is a participatory force and as much as their role in performing the part of the audience is something that contributes to the spectacle that is the live, ultimately the main focus of the live is the actual performance on stage. As I have briefly explained in the section on the history and subgenres of Visual Kei, there is a vast variety of styles of performance and music to be found in Visual Kei just as much as there is aesthetic variety. Here I will focus on one of the forms of performance that is quite representative of Visual Kei and that is the use of erotic and grotesque (henceforth referred to as *eroguro*) elements in live performance[71].

Eroguro is staple across many subgenres of Visual Kei even outside of the live space and therefore is also visible in music videos, as elements of costumes and photoshoots. It is also detected in the music through the use of lyrics and in accompanying sounds to evoke mood.

I choose *eroguro* not only because it is ubiquitous in Visual Kei, but also because

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[71] I use *eroguro* here in a general sense rather than as referring to the subgenre itself or a narrower use of the word as it could be applied to movements in art and pornography. I do this to capture the general mood and imagery found in Visual Kei that contains many traces and elements that are referential to the subgenre.

its use is the subject of much of the pathologizing of Visual Kei as something consumed by those who have perversions or as some kind of sign of social failure. *Eroguro* is used for particular purposes that overlap with the experiences I have already discussed in the section on *sansen*. Like Heavy Metal Carnival, it employs degradation and inversion and is a vital element that intensifies the approaching of a state of catharsis. Precisely because it draws from the erotic and grotesque, its images can be shocking, confusing, humorous, stimulating etc. which results in an invitation to experience sublimation. Furthermore, the deliberate prosumption and performance of *eroguro* also speaks to the sensitivities of Visual Kei prosumers in a way that deserves particular attention. Here I will introduce two examples of *eroguro* in live performance:

Gara is the silent vocalist of Merry. He may sing but he does not talk. When he talks he does so through calligraphy. He writes to the audience using a brush and black ink as they read out his words and sometimes his instructions. When he is done conveying his message he pours the remaining ink (real ink) into his mouth and then begins regurgitating it, spitting it out so that black drool drips and spreads from his mouth down to his neck and chest turning him into an inky, sometimes half naked, mess. Sometimes he does this with raw eggs. His performance features various elements of the absurd- he performs handstands on a school desk, he bites from an apple which he proceeds to spit out from the gap between his front teeth, he rolls from one end of the stage to the other, barefoot while managing to sing in tune, he imitates masturbation and he also tap dances.

This is meant to be absurd- it is at once strange, humorous, sexual, disgusting, nonsensical and meant to evoke a range of confusing feelings upon witnessing. One may laugh, be offended, feel disgusted, amused, aroused, be in awe, feel second-hand embarrassment, or simply be confused- It is in this range of emotions that Gara invites the audience to experience something that they may not in everyday life, especially not

within this short a time frame.

"Now reconnected to a series of feelings which may be ignored or suppressed during one's ordinary waking life, audience members walk away from the live now feeling provoked into recalling what they just saw and reconnecting this to images and experiences they may have had in their own lives, perhaps as children, perhaps in private. They are therefore reconnecting with that which they may have suppressed that is part of an 'authentic self', a primal state, through the liberation of controlled emotions and the rationality that governs everyday life" (Malick 2013, 100).

I quote a Merry fan, Remi on her feelings about this. I spoke to her about these things that Gara did on stage and she had this to say:

"(Laughs) I forgot he is actually kind of a genius. What a fool! He is really brave to show how human he is. Remember he said he wanted to join Johnny's[72] when he was a kid? We know why they rejected him. He was probably too gross for them (laughs). No filter, no shame! Which is why he ended up in Visual Kei. Here he can really be free to express 'the inside'. He could never do that with Johnnys."

Aki, another Merry fan had this to say:

"Make sure you don't use my real name ok? (laughs). One day I was eating an apple and I decided to try spitting out the bits like Gara does…this happened for no reason. But somehow this simple thing had me laughing so hard by myself. My cat stared at me like I was a weirdo but came to sniff the apple bits on the floor. I wondered then "Did I actually say something to my cat without even realizing it?" It sounds nuts I know, but I feel I maybe achieved a new level of

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[72] Johnnys *Jimusho*. The premier male idol *jimusho* of Japan.

communication with her"

What these narratives reveal is that it is precisely in the unstated meaninglessness and strangeness of Gara's actions that fans find something joyful and thought provoking in its absurdity. It is precisely because he degrades himself into such a state that the audience, reminded of base human properties like spitting, experiences this as a kind of liberation. Remi expressed this as a 'shameless freedom' and Aki through the incident with her cat wondered that if such actions perhaps contained some kind of 'hidden potential' in them, even though it was all expressed humorously. *Eroguro* for these fans, while they did not express them in clear terms, allowed them to feel, sense and aspire towards a state of liberation that once again, although not towards specific goals, did bring them a sense of joy, even if only personal and ephemeral. They also seemed to appreciate that there was someone out there, like Gara, 'playing the fool' and that there was a space in which this could happen.

In one of BORN's releases, THE STALIN-666- (BORN 2014), Stalinist iconography and authoritarian symbols were employed in costume, props and as the performance set. Vocalist Ryoga played the role of a dictatorial director in deliberately a grotesque parodic fashion. As the live progressed, the impeccable dictator slowly came apart ending the live as 'but a human'. As described by Munia:

> "The stage of the outfits itself, already a bricolage of elements that juxtaposed the authoritarian military themes from Stalin with the more sexualized clothing was in itself already a desymbolization of the Stalinist ideological apparatus. But more than that, the more incisive mocking of the whole ideology, that makes clear the bands non-alignment with the ideology, despite the usage of its aesthetical repertoire, is the body performances. Performing with deviant, non-constrained, erratic bodies, the authoritarianism and the myth of "sacrifice of the

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struggle" fall apart at each song, jump, scream, touching, or simulated gay oral sex performed in front of the audience. What starts as a play on authoritarian Stalinism marching in the stage located at a higher position than the crowd, moves to break this very symbolic hierarchy by frequently diving into, touching and letting be touched by the audience. In its own way, BORN uses authoritarian figures and iconography in order to undermine authoritarianism from within." (Munia 2015).

Vocalist Ryoga, sharing his thoughts on the concept of THE STALIN-666-explained that they intentionally chose such an impactful title because nothing screamed evil more quickly than the name of a dictator next to a satanic symbol. He also joked that this was used in a tongue and cheek way to spread their bands name with the same 'devastating impact' (Ryoga 2014) the evoked references have had on the world. Stalin and Satan though, are evoked not in actual celebratory fashion nor are they idealized, but like Munia analyzes, are used to comment on something quite the opposite. Commenting on the album and its thematic content, Ryoga explains that such images were employed for their hyperbolic function as a means to express the 'evil' within us all. The album is full of 'painful' lyrics not in that they are actually depicting the violent horrors of authoritarian regimes or of biblical struggles, but that they are about the ugliness of human nature that one can encounter every day and the pain that one can feel having confronted the real horror that is simply human behavior in all its honesty. This is the same truth that the audience is invited to recognize when Ryoga invites them to "Fuck Stalin" as he screams at lives when he stage-dives, entices the audience to rush to the stage as they grab on to one another, the piling and sweating of a hundred or more bodies take apart the dictator, costume now a mess, makeup melting to reveal simply a man like anyone else.

5.4.5 Lives as Experimental Fantasy Space

As Visual Kei is ripe with performers who on stage (and sometimes off as well) perform non-normative visions of gender (these range in interpretation and performance from non-hegemonic masculinity to *josou*) through the use of the dress as well as the body itself, it is often assumed that there may be some common ground with another form of contemporary Japanese performance art, Takarazuka. While Takarazuka is much more organized and stylized as well as clearly structured and directed in terms of its presentations, crafting and repertoire of non-hegemonic gendered performance, it is worth examining if there are indeed any actual commonalities in terms of the prosumption of these performances with Visual Kei.

Instead of reading the performances of *musumeyaku* (female part/role) as hyperfeminine and the *otokoyaku* (male part/role) as hypermasculine, Takarazuka has been studied and revealed to be depictions that are not so much grounded in realities as they are representative of ideals. Writers and fans often state that *otokoyaku* in particular are not actually 'male' characters, but are portrayals of 'female masculinity' that do not exist in the real world and only that of the Takarazuka theatre (Matsuo and Nakamura, 2003). They are therefore constructed as non-sexual and agendered characters. This is a status of gender that allows for the process of *bunshin* to occur as audience members through their relational consumption of Takarazuka characters get to experience a kind of emotional catharsis as they "play with roles outside of their own" (Matsuo and Nakamura 2003, 67). Takarazuka actors provide fans a kind of vessel of escape from the everyday gender norms that govern society through their unique depictions and performances of gender.

One of the reasons Takarazuka comes up in studies of Visual Kei is that it is thought to potentially be the 'reverse' version of this in which men perform agender, gender ambiguity or even non-sexual bodies towards similar goals and therefore similar

patterns of consumption are thought to be present. I do believe that any investigation of Visual Kei in terms of the prosumption or interactions between band and fans will reveal a multiplicity of heavily gendered meanings that generally speaking, do not speak towards fans seeing or even bands seeking to perform these meanings on any consistent or general level. Band men, even if they are 'different from normal men' as some fans see, are still, with only a few exceptions, thought of as men in many ways (Brunell 2008; Iida 2006; Inoue 2003).

What I do think one can detect though is that within Visual Kei there are particular band men and specific subgenres in which performing genderless-ness, androgyny, non-binary, or agender enactments are present, but they are but one of the many presentations and performances of gender and by no means the norm in the totality of prosumptive activities. It is precisely because Visual Kei is inclusive of many forms of content and body presentations that this does come to exist within it, but I would also emphasize its minority status and that it is one that is seen even less as time passes.

It could also be that while fans may initially feel due to the difference from men in everyday life, that the band members gender identity or displays are ones that are agendered or androgynous, but the more involved they become with interacting with the performer and in the socialization of *bangya* culture, the more aware and conscious they may grow of the very male-ness (or whatever sex/gender that individual identifies as) of the majority of performers. Therefore, the general level reading of Visual Kei as an intentional style of agendered performance is not possible from the vantage point that considers the very daily interactions between bands and fans, but is possible if treated simply as a textual representation in a social vacuum or with reference to specific formations of this.

Therefore, while studies on Takarazuka may be relevant to particular band

members who choose to engage in such styles of performance and the consumption of this by his fans, I would tend to see this a particular point of investigation within Visual Kei and one that is not generally applicable to most band members and certainly one that would be more commonly found in the past. What might be a commonality with Takarazuka however is the notion that space and performance, although temporal, can provide its consumers and fans a means of reconfiguring their own conceptions and values surrounding gender; "staged performances of non-normative gender, precisely because they are engaged in the realm of fantasy, provide an opportunity for the expansion of imagined ways of being" (Malick 2013, 69).

Adding to this, what both the Takarazuka Fantasy Space and Heavy Metal Carnival have in common is that they are both temporal zones that allow their fans a means of reflecting on a variety of hegemonic ideas of normative behavior and normative gender, through participating in the identification with the spectacles that they can also join in on. They are both aesthetically anti-structural in content as they showcase imagery and performances that are distinctly a part from presentations found in everyday life for most people. Thus, entering the performance zones potentially allow for fans to engage with new approaches or tools to imagine difference. However, what they do with this repertoire for imagining may not translate directly into any organized action, but the point to be made here is that there exists in some capacity through prosumption, the idea that there is a personal space for re-negotiating hegemonic culture.

5.4.6 Lives as Gendered Prosumption

While not adopting the language and discourse of prosumption, scholars on fandom have in other ways shown how fandom is inherently productive, as much as it is receptive. Fiske on the participation of sports fans and rock fans in terms of dress, chanting, moshing, headbanging describes this as fans creating popular culture itself:

"This melding of the team and performer and the fan into a productive community minimizes differences between artist and audience and turns text into an event, not an art object" (Fiske 1992, 40).

However, prosumption is not to be mistaken for an egalitarian or horizontal process for "even if it is true that audiences are always active, it does not follow that they are ever in control" (Grossberg 1992, 54). If one were to ask a Visual Kei fan if they saw themselves as a 'producer' of culture they would most likely only agree in very specific contexts of 'fan-culture' (*doujinshi* (self-published works), cosplaying, fan get togethers, online content) and during instances such as live participation. The exception to this is of course if fans begin to make music themselves and then there is the question of what they intend to do with that music.

Fans for the most part, are not participating in the music making process itself as that is an activity that is exclusively one conducted on the side of production[73]. Indeed, producers may make music that they feel 'fans would like', and this is perhaps evident in sub-genres like *kira-kira kei* or *kote-kira kei* where music is sometimes composed to maximize the enjoyment of *furitsuke*. However, this does not involve fans participating in the actual writing, studio or recording process. Bands may sometimes run surveys asking fans some questions about their preferences and so their input may be considered in a general sense, but when bands/producers make music 'for fans' it is rather based on their impression and general knowledge that those making music have about 'what fans enjoy' and is also influenced by larger popular trends in music.

Take for example, in recent years, there has been a rise since the 2010's of the

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[73] There are exceptions as when bands ask for their fans to send in some voice samples (cali≠gari's 'Minna no hakkyou') or ask them to appear to perform as an audience in music videos (Dir en grey's "Filth" and BORN's Devilish of the PUNK) but fans in these cases participate under direction.

use of the 'wall of death' at Visual Kei lives. Wall of death refers to a live practice found originally in the hardcore and punk scenes, but has become more associated with metal bands and festivals in recent years.

In Japan, the popularity of the Wall of Death is mostly due to the popularity of the American heavy metal band, Lamb of God who first came to Japan in 2006 and have since visited another six times for performances. As mentioned in the chapter on the history of Visual Kei, there has been an increasing influence of the loud scene on Visual Kei practices and music and therefore, bands like Lamb of God and SiM[74] who have a general level popularity in the loud metal scene in Japan, become points of reference for Visual Kei artists. The wall of death is described as:

> "Perhaps the most badass and dangerous ritual you can experience in a mosh pit is the infamous wall of death. It's a true reenactment of war as two sides, split down the middle, charge towards each other with the hope of survival. If you're near the front of either charge, you're basically guaranteed to be met with pain, but with danger comes adrenaline and for these fans, the risk is all worth it" (Hartmann, 2014).

This is the basic premise as Hartmann describes: the audience splits down the center in half and upon a certain change as indicated by the music, rushes to crash into each other in the mosh area. This is followed by a period of moshing. At metal lives, regular intervals of moshing and various other forms of audience participation ensures that the audience is more or less always moving around the audience area and therefore fixed positions that are 'secured' via ticket number are not so much of actual importance. Given that I have already described the *shikiri* system and how ticket numbers and the

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[74] An influential Japanese loud rock band who are thought to have one of the 'best' (read: violent) forms of wall of death executed at their lives.

securing of positions is a highly contested premium which is the source of much tension and competition amongst fans, the introduction of the wall of death into the repertoire of audience participatory activity messes with this system in several ways.

Now the wall of death when used in Visual Kei is of course adapted to Visual Kei sensibilities depending on the subgenre of band and the ethos the band expounds in wanting to include this in to their set. This is another thing that should be mentioned; the wall of death was not brought in by fans, but introduced to the audience via bands themselves who saw their loud-kei counterparts utilize it. Therefore, the majority of Visual Kei fans had to learn how to execute the wall of death based on the band's instruction (unless the band and its fans were very much already entrenched in loud-kei sensibilities) and depending on what the band instructs or cues they want happening after the crash and mosh period, this can change the way in which the audience proceeds on from after that.

The immediate problem that occurs is that in this period of moshing, the initial starting position from which a fan begins at will be lost in the mosh as bodies move, mosh around and are shoved to and fro, until the music phrasing which indicates the moshing phase comes to an end. Any positions obtained through ticket number or *shikiri* negotiation are temporarily (if not permanently) lost. For fans, the immediate question that arises is; do we go back to where we initially started from or are we simply supposed to continue to watch the live from the new position in which we find ourselves in?

The answer lies in two factors; what were the bands ques over the situation and how big was the participating audience? Generally, smaller audiences (capacity of approx. 100 and less) could afford to politely make their way back very quickly to their initial spots and in general this does tend to happen, especially in smaller lives and lives where the band itself is not adhering strongly to the original 'spirit' of the wall of death, but

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simply incorporating it in a more liberal sense. Needless to say, there was the usual criticism and stereotyping that accompanied this; of Visual Kei using things in an inauthentic way, defeating the point of the wall of death as an equilibrizing tool. On top of that, the Visual Kei wall of death applied this way was also seen as a 'girlified' version of it that was juvenile and simply once again served as more evidence that Visual Kei is a 'pretend' form of rock[75].

However, an equal number of bands have also used the wall of death for a number of other purposes truer to the original spirit of its use and do not use it in the same causal manner as these bands. First, that they indeed wanted to incorporate some of the imagined enjoyment and equilibrizing forces that the wall of death is believed to have. But they also did this with a particularly Visual Kei reason in mind; by incorporating this into their lives, they could effectively erode the *shikiri* system and the unfairness it was thought to bring, without actually confronting their *jouren* and *shikiri* on an individual level. Here, they coopted the authenticity of moshing as a practice towards the ends of both legitimizing the band on a larger level in terms of the overall metal scene, but also used this very act of legitimacy to silence (or as a form of indirect interference) the longstanding problem of the *shikiri* system without actually having to confront their fans.

One simple enactment however is not enough to undo the shikiri system, but it can be achieved if the band continuously calls for the wall of death to be performed repeatedly and further 'messes' the audience up with *aori* and musical compositions that

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[75] Outside of Japan, the wall of death can be so violent it results in not only injuries, but actual deaths which have led the move's banning by bands and particular venues/festivals. Many fans do believe though that these deaths were not a result of the actual wall of death (although injuries are indeed quite normalized) but that deaths occurred when participants were not aware of just how to participate properly or when it was done in a scene in which not everyone was used to the particular measures that regular participants would take when participating.

does not give the fans much room for finding their way back to their spots, but instead would require them to be ready to participate straight away. What the utilizing of this indicated to fans is that the band wanted this to be a moment to prove that it was not a particular position or favoring of any position/vantage point in the venue that shaped the enjoyment of the audience experience, but that the band could be enjoyed from just about any random position an audience member happened to find themselves in, which was exactly where most would find themselves immediate post wall of death.

Opinions on the wall of death and its uses like this are very divided. Needless to say, *shikiri* aside, anyone with a good ticket number or anyone who had secured a position that they liked regardless of ticket number now had to deal with the fact that they would most likely lose this position. Furthermore, what this particular kind of moshing allows for is actually for a winner takes all mentality to become the norm. Amidst the wall of death, fans who charge forward and have no qualms about using their physical strength to better their position indeed use it as an opportunity to do so. Fans who are not comfortable doing so or are timid or simply trying their best to not get injured tend to lose their ground and position to fans who are more proactive in their participation. Therefore, a new dilemma, one that initially sought to undo the unfairness that the *shikiri* system was thought to bring has emerged; the wall of death as promoted by the band has actually worked towards the service of fans who are willing to tough it out, who have physical strength and use it, and for those of who take advantage of the opportunity to get ahead (literally).

Observe the following conversation I had with Mai and Sana when I asked them how they felt about bands they liked asking the fans to perform the wall of death:

Mai: I hate it.

Sana: (laughs) Mai hates this kind of thing…but actually its very fun! But if there are

impolite people around you then yeah….it can also be quite troublesome.

Mai: I don't know why Visual Kei bands have to do this. They need to show they are cool or something but us fans suffer.

Sana: Yeah well, they are guys so…guys enjoy this kind of thing…like its manly to them….

Mai: Yes, but the audience is mostly girls!! I hate it when I'm just watching the live and then some idiot suddenly comes ramming into me. I end up just going to the back of the live house to avoid all of this.

Sana: Its fun if it is done in a fair way I think. If you can go back to your spot it's not a problem. In the front area… actually fans are trying to help each other do this but it's a mess…

Mai: The band doesn't seem to care about that (that fans lose their initial spots).

Sana: Well, if they like it there is not much we can do.

I interviewed a *gya-o*, Nitta on what he thought about it and this is what he had to say:

"As a man I have to be careful not to use too much strength as around me are many girls, who are usually smaller. They can be very strong and powerful too but I think naturally I cannot compare my 'regular' amount of strength that I will use in such a situation with the 'regular' most girls have. Wall of death, circle mosh, diving…these things are really great fun and you feel like a release of tension from them. But in Visual Kei lives we men have to be aware of the women audience. I try, but I don't know if other male fans do that. I've seen a few times how some male fans upset girls because they do it in a different way (from girls). The guys see this probably the same way the band does…like they emphasize the enjoyment. But maybe to girls it's not fun in the same way because

they cannot participate like men. But for some it is I think. If they really do it with just the intention to have fun then I don't think it will be a problem. But of course, men too have to be careful."

What should come through from these narratives is that there are clear ideas about 'male' enjoyment of lives and 'female' forms of enjoyment as being quite different. Girls are seen as simply not able to do the wall of death as men do and some of them also do not seem to enjoy it period. As Sana and Mai have shown, although Sana finds it fun, Mai seems to be opposed to the whole idea on several grounds. For her it is physically not enjoyable and she feels that there is an element of the display of masculinity that bands desire to attain by incorporating it, as if they feel an inadequacy in this department because they are Visual Kei bands and therefore not thought of as cool by men.

Nitta was a very conscientious *gya-o* who I have to say is not the norm. He was often amongst female fans and had no problem joining them even in social get togethers even if he was the only man in the group. If anything, he said he simply enjoyed having fellow Visual Kei fan friends regardless of gender, but this was an exception. Other *gya-o* I spoke too often lamented they wish there were more men coming to Visual Kei lives and even felt that Visual Kei bands who had more male fans were lucky and 'cool' and that it was easier for them to go to these band's lives.

Therefore, Nitta's exercising of strength carefully was something I could not determine as standard practice amongst fans and the internet is filled with complaints about *gya-o* 'overdoing' participation and upsetting female fans with their use of force which they may or may not have been aware of. Also, while I appreciate the care Nitta had, he too displayed strong ideas about what was a 'better' way to enjoy the live that actually cohered to fairness and equality in terms that were valued and expressed by most men which had nothing to do modes of enjoyment that were less 'proactive' (like the kind

Mai would prefer). As Nitta's words reveal, it is thought that men (including the bands) would like for participation to be more liberal, one that is achieved through equal participation in equilibrizing forces like moshing and the wall of death. However, this clashes with other forms of participation and indeed clashes with a lot of the established norms of participation in the Neo-Visual Kei era onwards such as elaborate *furitsuke* etc. that fans have come to be very used to.

Fans indeed completely 'make' the live together with the band as co-producers of the spectacle, but as this example has shown, it is own rife with understandings of gendered forms of prosumption and values that loaded with gendered meanings about ideas of enjoyment and fairness that are worlds away from the 'agendered, androgynous, fantasy worlds of new possibilities' that some have seen Visual Kei to be potentially offering. The wall of death in practice does not allow for equal participation, favors the production and prosumption of men and ultimately, the shots are still called on the side of production (the bands) who have the ability to conduct how the audience participates.

5.5 Music and Lyrics: Stigma, Pathology and The Prosumption of *Menhera*, *Yanderu* and *Chuunibyou* Identities

It should be apparent that despite the accusations of a superficial focus on appearances and aesthetics, fans clearly enjoy listening to Visual Kei music whether live or in its recorded forms. This includes both its sonic and lyrical content, a combination in which they say they enjoyed in particularly in contrast to 'normal' or 'popular' music.

In this section I will examine this contrast in detail and then move on to some views on the music from the point of view of Visual Kei artist (lyricists) themselves to demonstrate that it is also through the prosumption of Visual Kei music that a kind of particular worldview and identities come into circulation amongst listeners who feel an affinity to the music. While there is slight variation, across time and eras, a consistent

thread can be traced that indicate a common thematic consistency which pertains and appeals to the identity, mode and sensitivities of the (whether self-proclaimed or externally diagnosed/ascribed) menhera ('mental health-er' meaning mentally ill or unstable), *yanderu* (state of sickness) and *chuunibyou* ('2ⁿᵈ year junior high syndrome', a kind of arrested development). These are mental-emotional states that are contrasted to 'normal', 'healthy', 'mainstream', 'regular' and other positively associated statuses, identities and qualities associated with those outside of the subculture.

While much of the identification process is mostly a 'felt' one in that it is the listener who identifies with the content, there are elements of this identification which are also compounded by various external forms of stigmatization that prosumption in turn intensifies.

5.5.1 Lyrical Reception and Identification: Hinichijyou vs. Mijika

In general, a pattern I found to be present was that when I asked people what they liked about Visual Kei music, two initially opposing perspectives emerged. The first group can be described as liking the *hinichijyou* feel of the music and lyrics. *Hinichijyou* literally means 'non-everyday' but it more accurately refers to the out of the ordinary or extraordinary imagery and feel of the subject and worldview expressed and found in Visual Kei music.

In contrast, the second common view was that listeners were moved by how *mijika* (close, near, familiar) they found the themes and subjects in the music to be. This was a closeness not just felt in terms of 'relatability'[76] but one that was expressed at a deeper more profound level, partly because the closeness here was usually concerned with the expression of negative experiences or what is thought to be 'negative' emotions in

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[76] Relatability (*toushindai*) here was not a word that fans used which is a point worth noting. They did not find the artists relatable in the everyday way that idols are often described as having the quality of.

that they dealt with painful, emotional or darker themes. Listeners would feel they could superimpose (*kasaneru*) themselves into songs in the sense that the songs spoke of their own experiences and feelings in a way that they did not find present in other forms of music.

I will now turn to show some examples of both types of experiences with regards to lyrics and then go on to show how despite this difference, what both types of listeners have in common is that the music provided them with a medium to experience music in a way that recognized their desires (and as a result themselves), deal with traumatic experiences and gave them a way to think about and position themselves in relation to their surrounding social realities.

The examples chosen range from both canon examples in that there is wide agreement amongst Visual Kei fans, writers and producers that these songs represent something of the '*Hinichijyou*' (Kambe 2019, Hinishi 2017) and also from examples that came up in interviews. Finally, I will discuss how a certain kind of proclivity towards particular stigmatized identities is formed through intense prosumption of Visual Kei music. All lyric translations that I have used are my own.

5.5.1.1 Hinichijyou (Extraordinary) Reception

For the first group of people, songs gave them a way to imagine other worlds, possibilities outside of their everyday lives and a mode of fantasizing. While this is most apparent in songs from the earlier and mass-popularity eras of Visual Kei, it is still an element found today. Two representative examples are LUNA SEA's 'ROSIER' and Dir en grey's 'Akuro no oka':

ROSIER

The town that's forgotten even how to shine is a flood of neon,

A herd of sleepwalkers

Amidst a drift of rotten ambitions,

Buildings mangled the night sky as I looked up

This world is without dreams

In the city where even shining stars can't be seen, I seek the end in the night sky

My thin fingers, held out into this night

Are searching for the answer

Wavering, wavering, my heart now remains unable to believe in anything

It's my rosy heart that has bloomed

Wavering, wavering in this world, remaining unable to love

Like sorrowfully vibrant flower petals

(LUNA SEA, 1994)

       While the setting is clearly urban as images of tall buildings and neon lights are evoked, where the city the song takes place in is never culturally identified in a clear way. A mood of surrounding hopelessness permeates the scene (shining stars that can't be seen), but the subject, while within a situation where hope is scarce, remains searching for a way out despite having nothing to go on. On top of having a baseless will, the subject is also aware of their own sorrow which they metaphorically uphold to have at its core something of beauty and value (their rosy heart within and their inability to find love is likened to a wilting flower).

       For people who grew up outside the city who had dreams of leaving their small town or village life, the song has a particular representative meaning of a life far removed from theirs. Thus, while it is not of fantastical properties, here, lonely or alienating city life itself becomes an 'other world'. Their personal dreams of moving to the city itself too are contrasted to the lack of dreams the subject of the song has and this as Echizen tells me is as a teenager listening to this song when it came out was "Was totally different from

the life I had. It sounds childish but when you are a teenager in the boondocks dreaming of a way out, even a cold city life can seem more exciting than the fields you see every day."

This is also echoed by Fujiyama (Kambe, 2019) who explains (also on the subject of Rosier), small village or small-town life was one where you looked up and you saw trees and birds and even the idea of "buildings mangled up into the night sky" seemed almost science fiction like and would therefore for him, transport him to another world.

But the worlds conjured in songs were not always a blank canvas and sometimes specific 'other worlds' would be referenced as is in the next example:

Akuro no Oka (Hill of the Acropolis)

Withering flowers

Like in those days, even just once is enough

I want them to bloom beautifully

On this night

My heart and my ideals melt into the darkness

If even just for tonight

Interlocked fingers come untwined

I, who sink deeper, loved you when I saw you for the last time

A dream that won't come true

I will wait on the hill of the acropolis

I want to slumber beside you

A dream from which I do not wake

(Dir en grey, 1999)

Once again, the mood is dark and in song, the subject is grieving the loss of a love. The same trope of comparing one's desire to an object of beauty (here too again it

is flowers) is present and as with ROSIER, despite the overwhelming impossibility of reunification, there remains the hope, an almost fatalistic wish to be reunited as the subject waits 'on the hill of the acropolis'. A specific place is referenced, but it is one outside the existence of daily (Japanese) life, thus allowing for the pain and turmoil which is portrayed in the song to be elevated to an extraordinary level that propels the listener into the heart of the emotions, simply to feel it. The distance from reality allows for multiple interpretations to take place, a listener may be curious about where these dark emotions come from, thus involving the text and the producer of it, or they may be inspired or experimenting with the emotions experienced in the song in a way that may see them engaging in their own creative processes.

Dreams that do not seem to come true, flowers struggling to bloom or wilting, searching in the night, sinking deeper into things, lost yet searching; these hyperbolic psycho-emotional states were ones that while dramatic and sometimes found to be humorous in their melodrama, are a hallmark of the emotive degree of Visual Kei in that depictions of feelings are rarely moderate or normal but instead intense, almost violently decadent and fatalistic. Listeners would contrast this with the 'everyday' in that they compared it to popular songs they heard on tv or the radio that they said depicted a world of healthy *ria-jyuu* (short for *riaru jyuujitsu*, fulfillment in reality[77]) people. For those who felt removed from such a world, songs that basked in despair or hopelessness yet the subject was still hoping, allowed for them a vague yet invitingly 'beautiful' sonic space to enter. This is aided by the accompanying visual and aesthetic experience of the music videos, performances, stages and the very otherworldly personas of the band members

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[77] This would indicate having work-life balance as well as being in a 'real' relationship. In Visual Kei, it refers to this, but *ria* is also used to refer to '*riaru koukousei*' (real high school students) who are assumed to be having the time of their lives, free from adult responsibilities. They can be used overlappingly to indicate both meanings.

themselves.

While some may see this as escapist and perhaps all forms of fantasy contain some sense of escapism, escapism here should not be simply dismissed as a futile act of consumption. A theme that often came up in conversations with fans regarding what they liked about Visual Kei as previously discussed in the section on Visual Shock, was that of '*henshin no kanousei*' (the possibility of transformation). This was not only in a literal physical sense having seen how band members could 'transform' into otherworldly stage personas, but something that was also felt in songs. In the next two songs I introduce as examples of otherworldliness contain subjects that while suffering, either wish to or are able to transform:

Yami yori kurai doukaku no acapella, Bara yori akai jounetsu no aria

(An a cappella lamentation darker than darkness, an aria of a passion redder than the rose)

My dear rose. You are all of me in this world.

In now, the past, and the future I sing for you.

The depths of hell

A voice that slithers across the ground

An a cappella lamentation darker than darkness

A heart fulfilled

A voice that falls from the heavens

An aria of a passion redder than the rose

I never know pleasure to live

Why was I born such ugly?

(Why?) (You wish?) (Your mind?)

Just once, I'd like to be loved

Even what's beneath this hideous mask

Born into this world without knowing love, remaining wrapped in darkness

(D, 2005)

In this song, the subject laments with despair their 'ugliness' which precisely because it is not clear, can be interpreted to be both a physical ugliness as well as one caused by their state of never receiving and therefore never able to feel or give love. What the subject wishes for is the beauty expressed as the 'rose'; an object of love that is beautiful and 'full' of passion as opposed to the darkness of the 'mask' the subject wears. Here it is love (the rose) which holds the key to the transformation which is actually located, but simply unseen within the subject themselves, hence the song they sing is 'an aria of a passion redder than the rose'. The potential is located within themselves and through action (singing) that while may be painful (lamentation that is darker than darkness) they approach beauty in this way.

But potential is not simply a thing located within, it is also one that can be realized by an external impetus, as is expressed in the next song:

ROMANCE

Only permitted by the moonlight

Simply captivated by the luminous down on your skin

Continuing to sleep, I enter your dreams

I want you to be waiting for me wearing a black dress

Ah, I'll pierce your nape deeply with love

Ah, mingle with my blood and run through the night with me

The bride of the moonlit night

(BUCK-TICK, 2005)

Here vampiric tropes (a canon trope across genres of otherworldliness) are an invitation to join the 'romance' which is depicted as a dark yet beautiful world of the night

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through the use of gothic motifs. Rather than the transformation being one that is internally self-activated, here the transformation is more passive and it is achieved by giving in to desires. Transformation here is self-admission, a state of acceptance of one's own dreams.

In both these examples of transformation, the otherworld is at once beautiful as it is painful, for the transformative process involves the subject to have to realize/admit (whether actively or more passively) their deepest desire; to be loved and to be beautiful. These can be realized upon entering this world which is happening both at the level of the subject of the text and also the world that is presented to the listener which is that of the space in which Visual Kei exists. Songs and their Visual formats are manifestations of these inviting worlds that offer narratives of 'transformation' to fans. The otherworldliness employed here also functioned to elevate, make beautiful or intensify their emotions so that transformation could be 'felt' and imagined more directly/poignantly. What listeners should do with these invitations and intense feelings was never made clear, except that they were left with the ideas of being able to activate some kind of 'world' changing by participating and prosuming Visual Kei. Prosumption born from consuming texts (also discussed in the Visual Shock section) ranged from fan created text and culture (cosplay, *doujinshi*, art, social events, fan activities, live culture, body projects) to making music itself whether at the amateur cover level or going on to form a band with the aims to become professionals or form a career out of it. Acts of creativity allowed people to 'transform' themselves by approaching and attempting to find their own places and meanings located in the 'other worlds'.

This element of *hinichijyou*-ness is still present in Visual Kei, although the style in which this is expressed by younger bands has shifted from gothic motifs to that of marchantic motifs. While pain, turmoil and darkness are still mainstay themes in Visual

Kei, marchantic other worlds are slightly more gentile, yet the appeal is in their presentation of uncertainty whereas thematic darkness has become more present in other subgenres.

An example of this would be Grimoire's song, 'Never End':

Never End

The canaries, tired of playing, sleep quietly

Now the never-ending story is about to begin

Can you hear the sounds of life, entrusted to the wind?

If I laughed at the sky, as if in a gallop

That's far away.

The fickle footprints of someday,

Entice us to come along

Now let's go,

And raise the curtain of fate

The fancy we play

A big wooden puzzle

For some reason I still

Can't find the last piece

A baby's first cry is a rhapsody

At the tip of a branch of the World Tree still unknown to us, is a taste of a small, colorless fruit we discovered

Searching for an answer

To this unfinished puzzle

Will I find it in time?

Tell me, my tree,

How much longer till we reach the end of this floating world?

(GRIMOIRE, 2016)

Notice that while the act of invitation is present, it is no longer one in which pain is overwhelmingly present. Furthermore, the hopelessness is not one that is outwardly expressed but one that comes from a sense of uncertainty. There is a journey to be made and a searching that continues, but the end is unclear to the subject as is the point of the journey. They are aware they have to keep moving but a lingering uncertainty and listlessness permeates every action. What they are searching for in this otherworld (which although is beautiful in a comparatively more gentile way), more than for love or the desire for beauty, is purpose itself. The transformative potential here is not about a particular fulfillment of carnal desires or for emotional solace in a clear sense, but is from the understanding gained from the process of the journey itself, all of which is shrouded in a picturesque mystery.

While these songs were chosen for their representations of *hinichijyou* elements and I have tried to show that they serve as invitations to potentially transformative other worlds that are not so much about clear identification, this by no means entails that listeners did not identify or related these songs to their own experiences in life. However, these were more clearly expressed in the prosumption of songs in the next section.

5.5.1.2 Mijika Reception

I now move on to discuss a very different approaching to the listening of Visual Kei music and lyrics which is that of feeling a personal closeness or affinity to the subject. I asked those I interviewed this specific question if they ever felt there were Visual Kei songs that were personally meaningful or important to them. Without even asking, people who answered would bring up lyrics as a reason they held a song close to their hearts.

Other times it may have been a moment experienced at a live, but the majority

of answers were not necessarily in the context of a live, but just the song on its own as a piece to listen to. Of course, hearing it live also gave it another layer of meaning, but these songs thought to be felt as *mijika* were more so due to the lyrical content. For example, Sana brought up cali≠gari's "Blue Film" which she said "Anyone who has ever been depressed (*yanda koto aru*[78]) in this way will be really cut deeply by this song."

Blue Film

The day when our youth died and we fell into adulthood.

Ah, I just wanted someone's body temperature to match mine.

The movie theater where the atmosphere is thin is good, and someone tells me "I love you."

I wanted to be told this, so I grabbed any hand I could.

But none of it was real.

The day when our youth died and we fell into adulthood.

Ah, I just wanted someone's body temperature to match mine.

In an old bed with yellowed sheets, embracing lies whose names I don't know,

Just for today, I will stumble alone.

Because the sun will rise.

The projector turns with a rattling sound.

It reflects a faded blue scene on the screen.

Weak, entangled voices become a tiny source of strength,

My frozen moments, will probably be destroyed in my warm heart.

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[78] I will discuss the specific meanings and significance of *yanderu* in the context of Visual Kei later in this chapter but for now, I have translated this as depression here. To be more specific, it is a kind of depression that is associated with problems surrounding romantic relationships.

The many high walls and the many deep wounds, beaten down without even a word,

But even then if I still walk on…

The projector turns with a rattling sound.

It reflects a faded blue scene on the screen.

Absent-mindedly I sat beside a nonchalant kindness,

My stiffened heart, even the tense thread runs out.

"It's okay to cry for yourself and not for someone else, cry so hard you look ugly, it's

fine."

I'll take a walk over someone's body. I'll walk until dawn.

Weak, entangled voices became a tiny source of strength,

My frozen moments, will probably be destroyed in my warm heart.

The blue film that spoke to me when I had no place to go.

(cali≠gari, 2000)

> I asked Sana to elaborate on her feelings about the song and she said;
>
> "It's really a masterpiece…to write to honestly about being so lonely that
> anyone will do. You know it is not love, it is not real, it is all an 'act' of love
> which leaves you empty in the end because it cannot replace a real everyday
> love…but that is not the amazing part of this song…. the real crux is this, that
> even though it's not real, you actually gained something from it, as pathetic as it
> may seem. Doing this gave you some courage to go on because in the moment
> of being with someone, you did experience the kindness of another human,
> maybe they are hurting like you too, but they are simply not for you and you are

not for them."

Recalling these experiences to the individual, the metaphor of the 'blue film' is employed to represent their memories of their life, which although sordid and 'an act' in the same sense pornography would be an 'act', was the undeniable experience from which they grew into who they are now.

'*Yandere*' which is often used to describe a woman's depression concerning relationships, was also something actually experienced by men as one of my interviewees brought up another song in a similar way to Sana's, of one that he could relate to for it seemed to be singing of his experiences in a toxic relationship:

Kore ga izon to yobu nara (If This Is What You Call Dependence)

The door is shut, and I'm alone

I had a dream that you lusted insatiably for my sins

I dip my intertwined arms in the bath

And hide the spare key you left behind in my mouth

The dream we talked about and the rosary we chose

At the back of my neck… your teeth marks remain

On the last night, my heart flutters through space

With a cold gaze, silence, embraced and thrown away

Ah… Choking me

Ah… As I cried

Ah… I saw you smiling

Ah… And said, "Kill me" with that love

If this is what you call dependence, then I'm burning in its hellfire

To become the shape of what you wanted …I'll even grow wings and fly

If this is what you call dependence, then I'm going deep into the water

To become the shape of what you wanted…I have no reason to worry, right?

(MEJIBRAY, 2011)

This interviewee did not just talk about the lyrics, but he also went on to describe why the lyrics are particularly poignant because of the way in which they are sung; voice breaking, screams, cries etc., are employed as vocal techniques to deliver the message in a way that melodic singing alone cannot. He also went on to say that most 'normal' men will hide that they ever felt this way because it is shameful to lose oneself in a relationship to a woman like this, but it was indeed something he himself experienced and he found it really easy to superimpose himself on to the subject of this song as it mirrored his own 'shameful' emotions and experience in many ways.

Difficult love relationships were not the only kinds of songs people related or felt moved by in a personal way. Other traumatic incidents and experiences that also came up that were the topics of songs one had an affinity to concerned topics of child or sexual abuse. Sei, who was raised by a single mother after her mother found the courage to get out of an abusive relationship recalls only 'noisy' memories of her father. The voices of her parents quarrelling and her father's anger sometimes escalating to the point of violence, are some of the few things she remembers of him. "There are no songs of this kind because they are not song worthy was what I simply believed as normal. When I heard Shingigan for the first time, I was really shocked. That was my story too."

Shingigan (Artificial Eye of God)

Every time your eyes glaze over, you turn into another person

Blood flows Shaking…Shivering…

Looking into the mirror, a figure broken down in tears is still…

Seared into my mind

(Sel'm 2008)

Here, both fan and artists find in the space of Visual Kei music, the room to express things that may not have an easily accessible outlet of discussion available to them. The act of *sansen* has been shown to provide catharsis for its participants, but the act of performance and creation too can serve a similar function. The liberal boundaries regarding content allow for a number of topics and themes to be taken up in the music itself and therefore marginalization of various forms, abuse and pyscho-emotional issues are often the topics of songs which the performer/writer themselves says comes from their own experiences. It is this "very personalized approach to lyric writing that for fans and bands is one of the attractions of Visual Kei" (Malick 2013, 92). The song mentioned above was written from the band members own personal experience of domestic and child abuse, written from the point of view of himself as a child caught in the midst of his parent's fights.

While a song like *Shingigan* is meant to depict turmoil and trauma in a realistic way, trauma as a subject was also depicted in other ways. Sometimes rather than trying to get under the skin of the victim in a realistic sense, elements of fantasy or fiction were used to channel the anger and desire for a sense of control over a traumatic incident which was left unresolved. Here, similar to the way in which the re-living of trauma as recreated by the victim themselves within the parameters of the control of their own narrative as it is in rape-revenge films and fanfiction, fictional situations allow for victims to deal with experiences in a way that may seem counter intuitive at first:

Embryo

Yes, it was a summer morning in 1983

My beloved mama was always by my side

Please, smile at me just like you always do

Your expression distorted in the sunlit morning

Mama's neck was choked   if she dangles from the ceiling

Bye bye, Mother

With silent tears and deep anguish

Unable to bear it, the flowers scatter

I am alone

Without a Face a gasping voice

Without a Face a distorted voice

So rape me until you're satisfied I am yours, Papa

But see, Mother is looking down on us from above

My Sweet Mother

Smile   My heart bursts open as I smile

Deadly Sweet Mother

I'll wait for you as I hold back nausea and endure in hatred

While he embraces me

It's already a winter night in 1992

My despised papa is always by my side

Look, just like always do, today too, you embrace me

Papa's eyes wide open, burnt into my memory

I thrust that thing I had kept hidden into his neck deeply and strongly

Bye bye, Father

Still naked, blooming in the snowy landscape I bloom, smeared with crimson blood

I am alone

(Dir en grey, 2002)

The victim of an incestuous rape here is allowed to kill their abuser, thus allowing for a form of 'justice' where there is perhaps none that can take place. It does not make things better and it does not undo the trauma, but it is living out a kind of desire that may not be easily voiced in real life and it is also one that even if not a literal desire, enables victims to channel as opposed to bury, their anger or hurt that they may be suppressing into a symbolic form. It is a re-exposure of a wound, not for the function of re-humiliating the victim, but one that allows for the acknowledging the totality of the horror that may have taken place. There are several problematic points that could be discussed such as if this is a kind of commodification of trauma or if it is appropriate for a man to be writing on women's trauma in such ways and I do think that those debates could take place using examples on a case by case basis, however rather than to evaluate songs this way, what I seek to present here at this point is that they exist and are sometimes consumed in these ways. I will later in this chapter discuss some of the social criticisms that emerge surrounding these topics in Visual Kei songs as well as how they are also sometimes both sources of self-deprecating humor and stigma even for fans.

It is precisely these kinds of lyrics and topics that fans found not present in other

genres of popular music that they found a kind of solace in. The very personal and emotionalized range of topics were seen to be refreshing and honest. This provided listeners a means to experience a range of emotions within music that these listeners came to value precisely for its rare relatability.

Visual Kei music was found to be *mijika* in another way which was in that sometimes, songs (especially within particular subgenres like *misshitsu-kei*, *eroguro-kei* and songs from the first *hyougaki* onwards) contained imagery that was specifically Japanese. Clear examples would be MUCC's '1R', a song about how even a 1R room can seem big when someone's presence is missed or cali≠gari's 'Tadaima' depicting emptiness in the form of no reply to the *tadaima* (I'm home) that is uttered by the subject in the song. Other examples would be of D-Out's 'Chuukyori renai' (love at mid-distance) a song about a person who lives on a stop on deep in the Odakyu line who is in a relationship with someone who lives in the city center and how this delicate distance is felt in many ways beyond the literal spacial 'middle-distance' that lies between the couple. Songs like this were said to have '*seikatsukan*' (feeling of everyday life) in them that is far from otherworldly, and therefore easy for the Japanese listener to superimpose their own everyday life on to.

However, songs with *seikatsukan* are *mijika* in particular Visual Kei ways, which is also what makes them received differently from 'normal' music with *seikatsukan* in them. Even though there is something of everyday life in these songs, the topics themselves are not 'safe' or 'normal'. Take for example MUCC's Suimin:

Suimin (Sleep)

Even though I do not want to wake up yet, somebody is trying to wake me

I still lack sleep so I've come to keep ignoring that voice, me

The sounds of the person I hate are so painful, but there's nothing I can do about the pain

Because it was so unbearable, I would bury myself deeper and deeper under the *futon*

The best thing would be to keep sleeping on and on, and when I wake

It would be good if there's nothing but crying into the darkness, I think

Somebody, please help him. He is so weak.

Am I the only one who can hear amidst this crowd of people

his sorrowful screams as he cries all alone?

Everyone is so good at pretending they can't hear, aren't they?

Are those splendid ears just decorations?

The creatures living in the shape of people are now nowhere to be found, aren't they

At some point I had forgotten the feeling of fulfillment

I was terrible for not being able to notice what was really going on

I understood what things will go unnoticed, no matter how much I make appeals

Even so, I kept on wishing

I want to erase that person

I want to disappear

Somebody, please help him. That child who is crying all alone

Can't you hear his screams? The crying screams of "Somebody help me"

Most adults pretend they don't see the lost child and walk on by

I won't ask anymore of all of you.   One day I will kill you all.

The song is a depiction of someone in their apartment who is aware of the

presence of a child who is constantly abused who is living in the area yet they continue to do nothing. They are bothered by it, but they are also bothered by the fact that no one else seems to be doing anything about it. It is a confession of the feeling of regret, frustration and of selfish behavior at once that while even though may not have occurred in the exact same way, many have reported feeling, especially those who live in the city and it is a critique on the lack of care and lack *yoyu* (leeway)that people develop in their daily lives. It is also uncertain who the child really is in the end as the crying child may simply be a metaphor for the suppressed trauma of childhood abuse the adult person ignoring their screams as he buries deeper into his *futon* is actually experiencing.

One song that kept coming up that was both inspirational to band members and was said to be a poignant capturing of their initial feelings when they decided to pursue music was the next song:

Like@Angel

On the night a boy reaches his hand out from the window

He shows interest in everything he touches

He begins to grow out his hair due to his sharp pride

Despite constant worry, he feels a thrill

I want to spread my angel wings and leap over my lofty dreams

Recalling my childhood, I want to swim as if I'm struggling

You gave me a sign and I want to take you along for the leap

If I had angel wings, I could keep on singing

I'm going to leap over the next dream

(Kuroyume, 1997)

5.5.2 Discussion: Stigma and Pathology

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As was shown, it is within the idea of a kind of felt 'difference' from general popular music that was one of the reasons listeners felt an affinity to Visual Kei music. Lyrics that they contrasted with that of pop music and lyrics that engaged them at a personal level they had not experienced up till now. Writing on the forms of ideology or authenticity in the fan experience, one of the ways this is gauged is when an artist displays the 'ability to articulate private but common desires, feelings and experiences in a shared public language' (Grossberg 1992, 62). It is along these lines that both the closeness of emotional experience and setting of context in *mijika* reception as well as the realization of desires through channeling of the otherworld in *hinichijyou* reception that fans find a sense of authentic emotional resonance with the artists and their words.

From such narratives of what fans find meaningful or vital about Visual Kei, one distinction element that should be apparent is that it is not always a consumption process in which the fan seeks to be entertained, but instead what is enjoyed or cherished here is something that is far more complex as it involves an affectively charged sensitivity that is cultivated and re-produced with every act of participation. It involves sometimes entering a mood that is not fun, relaxing, or any of the qualities associated with casual leisure. Sometimes fans enter a tumultuous emotional state; feeling down, sad, empty, melancholic. It is through the experiencing of these feelings in the affective state they enter that allows them to confront or validate emotions, memories or experiences they have had that they may not be able to express easily verbally as there may not be people with whom they can do so in person. It is in this sense that affect is not simply desire or emotion, but "affect is closely tied to what we describe as the feeling of life…different affective relations inflect meanings and pleasures in different ways. Affect is what gives 'color', 'tone' or 'texture' to our experiences" (Grossberg 1992, 57).

This is why rather than simply focusing on emotions, I believe affect allows us

a better means of comprehending the consumption of Visual Kei fans for as Grossberg highlights in arguing that fan involvement and affinities are affective and not simply about the emotions or desires, but that the difference for fans is a process that is constantly being re-defined affectively, producing an 'affective alliance' that separates the fans notion of what Visual Kei is from other people who are outside of this structure of experience. In this way the fan separates 'us' (fans) from 'them'(*panpi*).

While fans may enjoy lives and these spectacles for their entertainment properties and are indeed 'entertained' by them, I suggest that this is not what fans value about Visual Kei solely. This is why when explaining what they like about Visual Kei they compare other forms of 'entertainment' to it in order to highlight what is special to them about this particular scene which they contrast with 'light' entertainment. Seen another way, what Visual Kei fans are cherishing in Visual Kei is this affective state of otherworldliness that they feel an affinity to in an intimate and personalized way. They realize this state is also one that is in contrast to their surrounding social realities where the opposite is thought to be right and normal (the states of *riajyuu* and the identity of *panpi*). It is upon this that their oppositional sense of self and identities are contingent upon. These are often generalized and stereotyped into three separate labels of stigma that I have alluded to on several occasions already; that of the *chuunibyou*, *menhera* and yandere.

These were words that repeatedly came up in interviews when prosumers talked about why they felt Visual Kei had a negative image and when they discussed feeling discriminated or looked upon strangely for their interest in Visual Kei. I will now discuss briefly what each label means and how they pertain to Visual Kei.

Chuunibyou (netslang which literally means 2ⁿᵈ year junior high disease) can be thought of as a state of adolescence where certain kinds of thoughts, actions and beliefs

are thought to escalate into a kind of development of character where the person 'afflicted' with this disease thinks of their position, existence and self as outstandingly different and special. It is also characterized by peculiar behaviors such as the elevation of self as possessing super powers and heightened sensitivities which legitimize the feeling that one is special and is therefore justified in one's beliefs. Other chuunibyou associated qualities include thinking that everyone around you is below you in terms of intelligence and 'getting it' (thus people with *chuunibyou* often feel their peers are childish or 'aren't there yet'), a propensity to fantasizing where one is the protagonist in a variety of fictional settings and the dramatizing of being a victim of circumstances. *Chuunibyou* is thought to be somewhat normal when it is a developmental phase in the life of a teenager, however it becomes a 'disease' when it is never resolved and when one continues to show these propensities well into adulthood.

Yandere as explained briefly earlier in the chapter, is a state of depression where the source of pain and sadness is either due to a relationship or a love interest. The word comes from a combination of '*yami*' (illness) and '*dere-dere*' (meaning sloppy or spoony). *Yandere* are thought to be too involved in trying to prove and elicit care and love and tend to center their worlds around the person they like. Therefore, they are thought to be prone to violent mood swings based on the perceived reactions of the objects of their affection and are believed to not be able to control their feelings very well.

Menhera, which comes from the word 'mental health-er' indicates someone with mental health problems, usually that they are emotionally unstable or experiencing some kind of mental or psychological disorder like bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, obsessive compulsive personality disorder of narcissistic personality disorder. *Menhera* has some overlap with *yandere* in that there is a perceived inability of the person who has this to control their emotions and having violent mood swings, but it differs in

what is thought to be the source of the problem; *yandere* place their focus on others (the object of their love) whereas *menhera* are thought to be self-obsessed, self-referential, self-aggrandizing and focused on themselves. As much as they are depicted this way, rather than their sense of self as tied to one person like the *yandere*, it is also thought that the *menhera*'s sense of self is tied to everyone in their surroundings and that they seek the understanding and attention of a much larger group of people (Hattori 2021).

If readers were to think back to some of the lyrics I introduced in previous sections, it is not hard to see how some of these contents could be interpreted or viewed under such light. The depictions of emotional turmoil as located in fictional other worlds, the isolated sense of suffering, the desperation expressed when separated from objects of affection and desire, scenarios where only the speaker feels and sees things and is therefore enlightened in their suffering, the posturing of self as a protagonist in a tragedy, the inability to 'realistically' deal with trauma and the dreaming of escape or solutions as located only through aesthetically heightened worlds etc.; these are all 'other' ways of looking at these songs and also attributes that can and are attached to those who prosume this music. Observe statement from the girlfriend of a Visual Kei fan, Shinobu (she herself does not like Visual Kei):

"My boyfriend likes to play those songs (Visual Kei songs) in the car and like…it's just too much you know? Like all this singing about feelings? It's really over the top and like, normal Japanese people do not feel this way!"

What bothers this person is the overt display of strong, dark emotions in the songs that she felt was 'abnormal' both in the sense of the emotional maturity of an individual and doubly so as a 'Japanese' person. What such a statement proves is that a healthy, functioning adults in Japanese society should see that such content marks some kind of fallacy of development; hence the people who listen to it, identify with it and

enjoy it have *chuunibyou*, which is a kind of arrested development. It is for reasons like this that many Visual Kei fans also hide that they like or listen to it. Studies on the listening habits of high school students have shown that one of the music genres that students were most protective about that they listened to in their personal time (but did not reveal in public so easily that they did) was Visual Kei (Koizumi 2002) and that they would only reveal their liking for it in "select spaces in order to avoid being judged by others as exhibiting 'negative' personality traits" (Malick 2019, 179).

Chuunibyou was also used self-deprecatingly and humorously by prosumers to describe their own tastes. Kouryu, the guitarist of RAZOR described his love of fantasy tropes and video game characters (which he used as inspiration for his costumes) as due to the fact that he was *chuunibyou*. Fans I interviewed, when talking about their *kuro rekishi* (black 'embarrassing' past) brought up how their love for particular things in Visual Kei were so '*chuunibyou*' and looking back, they even joke that Visual Kei is basically *chuunibyou* 'clickbait'. Observe this conversation I had with Sana and Mai:

Sana: There is this scene in the Niji (L'arc~en~Ciel's song) promotion video where one of the members is flapping his arms to the sky but it looks as if he is a dying butterfly or he is struggling to metamorphize…when I saw that the first time, I felt "that is me" (laughing).

Mai: (laughing) That is really too *chuunibyou*….

Sana: Visual Kei is full of this. They are really appealing to such people.

Mai: Yeah, when you are in school and you think like "No one understands me." And then you feel they are treating you weirdly...well it is cause you act like you are some kind of struggling butterfly, of course you are going to get treated like you are weird!

Sana: I thought I was a dying butterfly, but they thought I was just a pesky moth (laughs).

Sana was also the fan who chose 'Blue Film' as the song she could personally

relate to and is a self-professed '*Yandere*' hence the statement she gave earlier regarding the songs appeal to such people. The ubiquity of the application of these terms within the Visual Kei prosuming community has become increasingly common such that there appears to be a '*menhera*-boom' as some fans describe it. Just observe these song titles in recent years: 'I am *menhera*' (2012), '*Seishun wa risutokatto*' (Youth is wrist-cutting, 2013) and '*Yanderu kanojo*' (Yanderu Girlfriend 2014) by the band R-shitei. Other songs like '*Yanderu kimi ni okuru uta*' (The song I gift to yandere you, 2016) by the Raid, '*Dekiai yandere boy*' (Doting yandere boy, 2017) and '*Yuugai menhera doll*' (Harmful menhera doll, 2016) by 0.1g no Gosan, Amai Bouryoku's '*Gachi menhera*' (Menhera for real, 2017) all use these terms in an overt, unbashful way. This parallels how easily used these words are to describe Visual Kei by fans and bands members themselves without needing further explanation from those around. But what they also show is that Visual Kei has gone from potentially containing elements or being able to be interpreted as that of *chuunibyou*, *yandere* and *menhera* to self-proclaiming and loudly so these identities and qualities as commonplace.

Song content and performances of these identities may be part of the reason, but another reason that they are internalized and accepted (albeit jokingly at times) is that there are many actual cases of performers who do suffer from a variety of mental health problems and have been medically diagnosed as so. They are also open about having these problems thus making the image of the menhera as existing within Visual Kei as having some truth to it. Even when members do not openly speak of having such problems, some performances are so 'convincing' that many have questioned the mental/emotional state of performers. For example, Kyo (the vocalist of Dir en grey) and KENZI (drummer from d.p.s) for a very long time actually performed acts of self-mutilation on stage that would result in their faces and bodies becoming all bloody and cut up. Other band members have

even taken pictures of their *kusuri techo* (medical record book) detailing the medicine they take publicly. What truly solidifies this image however is the tragic suicides of many young band men due to depression. One of the most ridiculous things ever said to me about this which came from someone who headed a talent agency (not a Visual Kei company) was "Well they wear makeup and they are in many ways like women, they are very weak and easily swayed by emotions. So, they will not be able to handle things which is why many of them kill themselves."

Amongst fans, it is common enough to see evidence of wrist cutting and other visible forms of self-mutilation if one goes to lives. I do not wish to participate in any sort of trivializing, defending, authenticating or the sensationalizing of what is may be very complex situations regarding the mental health of these people, but I bring these up to say that their visibility contributes to the image that this is a scene wherein many 'unwell' people gather.

There may be many reasons prosumers position themselves vis a vis these identities, but one of the reasons they do so is because by embracing these unhealthy states, they are exerting their sense of difference and refusal to participate in 'healthy' states of existence which they cannot and do not want to have to participate in. This is exemplified in a conversation I had with Rika who was discussing women's magazines:

> "I hate those *riajyuu* magazines like Vivi[79]. They are just pushing new things and trends mindlessly all the time. People who look up to that, who are they really if they are just the latest thing all the time? They even have a guide in their magazine "How not to look like a *bangya*". Like what did we ever do to them?"
>
> What Rika is referring here to a very interesting fact that the women's magazine

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[79] One of the most popular women's magazines in Japan that has been in publication since 1983. It is thought to be read by the older teen to younger OL age group.

ViVi overtly attacks the Visual Kei aesthetic in its makeup guides telling its readers what sorts of makeup they want to avoid so that they do not end up looking like *bangya*. I will emphasize here that *bangya* is not used in any other scene except to describe Visual Kei fans who are women. In essence, here is a general level appeal magazine that labels itself one for *riajyuu* and *miha* (those who are flippantly concerned with the latest trends) readers directly stating that a Visual Kei identity is an undesirable one. They describe such makeup as 'painful', 'unhealthy' and 'unappealing to men'. I asked Makiko, a fashion stylist whom I met through work who used to work at a magazine very similar to ViVi, what she felt about these articles:

> "I think many people believe Visual Kei fans are lonely girls with unhealthy obsessions. It may not be true, but what these articles are saying is that even if you are single, you should not look 'lonely' in this way and try to look healthier, like you lead a life where you are going out and meeting all kinds of people, always trying new things. Like someone who has zest for life. I'm sorry to people who like Visual Kei, it's a bias of course but it is what people think."

When I asked her to elaborate more on this unhealthy image, one of the things that Makiko mentioned was how 'clearly' it seemed that the lives of bangya were very revolved around their one hobby and she felt this was what made them seem anti-social in that they were not concerned with 'normal' trends, yet their very distinct look meant that they were also exhibitionistic *(jikokenji yoku ga tsuyoi)*. While she stressed and apologized that it may not be true, this was what she said such magazines were trying to suggest was an unattractive characteristic because it was associated with the subculture that seemed to promote self-absorbed behaviors.

Based on what Makiko has said, part of the openness in which Visual Kei music deals with personal pain and trauma seems to be received by outsiders as a glorification

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of the self that comes off as both self-absorbed and self-defeating. Rather than showing concern for any mental health problems they may have, outsiders are more bothered by how prosumers of Visual Kei go about displaying their problems which trivializes any sort of actual pain that an individual may be experiencing. It is as if they are only seen as 'playing' at being sick for they are merely doing it for attention.

Magazines like these show that associating with Visual Kei is not a neutral experience and it is one that comes with stigma. The self-declaration of these states of illness therefore can be seen as a positioning of the self as authentically embracing the reality of one's emotions and trauma as opposed to giving in to social pressures to behave in the healthy, painless and happily heteronormative *riajyuu panpi* fashion. The embracing of the *menhera* label by prosumers of Visual Kei and the categorization of its flip side as *riajuu* works much like how labelling theory has shown, that "The process of making the criminal therefore is a process of tagging, defining, identifying, segregating, describing, emphasizing, making conscious and self-conscious; it becomes a way of simulating, suggesting, emphasizing, and evoking the very traits that are complained of" (Tennenbaum, 1938, 19-20) and is therefore capable of becoming a self-fullfling prophecy. Basking in these identities, whether ironically or legitimately so, contributes to the idea that participation in such subcultures where identity is contingent upon 'being sick' is proof of its impotence as it only leads one into steeping and wallowing in one's own misery.

PART 2: PLAYWORK

Chapter 6 Visual Kei as Playwork

In the second part of this dissertation, I focus on another mode of engagement, that I call playwork and how one carves a professional career in Visual Kei. I ask: What are the skills that musicians have to cultivate in order to sustain their careers and how has their labor changed? How do they balance crafting otherworldliness with the demands of digital capitalism? How is 'success' envisioned and realized? What are the ideologies that inform notions of success? How does their labor effect other arenas of life and what do these impacts entail? How can we understand the nature of their work in relation to the concept of playwork? In this chapter, I first describe how musicians embark on the journey to become professional artists. I focus on their personal relationships, that of the family in particular because it is often where their initial interests and training in music start, and yet, it is the site where the transition from play to work is contested, negotiated and ruptured. In the chapters that follow I will discuss how musicians develop Visual-Kei specific skills. I identified 5 skills that form the labor of musicians. They are musicianship, craft work, service skills, business skills, sustenance and maintenance, reconnaissance and monitoring. In this chapter I will discuss sustenance and maintenance and some of how musicianship begins to develop. But before that, a short discussion on notions of success will be presented in order to provide a picture of what musicians are working towards in terms of tangible goals within this industry. Why they cultivate the particular skills they do are directly informed by these notions of success and while these same notions can be applied to other forms of performing arts, the skills needed to obtain them manifest in particular forms of labor within Visual Kei in ways that require musicians to be adept at both play and work and in effect blurring the lines between the two.

6.1 Notions of Success

First, I examine notions of success. *Chimeido* (name recognition) is a measurable sign of success that is dependent on digital and physical music sales and chart position, the capacity of venue one fills and average live attendance, SNS account statistics and total sales of commodities. It is the name and reputation one carves based on quantifiable popularity. Some openly say they wish to achieve this in statements like *mokuhyou wa uretai* (the goal is to sell) or *tenka wo toru* (claim power). Fundamentally, it is about sustaining one's ability to sell out and then to increase venue capacity. There are actually a lot more levels, but this is a simplified version:
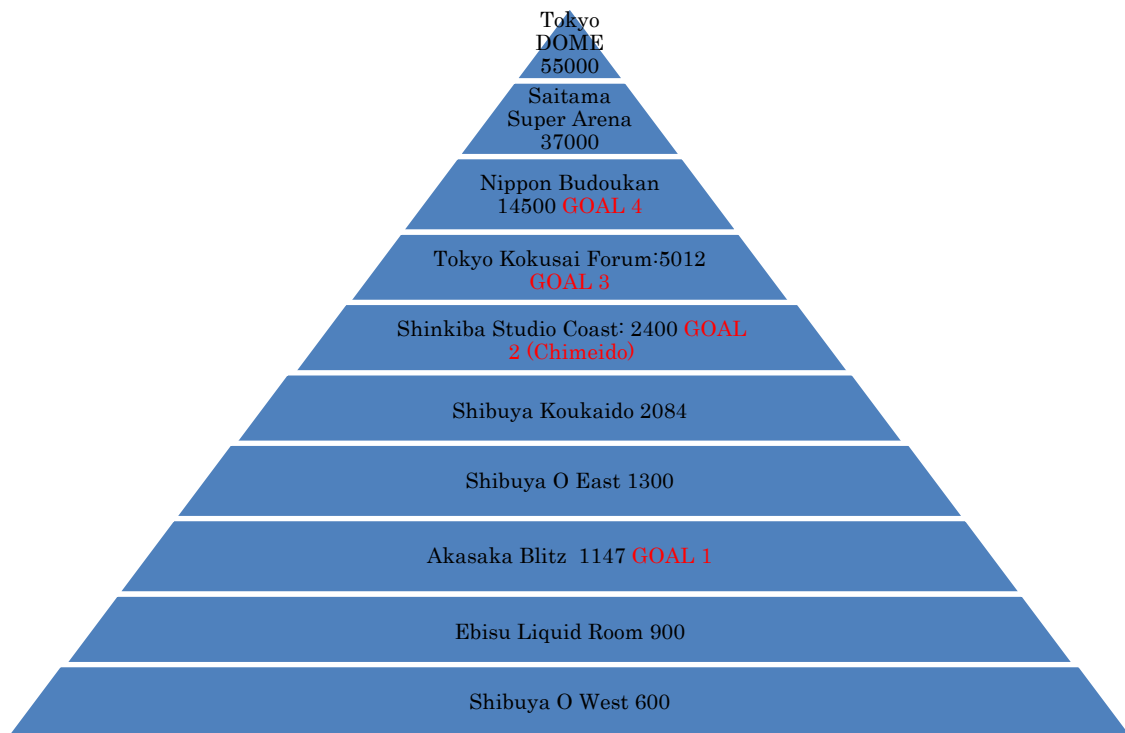
Diagram 3: Chimeido Progression (Tokyo Version)

If a band can sell out a 600-person capacity live house, they then move on to the next level which would be to a venue capacity of 900 people. The first sign of success is being able to fill Akasaka Blitz (capacity 1000). If they progress further and sell out at

Shinkiba Studio Coast[80], capacity 2400, they can then go on to being a hall class band. The next level would be Budokan class (capacity 15000) then they move on to being an arena class band and the largest capacity (not counting outdoor festival type venues) they can play at is Tokyo Dome and getting there means being a Dome class band. To be considered having *chimeido* would be around the Studio coast level and above.

Having *chimeido* overlaps with other measures of success, first Industry Recognition: this can lead to a contract with a major record label. Which means a larger budget for production, access to mainstream media networks, bigger scale of promotion and wider work opportunities. Equally important, it most likely means earning stability in the form of a stable base pay and potential benefits, commanding a higher artist fee and the ability to bargain for commissions. A major contract however is always negotiated case by case and therefore does not necessarily include all of the above.

Keeping this stability going is dependent on maintaining a growing and stable fanbase; it means being able to elicit audience loyalty. As is said in the industry 'Fans are the best media' and therefore, good public opinion is evidence of marketability and that the product is socially meaningful.

Another measure of success is peer respect. How much one is invited to collaborate? What do other bands say about you publicly and privately? It is sensed in one's level of influence; how much your sound and style are copied, who cites you are their inspiration. It is a sign that one's product, professionality and personality are attractive and valued. To have this, one needs to have a working relationship with one's band-members. A common reason for band dissolution is friction between members. Disagreements range from music and band direction, money problems, different goals

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[80] Shinkiba Studio Coast closed its doors as of January 2022 and had Dir en grey play the final live there as the band who has played studio coast the most in the 20 year history of the live house.

and visions of success, clashes of personality etc. to name a few of the common factors for the breaking down of professional relationships. There are bands that decide to stay together for practicalities sake, but have dysfunctional relationships personally. Nevertheless, a healthy working relationship, professional chemistry and getting along with one's own members is highly valued and one of the biggest reasons cited for the success of bands who have longevity. This is not objectively measurable, but is evident in the working style of bands and in how they interact. It is visible in how they value each other and their own input and roles in the band, and how they deal with crisis as a collective. The key indicator here is that band members still want to and can come together to make music.

An important personal measure of success is how much artistic independence and control one has. This too is subjective, but it fundamentally concerns being able to make music the way you want, ability to pursue artistic vision and making things that are described as *katachi ni nokoru* or *kokoro ni nokoru* (creating and leaving behind something tangible, something that can remain in the heart). Not having one's music over tampered with by producers, not having one's music and image over commoditized and particularly pertinent to Visual Kei is not having to become a '*kajyou eigyou*' band, meaning a band that has to do a lot of personalized communicative intimacy producing service for fans. Independence may mean having bargaining power with ones *jimusho* or it may mean having independence from a *jimusho* by starting your own to manage and control your own affairs. Last but not least, 'success' is staying power, surviving through success and downfalls, and still finding such careers meaningful. Sakurai Atsushi of BUCK-TICK whose band has lasted almost 40 years now says the secret to staying together is the commitment to stay together and not setting 'what if we don't make it' type scenarios.

6.2 From Play to Work

6.2.1Working-Class Homologies and Music Subcultures

Ken McLeod wrote that most Visual Kei band members come from "economically challenged backgrounds" and that they "often see Visual Kei as a way to achieve fame and fortune" (McLeod 2013). How McLeod arrives at this observation is unclear as he does not offer a methodological explanation of how he obtained such information nor did he conduct any interviews with musicians. It is simply written as a passive, passing fact. What he means by 'economically challenged' (working class? blue collar? living just on or below the poverty line? freeters?) is never clarified, and the utilization of words such as 'often' and 'most' are also employed with no numerical references to justify what he means by this. Nevertheless, the point that McLeod wishes to get across here is that their supposed lower rung socio-economic status provides a motivating catalyst for these men to embark on careers as rock musicians in a quest for upward mobility.

I suspect McLeod arrives at this association between the occupation of socio-economic class positions and the pursuit of 'dreamwork' partly due to long-standing homologies that link the performance and generation of subcultural music styles (such as punk, heavy metal, rap) with the disenfranchisement of working-class youth (Hebdige 1979; Arnett 1995; Hall and Jefferson 1975). While there has been much scholarship dedicated to debunking any clear linkages between class and consumption of music styles (Bennet 1999; Williams 2011; Spracklen 2014), the stereotype is as McLeod's writing demonstrates, one that is easily passed off as a common-sense level of cause and effect that requires little questioning, precisely because many believe it to be true. And to give McLeod some contextually grounded benefit of the doubt, there are also some good examples of ethnographically grounded scholarship that shows a linkage between

working class backgrounds and particular kinds of dreamwork in Japan (Condry 2006; Takeyama 2016), but nevertheless such works are not alluded to in McLeod's article.

My doubts over the generalization he makes are not limited to ones that concern his methods for data collection, but that they spring directly from what I had come to learn from my informants and colleagues when I recalled conversations we had regarding their family situations, background stories and the struggles they encountered as people who decided to pursue Visual Kei as a career. I am not denying that there are indeed many people in bands who could be categorized as coming from and a part of the 'working class' or of 'economically challenged backgrounds', but there are also just as many who are from middle and upper middle-class families, while some were downright 'dirt poor' (in their own words *kuso bimbo*). In short, there is a large variation of people of different backgrounds involved in Visual Kei bands that is not recognized in McLeod's article and then there is the fact that many of these band members could become adept musicians in the first place because of the skills and leisure activities their families afforded (at times with ease and for others with much difficulty) in the form of musical instruments, records, CDs as well as other consumer items related to music and music education. Managing artists also meant that I had to deal with their families and at times I became better acquainted with the personal circumstances and private lives of some artists and as a result of that, understood some of the details of their upbringing and socio-economic situations that accompanied that. Some parents were proud of their children's music careers, other selectively proud in certain ways, whereas there were also those who were really at odds with the choices their children had made, for they had expected them to go to university and get 'normal' or 'good' jobs. Sometimes one parent would be proud and present and the other simply not there, or perhaps not wanting to be a part of it.

What I am trying to argue here is that the route to becoming a Visual Kei

musician does not necessarily emerge from occupying *particular* class backgrounds, but that there is instead a variation of routes in which people come to pursue music as a career and along the way there is convergence and divergence of tools, ideas and templates that people utilize to plot and make sense of the track. Some are enabled by economic capital, some are inspired by the lack of it, but to paint broad brushstrokes without providing details risks reiterating convenient homologies that deserved to be questioned or at least recognized to be far more contextually variant, which is something that can be better identified by examining in depth personal histories via qualitative methods.

Towards this, I have chosen to include both the narratives from the interviews I conducted as well as ones from particular publications such as official biographies, autobiographies and from the monthly mook 'Rock and Read' (published by Shinko Music Entertainment) which is known for its long, in depth interviews with Visual Kei artists. I chose these particular publications because these public disclosures form a good supplementary source of information. What using both forms of narrative shows is that packaged for public consumption or not, the diversity of backgrounds is present and that family always plays a part in the process of 'individual' choice. Using such publications also allowed me a means to cite and contextualize some well-known cases that are taken for granted as historical 'facts' by those who are familiar with or prosume Visual Kei, but still need to be based in some kind of tangible source.

6.2.2 Bad Boys, Good Sons

When I first met Kazu, he was 29 years of age and had already been active as an indies *bandoman* for close to ten years. Within the first ten minutes of our conversation, there were a few things about himself that he had chosen to share with me. The first, was that he clearly felt that being a full-time musician was something that made him 'different': a difference that he perceived lent him an air of attractiveness that is presumed

to be characteristic of an individual engaged in creative or artistic work, and at the same time, one that connoted that his career of choice was not of the 'mainstream'. And, for all the subcultural cool, notions of individuality and freedom to express himself that this rejection of a mainstream career brought him, he was also aware of the less-glamorous aspects of marginalization that this entailed. He did not have a stable income, little in his savings account and enjoyed none of the benefits regular full-time employment could bring.

The second thing he emphasized was that despite this, he was supporting himself, and he was not dependent on his family or anyone for financial help. He lived on his own in central Tokyo even though his parents lived only about an hour away, by Chiba prefecture. Despite the costs, choosing to live on his own was an important symbol of not only an expression of independence, but also one of perseverance: that he was willing to bare the economic brunt of his choices in not pursuing a more stable route.

It was also the idea of a 'route not taken' that Kazu also chose to talk about during that first meeting. It was not one that was elusive and out of grasp from the get-go. His upbringing was in many ways 'typical' (if not privileged) of a person from a middle to upper middle-class background; highly educated parents who had life-time employment, elite-track schooling which ushered him into one of the best private universities in the country. He also received private piano lessons from the time he was small, which was something he excelled in, much to the delight of his parents. He often performed in solo recitals, even winning several competitions. In many ways, he was on track to reproduce many of the socio-cultural norms his parents had achieved in their own lives. Much to their surprise (or horror), Kazu who was already playing in bands during high school, decided to quit university in his third year to become a full-time musician. He says, "I realized what I really wanted to do with my life, and having a university degree didn't

matter, or more like it wouldn't make a difference."

Not having a university degree may not have much of an effect on his band activities, but it seems to have had an effect on how he believes people may perceive him, evident from the way he chose to narrate the unfolding of events as to how he arrived at his current situation and from the manner in which he told his story, as I got the feeling it was one he was used to re-hashing. But not graduating from university has had a more direct implication on his life in a manner far more 'closer to home' — it has certainly affected his relationship with his parents. He tells me, half-jokingly:

> "When my mother complains about my 'going nowhere' and when they get upset about what happened, I often say to them "Hey, you're the ones who made me learn the piano when I was small! If you didn't want me to take music seriously, you shouldn't have encouraged me so much back then." It only makes sense I became a musician and now they're mad at me for it", he laughs.

Kazu is however, well aware that his cheeky rebuttal may be the only means of the moment to appease the deep disappointment his parents feel about their oldest son.

> "I don't ask anything of them and I don't cause them any trouble. In fact, I don't see them much at all aside from maybe once or twice a year. I don't want to be a burden to them. At extended family gatherings, I think it's better if I'm not there, then they don't have to feel like they need to address what I'm doing with my life to the other relatives. I know my parents have accepted the situation, but it doesn't mean they are happy about it. So, I try not put them in situations where they are reminded of my 'failure'."

The particular personal details of his narrative aside, Kazu's story is not unique in that it echoes much of what those engaged in pursuing 'dreamwork' have to contend with on route to their dreams. Economically this includes prolonged engagement in

irregular work, job precarity and income instability. Culturally they become subsumed by labels that enter the lexicon of popular culture which inspire moral panic such as NEET, freeter, *dokushin kizoku* (single 'nobility'), parasite singles, *soushoku danshi* (herbivore men) to name a few. Each of these labels refer to slightly different demographic groups at different points in time, but they all symbolize youths who are in one way or another failing to contribute to the common-sense reproduction of societal norms and its hallmark institutions like the family, belonging to a company and engaged in life course roles that link them to age appropriate markers of success. Socially, it becomes the source of tension within their families and other social relationships. At the heart of this tension is the anxiety over their futures: what will eventually become of them if their dreams don't work out?

His story also highlights two less explored dimensions of irregular work and creative pursuits: that the growing economic affluence of families (or aspirations towards attaining such affluence) during the period of high economic growth in Japan expressed in the form of the consumption of leisure activities and consumer items, can have long term implications in shaping life choices. In other words, certain skills and capital acquired, afforded and encouraged as 'leisure' by the understanding of one generation as 'a subsidiary activity complementary to work life, confined within boundaries' (Daliot-Bul, 2009) become to the next, more than the mere leisure activities they were intended to be. This is due to shifting socio-economic environments in an era in which increasing market segmentation, the proliferation of irregular work, the allure posed by the ideology of creativity (Mori, 2009) and the increasing marketability of prosumption (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010, Chia 2012), has come to alter collective imaginaries that transform the boundaries between work and leisure both in ways that are potentially exploitative as they are at the same time constitutive of the opening up of new subjective possibilities.

In this chapter I will attempt to highlight this shift by examining the long-term implications of one such leisure practice that families came to afford and provide for their children: that of music lessons and the consumption of music related media. While developing and crafting a musical skill and pursuing it in a rigorous manner is seen as a 'healthy' form of leisure and could be taken as evidence of good character traits, particular kinds of music, taken *too seriously* and pursued beyond the realm of leisure is a less-desirable outcome. I will attempt to highlight this tension by focusing on the narratives of musicians, both aspiring and professional, who were encouraged by family members when they were young to pursue musical hobbies, but who now face a variety of difficulties as adults who have embarked on musical careers. These pertain to issues related to social reproduction, career and income stability and family relationships and are experiences shared by individuals of various social backgrounds and degrees of career success. Individuals, like Kazu who are often negatively depicted as self-indulgent, hedonistic, debaucherous 'bad boys', but who are in their own ways, still struggling to be good sons.

6.2.3 Learning to Play

Perhaps no musical instrument symbolizes upper middle-class notions of achievement and respectability better than the piano. Commenting on consumer patterns and community interactions, Kuwayama has noted:

> "…when Japan was at the height of the so-called "high economic growth" period, pianos became very popular among upper-middle class families in Tokyo. For those wishing to claim upper-middle class status, it became almost a tacit rule for one's daughter to receive piano lessons in one's own living room. As a result, many people vied with one another and the sound of pianos was heard in every exclusive residential area in Tokyo' (Kuwayama 1992, 121).

What is most interesting here is not merely the tacit understanding of class propriety, but the taken for granted-ness of the piano itself as an appropriate, worthy and morally 'good' instrument to be studied. While it was indeed a leisure activity that many young women of a decent upbringing would engage in, they were not the only ones involved in the process. Yoshiatsu, the vocalist of the band DADAROMA was made to take piano classes along with his older sister by a mother who herself played the piano. "I really didn't like it, but my mother made me do it as my sister was already doing it. I wanted to quit but my mother would stop me by saying 'Well you can but there's a recital coming up already....' So it was hard for me to stop. She really liked classical music." (Yoshiatsu 2015)

Like Yoshiatsu, Yuya was also encouraged by his parents to play the piano, "My parents bought me a piano before I could even play. They didn't ask me if I wanted to play, they just thought it would be a good idea. When I was small, I was really afraid of my dad, so I really felt like I better learn how to play this instrument even though I was more interested in other things at the time." Like Yoshiatsu, the beginning of Yuya's musical endeavors may have be born out of some parental pressure, however unlike Yoshiatsu who is the son of a *koumuin* (civil servant) and whose mother was a classically trained pianist, Yuya describes his family as 'not rich' and having a piano at home was not something that was to be taken for granted or purchased out of a sense of having to keep up with the Joneses. Yuya then went on to say that his father enjoyed listening to jazz and had always wanted to play the piano when he was younger, but did not come from a family who could afford it. On top of that, Yuya's mother also saw in the piano an activity that would provide him a sense of structure. "I think she had heard something from someone about the connection between doing well in math and playing music once and from there she also developed the idea that it was good to have some kind of activities

to 'stick' to…I think through daily practice of the piano she wanted me to learn about discipline or like how to experience getting good at something through practice." Returning to Kuwayama's notions of class aspirations as symbolized via the piano, we see coming through in these narratives much of what is echoed in Kuwayama's study that has to do with what the piano represents: refinement and civility, coupled with its pleasing sound. Playing it well required practicing hard and discipline, which in of themselves are highly regarded values in light of a historical cultural rhetoric that extols the serious pursuit of activities as a 'way' towards the cultivation of both aesthetic sensibilities and spiritual wisdom, in which the polishing of skill entailed the simultaneous polishing of self (Cox 2007).

While different class connotations are present in both Yuya and Yoshiatsu's narratives, both cases reveal a more personal reason for why people choose the piano as the instrument to bring into the home that may not be so much about the overt display of class consciousness. In both cases, parent's wishes for their children to play the piano were born out of a liking of particular kinds of music. While there is scholarship that ties the consumption and preferences of particular genres of music to social class (Hebdige 1979; Bourdieu 1987) piano music has also been shown to be enjoyed at a very general level (Rose 2004; Seinfeld et al. 2013), due to its sonic qualities as well as it an instrument in which a variety of genres can be played and thus enjoyed. In other words, it is a vessel of both 'common'[81] as well as 'standard'[82] music that is easy on the ear (Koizumi 2002; Miller 2008); music that can be appreciated by the whole family. Thus, what I wish to

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[81] Common music refers to music that can be sung by everyone, tends to be cheerful in character and is regarded as music for 'everyone' in the sense that it is appropriate to play in public settings (Koizumi 2002).

[82] Common music becomes standard when it has 'survived a temporary vogue and has been played by successive generations' (Koizumi 2002, 113) such as music that is thought in school.

highlight here is that perhaps parents did not just view the piano as a status symbol or chose it because it was socially accepted form of 'good' or 'cultured' music, but also because they saw it as a leisure activity that their own families could enjoy together, partly motivated by their own liking of the sound.

While Yuya and Yoshiatsu both did not particularly enjoy piano lessons and saw the piano in contrast to their own personal interests, there are also examples in which mutual parent-child enjoyment of playing musical instruments served to foster what would become the emotionally imbued motivations for choosing musical careers. One of the most well-known examples of this would be that of X JAPAN's drummer and composer YOSHIKI[83]. Coming from a family in which almost everyone surrounding him played an instrument (his father a jazz pianist, his mother played shamisen and his grandmother koto) YOSHIKI sees his progression to music as a career as part of a 'natural' turn of events as a result that home environment in which he was very encouraged by his family to take up music. Like the cases mentioned before, YOSHIKI's parents bought him a piano when he was a child, only four years of age in his case and he began receiving private lessons, something that he took a strong liking to and displayed talent in. Because he displayed such enthusiasm for music, every year his father would buy him musical instruments for his birthday such as the trumpet, guitars etc. Music was also shared between father and son through the enjoyment of listening to records from his father's collection and books about music that YOSHIKI was given also by his father. Because of his status as a national celebrity and the popularity of X JAPAN, many are familiar with

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[83] The following information regarding YOSHIKI's upbringing and family background was taken from a TBS broadcast on the 24ᵗʰ of April 2020 of the program, 'Nakai Masahiro Kinsmapesharu'. The 2 hour special episode was titled " Kinsuma haranbanjyou tokubetsu housou YOSHIKI shougeki no hansei de shitta, ikiru imi."

his background story which as Morikawa has written, has actually led to the stereotype that rather than the economically challenged backgrounds that McLeod claims the majority of Visual Kei musicians hail from, popular culture consumers (not necessarily even Visual Kei fans) familiar with Visual Kei bands during the height of its popularity, actually believe that the majority of Visual Kei bandmembers are from economically privileged backgrounds (Morikawa 2003). YOSHIKI aside, another reason fouth the development of this stereotype was probably due to SUGIZO's (guitarist of LUNA SEA, and now X JAPAN), family background whereby both of his parents were members of the Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony orchestra; his mother a cellist and his father a trumpet player. SUGIZO himself was made to attend violin classes from the time he was in kindergarten (Yashiro and Yamaura 2020).

Daisuke, the vocal of the band Kagerou, was made to play the piano to keep him indoors and away from sports as he had health problems[84] that made strenuous physical activity a potential danger to his health. While he did not enjoy being made to take piano classes, he sees the connection between what he is doing now with those lessons:

> "It was not out of my own will and as a reaction to that, I got involved in baseball and karate…but I started to become interested in bands when I was fourteen. I think this was partly the influence of having learnt piano. I didn't enjoy learning but there were these yearly recitals and after performing at these, I felt glad to have gone through with it...standing on stage in front of a large audience, playing and receiving applause, it felt good" (Daisuke 2004).

The piano is of course not the only instrument that people learn in their youth or

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[84] Daisuke was born with *Kawasaki-byou*, an autoimmune disease seen mostly in children which causes inflammation of blood vessels throughout the body. Left untreated in its most serious form, it can cause fatal aneurysms of the heart.

their time at home. A variety of instruments were mentioned by interviewees as ones they learnt when they were younger such as guitar, violin, trumpet, drums and many had joined choirs or choral groups in school. Certain instruments such as the piano that require a larger investment are not so easily purchased by school-aged youngsters, but quite a few saved their own money to purchase guitars, second hand instruments or shared musical instruments with siblings (as well as being the beneficiaries of the hand me down instruments that belonged to their elder siblings). One of my interviewees was able to play the drums as loud as he wanted due to the nature of his home environment, as the house he grew up in was also in the same space as the workshop for the family business and was in his words "like small factory, very noisy and so the noise from the drums didn't make a difference!" His parents ran a small home-based parts repairs business and they lived in a working-class neighborhood in the suburbs of Kanagawa. Yet, like many blue-collar workers of their generation who could earn a decent living, they were able to afford and access for their family, products and leisure available for mass-consumption. It is for reasons like this that many consider themselves to be part of the 'middle-class', because mass-consumerism was one of the arenas in which this imagined status could, at times, be realized, even if the results, reception and pattern of practice generated ended up leading to very different outcomes (Slater 2009, 2010).

Even for those families who could not afford pianos, similar sentiments were experienced through the consumption of music in ways that incurred less cost. Mizuki for example says:

> "I've always liked music. Actually, my father was a guitarist and he played in a
> band until he was about the age I am at now. I think he wanted me to like what
> he liked too so he made me watch all these videos of Elvis Presley and Yazawa
> Eikichi…from then I thought "I'm gonna buy a guitar too!" and my dad got me

what you would call a 'starter kit' that was only about 15,000 yen and he taught

me how to play chords. The first song I played was Southern All Stars 'Namida

no kiss'. It was the song my dad would always sing in karaoke[85]. I sing that too

sometimes…come to think of it, I'm really influenced by him" (Mizuki, 2016).

What both Daisuke, Mizuki and YOSHIKI have in common, aside from having

parents who encouraged them to take up music, was that all three also experienced the

loss of those parents before they formally pursued music. While the motivations and

reasons for becoming musicians cannot be reduced to a singular factor, shared memories

and the experience of intimacy through the enjoying music with and the subsequent loss

of the individual to whom that experience is tied to, is a source of inspiration that can

propel the continued active engagement with music as more than a leisure activity. In fact,

it was Mizuki himself who attributed his decision to become a musician to the sudden

loss of his father:

> "It all happened with the space of a week (his father falling ill and passing).
>
> Confronted with this…I thought maybe if I could do what he never got to, what
>
> he dreamed of doing, then maybe it would do justice to the life he never got to
>
> live. He wanted to play in a band, but because he had me, he gave that up and
>
> got a regular job (Mizuki, 2016)."

Of course, Mizuki himself had already developed a strong interest in music and

was interested in bands, but he draws strength from this idea to justify what gave him the

emotional push, "If you do something just for yourself, you could easily feel a limit, but

if you're doing it for someone else, maybe you can find the strength to go further, I'm

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[85] In my interviews, 32 interviewees mentioned that going to karaoke with at least one parent was a
commonly practiced leisure activity because it was enjoyed by their parents. Most of them would stop
going to karaoke with their parents once they had completed elementary school. In their teen years,
karaoke as leisure continued to be a staple, albeit one that was done with friends.

that kind of person" (Mizuki, 2016).

There is certainly neither one singular reason why people chose to become professional musicians nor am I on the quest to discover simple answers, but in this section, I have attempted to reveal how leisure shared in the family equips people with the technical skills, education and exposure which for some form the basis of what will become potential career options even if these were not the intentions of parent or child at this stage in time. Parents themselves can become pivotal, inspirational figures for children in opening up such possibilities as well. The next section will explore how these skills are then developed and applied to emerging opportunities and the family responses that accompany this.

6.2.4 Taking Leisure Seriously

In the previous section, music was shown to be a leisure activity that was encouraged by parents for a variety of reasons, but in all cases, it was also the activity of choice because it was thought to have some kind of positive affect. In this section I will explore how music is undertaken and practiced as a form of 'serious leisure' (Stebbins 1992) which here can be thought of as a precursor to playwork. This section also highlights the tensions that emerge within the family and home out of the investments made into taking leisure 'seriously'.

Music is probably one of the most ubiquitous experiences of daily life as it literally is a part of the 'background' of many public (and private) spaces. This is most obvious in the form of background music played in commercial spaces, on television and restaurants. Then there is music that is listened to privately while commuting or at home. Personal music players and smartphones allow for music to be played just about anywhere. Music is also taught in schools formally through lessons and spreads informally through "communication interlocks: social linkages or conduits within and among networks of

people" (Williams 2011) through which ideas, objects and practices are transmitted and put into circulation. In other words, music is a shared social activity amongst friends and peers in the school setting. There are also other less formal instances in which schools provide a space for music through club activities and *gakuensai* (school festival). Students are able to experience (if they haven't already) opportunities for performing publicly at such events. Some, through the formation of bands with school friends even perform at local live houses in amateur or cover band events. Amateur bands who after attaining a certain level of performance or technical skill, have opportunities to take part in band competitions. In the 1980's and 1990's these competitions [86], some of which were sponsored by large music instrument makers such as Yamaha, were also aired on television and popular with young people (Mori 2005; Inoue 2003). The prizes of such competitions often involved recording contacts and the chance to go major. What such competitions did for some viewers was that they provided an outlet or vision for people who were interested in doing something more with music in their lives. Today media applications such as YouTube, niconico Live, SoundCloud and TikTok have further enabled aspiring performers from all sorts of genres, platforms for public performance with greater ease of production and access.

But to backtrack a little, most informants report that their first experiences of performing in bands come in the form of high school *gakuensai* productions. While these experiences are recalled with much embarrassment, they are also remembered as ones that are unforgettable as they often mark a moment in which a flame of sorts is lit. Takuya recalls:

"It was horrible (that first performance) in terms of the quality. But it was the

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[86] Such competitions have been around since the 1970's and were well attended, however national broadcasting of these competitions only began in the 1980's (Yano and Hosokawa 2008)

first time I genuinely felt like I enjoyed doing something…that playing with my friends and to be a part of a band, it was unlike anything I had experienced before. I had done sports too, but I disliked some of the rules like having to cut your hair a certain way or to take the abuse of your seniors, all that made it not very fun. But the band was…we were just doing it how we liked."

Takuya had already been playing guitar on his own as his brother too was a guitarist and had taught him how to play years before his first performance. However, through the shared leisure activity of playing music at home, this allowed him to take the opportunity to perform at the *gakuensai*. Thus, while many use the *gakuensai* as an event to start to learn how to perform (which is different from just playing an instrument but involves concepts like staging, movement and cognition of the audience etc.), those who already have developed the musical skills and performance skills prior to that have a slight advantage. People who perform well at *gakuensai* also first experience what it is like to receive the attention and approval of performing music, not from a parental type group (as they would at piano recitals), but of their peers. After the *gakuensai*, Takuya went on performing with his school friends, one of which was Yuya who had given up the piano and was now playing the guitar. Both began to develop ideas about performing and music as something they would like to continue after high school, not just as a hobby, but as a profession. As Yuya says, 'At that point it was still just a fantasy, but because I had others with whom I could share those thoughts and who also shared the same desires as myself, it provided us with some kind of fuel to push forward'.

When teenagers begin to entertain such ideas and display an active interest in pursuing bands, three sources of tension appear with regards to their family relations: how music interferes with school and academic plans, the kinds of music of interest and how serious they are about their music.

For most parents, their immediate concerns have to do with the academic performance of their sons, especially if they expect and plan for them to go on to university. Yuya's parents did not stop him from playing in a band (who were now meeting three to four times a week for practice) but they kept telling him, "don't let it interfere with more important things," meaning school work and his grades. However, Yuya had already decided that he would not go to university as he wanted to pursue music seriously. His grades began to slip and eventually his parents, who realized that his getting into a good university was becoming less and less of a possibility, began to change their pleas to "please just make sure you graduate high school." Similar comments were made by other informant's parents such as "music is just a hobby" and "maybe if you spent as much time studying as you do playing the guitar…"

However, there were some who were able to balance both school and bands such as Kazu, who as I already mentioned earlier, was able to get into one of the top private universities in Japan. But his ability to keep up with his studies in some way obscured his desire to make music his career, as his parents assumed that he was just being responsible about both his 'hobby' and his 'actual plans for the future'. In Mizuki's case, he was even able to make music into a reason to study hard. Not having the money to be able to go to private school (where extracurricular music clubs are more common), he found that there was only one public high school close to where he lived that had a *keiongakubu* (light music club). Because admission to the school required a high level of academic performance, he devoted his energies into studying for the purpose of being able to access some form of space to develop his band skills (Mizuki 2016).

There were also some informants who said that because they were not academically inclined to begin with, their parents were happy to see them dedicated to some kind of activity such as music. However, even in such cases, as Hiro related, parents

were worried about them taking their music seriously. "My mother said to me "It's not easy to make a living from music so you better think this through and you should at least finish school first just in case."

Some parents also exhibited concerns about the kind of music and the accompanying stylistic displays of fashion or hairstyles that my informants were increasingly interested in, whereas some others, who were initially encouraging of musical pursuits, were not in favor of the turn towards Visual Kei. Toshiya, the bassist of Dir en grey who had begun to grow his hair long and had dyed it blond says, "My grandparents were embarrassed because the neighbors kept making comments about their 'gaijin' son because of the color of my hair" (Toshiya 2004). Meanwhile, Makoto reported that his sister began to resent him because she was receiving comments from people in school about her brother being a '*furyo*' (bad boy) due to the way he began to dress. At one point, the bullying his sister was subject to became so bad, his parents began to think that he was really a part of some kind of gang and they confronted him on what he was 'really' up to as they did not understand why his music involved him having to look that way. "I had long dyed hair, that was all, but in the small town that I came from, this was suspect and so people did not believe that it was really just to do with my interest in this thing called 'Visual Kei'." Similar comments were also made by Takuya's parents such as "why can't you do 'normal' music?" as well as "men don't wear make-up". Yuya noted that while his parents were fine with him playing the piano, when he started to become interested in the drums they told him, "we don't have the space in the house. It's funny, there was no problem with space for the piano….", he compromised by deciding to take up the guitar, but his parents were not willing to pay for its purchase nor were they going to give him money for lessons, so Yuya had to save up on his own. "All that stuff about practice and dedication, I was doing the same thing for the guitar as I did for the piano

but they didn't see it that way. I wasn't doing well at school so maybe that's why and I couldn't explain it well to them at the time, my feelings about wanting to take music seriously. They just didn't understand."

While such cases and issues may also be seen as parental disapproval of what could be framed as phases of teenage rebellion or a common family experience of children going through adolescence that are not unique to having rock music as a hobby and they are underscored by a legitimate concern for their children's performance in school, which is ultimately tied to their future opportunities, these tensions are exacerbated when their sons make more concrete plans and decisions to pursue music as a career after high-school (for those who went on to finish, as some did not). While some dive straight into pursuing music careers, others do go on to university, vocational schools as well as make plans to become roadies with bands as a form of training, but often times this is a period in which family and other social relations become strained. Perhaps it is also worth noting that for some, this may be but a 'period', which came to an end upon gaining some kind of success or 'making it' or the case of some, by giving up. But for others who have not yet 'made it' and have not quit, these tensions continue to linger and affect their families as well as other social relations and their ideas about themselves. These tensions will be explored in detail in the next section.

6.2.5 Playing for Real: Sustenance and Maintenance

Whether they decide to go serious while continuing to study or not, most band members who are attempting to enter the indies circuit will not make money or be able to support themselves on the income from their bands until they reach a certain level of stability of sales of live concert tickets, music releases and other forms of merchandise. This also depends of course on if they are signed to a *jimusho* and what sort of an arrangement they have with their *jimusho*. Generally speaking, until they gain some

stability or momentum, most of the money they make is put back into funding for future productions and so indies band members have to make money elsewhere. This often results in them becoming freeters, doing part time work that allows them the flexibility of time which they need to put towards rehearsals, recording and touring. They also opt for part time jobs which ideally allow them not to be seen working[87] and sometimes due to their own physical appearance (brightly colored hair, tattoos, piercings) the kinds of work they are able to do can also be limited. On the surface, music should appear to be the only work artists are engaged in[88]. This is thought to be vital to the believability of the product; to offer unworldliness, worldliness should be erased.

During this period, income is unstable, living conditions are poor and health and nutrition also suffer. Those who continue to live with their families may fare slightly better in terms of the physical home environment, but unless they already happen to live in *toumeihan*[89] area, or at least within easy access to one of those big cities, men aspiring to become active band members will move away from their families. Others, like Kazu, who do have the option to continue to stay with their families may also choose not to out of pride or not wanting to deal with the stress that comes from appearing to be a dependent of sorts on their parents. In this section I will examine four common patterns that characterize this period of struggling to make it: still in employment, education and band,

[87] This is an unspoken rule of sorts that jobs that are too visible are thought to be damaging to the kind of otherworldly image that many attempt to portray as musicians in order for the emotional thrust of their music to be seen as convincing. The more they can selectively obscure about their private lives, the more effectively can the mystery surrounding their artistry can be portrayed or mythologized.

[88] Related creative work that is related to their music e.g. design, collaborations, other forms of entertainment, any sort of public/official work that is done under promotional activities is still within the realm of music 'work'.

[89] Tokyo, Nagoya or Osaka, which are the regional centers of Visual Kei. Other prefectures also have their smaller local scenes but for those with aspirations to go pro will not find such opportunities within their smaller prefectural industries. Thus most people will head to *toumeihan*.

hanbaito hanbando, the option to roadie and semi/fully sponsored individuals.

I will also highlight some of the problems that emerge with their families and romantic relationships during this period of hardship which echo much of what has been written about relationship between socio-economic status of irregular workers and their social-relationships (Cook 2014; Genda 2005; Toivonen 2011; Inui, Sano and Hiratsuka 2007) but argue that their status as *bandoman* also contributes in particular ways to how their social relations develop (or deteriorate) which have to do with the ways in which their labor is perceived; in that it isn't easy for many to perceive it as proper work at all. Miller has identified this as the 'trope of effortless music' (Miller 2008), in which the work, practice, repetition and effort that goes into the business of making music is obscured by the tendency to see "musical performance defined as leisure and transcendence, a refined pursuit and an unconscious utterance, a respite from the harried working world and an alternative to more demanding manual labor (Miller 2008, 438)." I will also add to this that the stigma or negative views about the aesthetic and thematic content of Visual Kei adds yet another layer to this obscuring of work as it is also then perceived to lack the morality of hegemonic values.

For those who fall in the first category, they have decided to continue with their education (for some, four year universities, for others vocational schools) but they also do *baito* or some kind of work to cover their own expenses and to fund their band activities. Not all of them end up completing their education, as Kazu's story has demonstrated in the beginning. Takuya also found himself in a similar position:

"It was hard to balance everything, school, work, practice. I was studying business at the time, even though I really wanted to study…after nine months, I realized there was no point staying in this school. I should just devote my effort of to the band instead since I knew that was what I wanted to do."

Dropping out of school then causes a new set of problems with band members parents as it is seen as a 'waste' in many ways; of resources, time and most importantly the concern that their sons are 'wasting' away at something which will not secure them a stable future. For some, this problem was compounded by their parents not understanding the nature of the actual work involved in being in a band. As Yuya says:

"My mother saw it literally as 'playing'. She thought I had my head in the clouds and she seemed to think it was maybe just a 'phase', something I needed to get out of my system and that I would eventually learn what 'real' life responsibilities were. I tried to explain to her what I did to be in a band and how much work it took but because we didn't make money from it then she said 'You cannot call that work, you can't make money from it. You think this is going to feed you for the rest of your life?'"[90]

Though things can be extremely difficult, receiving such comments from parents makes giving up and going home for some, not an option. Tsuzuku expressed this frustration when he said:

"I couldn't bring myself to go home. I occasionally went back to see my brother but if I went back to stay I knew I would have given in and just have proceeded to get a normal job and it would end. My mother had a lot she wanted to say to me but I ignored it. I had left home without even much of a discussion with the intention to make it, if I gave up now and crawled back home, it wasn't about being embarrassed, it was like I would not even be able to look her in the eye

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[90] Some band members were once on such tight budgets, they now look back on their diets at the time with humour. Some memorable methods for penny pinching include the MLG (*moyashi lettuce gohan*, (bean sprouts lettuce rice), deep friend garlic konyaku as a meal on its own and chips gohan (potato chip topped rice). One person claims to have ate nothing but the chocolates he received for Valentines day from fans for 2 whole days because it was all he had until he received his next paycheck.

ever." (Tsuzuku, 2012)

For those who are able to finish school and stay in bands while studying, their degrees, diplomas or certificates earned may not have been directly relevant to their progressing in the music industry, but were transferable in two notable ways. For people who obtained university degrees, this had the effect of lending them a certain pedigree that could be used to market oneself (even if not through the actual self-advertising of the individual himself) as 'educated'. Oftentimes because it is not the norm, band members who are in possession of such degrees are labeled the 'smart one' or seen to be '*erai*' (admirable or remarkable) in that they were able to balance both band and school. The second way in which this was helpful was in the case that the band split up, which for many did indeed happen. Two of my interviewees who were no longer in bands were able to use the qualifications they had gotten from vocational schools to get the jobs they were at now (one was now a music teacher, and the other was a physical therapist). For those who go on to music related education, they often were notably more skilled in their instrument of choice and some even gave workshops, tutorials and appeared in publications that were specifically geared towards the topics of the technicalities, equipment and gear of the instruments.

It should be noted that for those who had the support of their parents to take music seriously, their trajectories may already have differed while still in junior high school and high school. For example, the guitarist of the band MEJIBRAY, MiA, attended Hinode Kotougakkou, a school that many aspiring *geinoujin* (entertainers) attend as it has a *geinou* course as an option. While still in junior high school, MiA attended a vocational night school (ESP's Musicians Institute Japan) to learn music theory and to study guitar (MiA, 2013).

The second category consists of people who for various reasons do not continue

their education and are therefore doing what could be described as *hanbaito*, *hanbando*, (half *baito* and half band). They share many of the same problems encountered by those who are also still studying, but having the 'extra' time that the former doesn't possess does not necessarily make things any easier. They experience the same economic hardships and do not have educational opportunities as backup plans to fall back on as well. Hiro explained that during the time he was still struggling to get his band going, he would receive care packages from his grandparents that were filled with food, medicine and that his grandmother would sometimes even send him money. While it was helpful, Hiro says,

> "It was also painful to receive this. I felt I really wasn't an adult and they did not see me as one too. It really made me want to get out of that bad space as soon as I could. They were old, I should become the one to look after their needs… I wanted to show them that I could succeed, that I was not someone who they had to worry about or feel pity for."

Another commonality of those in this category was that it often resulted in them beginning and stopping jobs numerous times. For most, it was easier to take up service jobs that they could temporarily have to make some money, quit when they were busy with band activities, and then begin anew elsewhere once again when the band was in between releases and tours. One informant, Masaki, mentioned that in the space of 2 years he had held 8 different jobs which ranged from restaurant work, window washing, cleaning at a hotel, game center, on set runner for a film production and data entry:

> "I never told my parents what I did. They would have been horrified. They knew I was doing *baito* while also pursuing my music, but they had no idea what I went through. It was hard at first and it made me feel disoriented, but after a while I got used to it and I realized there are others like this too who do the same

thing while trying to make their dreams into reality, not just in music, so I didn't feel so awkward. Also, I learned many things from the various part time jobs I did!".

Those who had specific employable skills would find themselves in these 'half and half' positions albeit with better working conditions. While not exactly *baito*, two of my informants had more stable jobs that allowed them leeway of time and flexibility of schedule. Shuuji who had completed his studies at an IT school was very good at building websites and programming and therefore landed a job at a music publication magazine. He was put in charge of their website and maintaining the magazines online services. The magazine happened to be a Visual Kei one and as he did not need to always be in the office to do his work, his work hours were flexible so long as he was able to complete tasks in time. This allowed him to delegate time quite flexibly to his music activities. Eventually, as his band did not make it, Shuuji continued to work at the same publication, although his job scope has changed a bit since and he now also covers *genba* work for the publication's events.

My other informant who also possessed a specific skill, like Shuuji, found a means to stay somewhat regularly employed at the same company, but with enough time to pursue band activities. In Sora's case, he had trained to do ship repairs and found employment at a *benriya* (handyman service). *Benriya* tend to hire people with a variety of skills and dispatch them when work comes in. Workers would take up a variety of jobs, sometimes suited to their skills and sometimes on a more general level depending if they were on duty or not. Sora said that he was very lucky as the owner of the *benriya* he worked at was very flexible and was used to working with aspiring *geinoujin* and therefore knew exactly why they chose to work at such jobs. In fact, he was asked by his boss to bring in more of his band friends who were trustworthy should they be needing

work. On months where he was not that busy with music, Sora says was able to earn about 300,000 yen a month. He was also asked by his boss to take over the *benriya* one day should his band not work out.

The third category of people are those who *shuugyou* (training) and become roadies. Roadies are tour and recording assistants who are engaged in all kinds of manual labor, sometimes instrument specific, for the production of bands. They are often thought to be seeking training for skills that they will use when they form their own bands or in the case of others, those aspiring to become professional roadies. People wanting to learn more specific technical aspects of production will not be considered roadies but PA's or sometimes specific instrument tuners. Roadies do receive wages and salaries, although the amount depends on the level of the band they are roadie-ing for, as well as the amount of work required. There are in general three forms of employment for roadies: full time positions usually for professional roadies or those with some skills, contract employment for those who want to roadie not permanently but for a specific period, and then piecework employment which may not see them attached to a specific band but on a project to project basis or employment via a venue. Salary therefore is dependent on the form of employment. For full time workers, one can start at a pay as little as 110,000 yen a month but receive commission and benefits. A very in demand skilled and experienced roadie can have a basic salary of 300,000 a month, not counting commission and benefits. Roadies who do piecework/by the day labor can receive anything from as little as 900 yen an hour to 10000 yen for the whole day.

Roadie work is extremely physically demanding, the hours irregular and some roadies still need to take on other forms of work in order to support themselves if they are not full-time workers or attached to a specific period contract or band, which is difficult to coordinate time wise with the existing work of a roadie. While being the roadie of a

famous band or one that operates on a larger scale of market and production equips roadies with valuable skills and knowledge, it does not guarantee a better chance of success when the time comes to form and make their own bands go somewhere. Yuichi found that because he had roadied under a band that was operating at the major level, much of what he had learnt was not always applicable to the minor/indies scene and thus when he first started activities, many saw him as 'acting big' for the things he was doing and the manner in which he interacted with people, things which he thought was just part of the working culture of the Visual Kei scene, but were really more applicable to the mainstream music industry. Sometimes, roadie-ing for a famous band brought some amount of pedigree to one's reputation, but it also came with higher expectations which sometimes worked against a band or band members who in reality, despite roadie-ing for a famous artist, were really just starting out themselves.

Good and bad experiences of being a roadie ultimately depend on the artist and company and experiences can be highly varied. Kenji and Haru were roadies at the same time for a fairly famous mid-level Budokan class band. Kenji was attached to the vocalist of the band and Haru the guitarist. Haru says his experience was a very educational as the guitarist of the band seemed to take his roadie position and aspirations to form a band very seriously and treated him like a *deshi* (apprentice). He insisted Haru learn to play all the bands songs and understand the equipment in detail so that Haru could spot and attend to any sign of trouble if it were to occur during performances. Haru says that his guitar skills really improved on the road with this band as he ended up getting 'free classes' from his guitarist *senpai*. When Haru graduated from roadie-ing, the guitarist gave him many things to start his band like equipment and instruments he no longer used and even his old *kizaisha*. He also imparted unto him confidence for Haru recalls his words vividly still: "He told me that a roadie is as important as the band is in making the performance a

good one and that it was vital for us to work as a team. He trusted me to make sure that things would run smoothly. It made me feel even more motivated to perform well."

Kenji on the other hand was attached to the vocalist of the band and while he worked very hard on the job, he was also expected to accompany said vocalist to various social events like drinking parties, which were not actually part of his job. He also ended up running all kinds of personal errands for the vocalist, which had little to do with music. He looks back very fondly on some of these 'crazy' experiences, especially many a drunken escapade and while he has since quit music, he says that as a roadie, he learnt more about people than actually making or producing a stage which he still values, even if it did not help him to actually realize his band dreams. Perhaps due to his own experience, he says that he does not actually recommend roadie-ing as a job for someone wanting to start a band, because it is really physically demanding[91] and he says unless you luck out like Haru did, you may just as well learn on the job while going ahead with your own band minus the roadie experience. Kenji also says that while he did feel taken care of by the vocalist who paid for all of his meals and drinks, and introduced him to many "famous and interesting people", it was also a really difficult time as money wise, he did not make much and was often too tired from work to do anything about pursuing his own music. Haru however, really felt that it was a great experience and would recommend it for anyone starting a band. Nevertheless, based on the horror stories I have heard over the years, Kenji and Haru are still considered to be lucky for they were not subjected to bullying or torture as some other roadies have been reported to have experienced[92].

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[91] Another reason it was not recommended by people who had roadied in earlier periods was because it was *taiikukai-kei* meaning that vertical relations could be very strict and could even involve physical bullying on top of being an already very physically demanding job.

[92] I have heard of one case where the roadie was made to eat and drink all the leftover food and alcohol after parties so as to not let it go to waste. He was then made fun of for 'being fat' and then would be put

The fourth category is that of an individual who has some form of sponsorship or economic support. This can come in multiple ways, first from one's own family. I was told by a former magazine writer that one Zepp class band who have been active for many years but do not actually have a big fandom were only able to go on with activities at that scale for so long because the drummer's parents, who were wealthy, had funded everything for their son. From the setting up of the *jimusho* that they were signed to, their advertising and production costs and despite the band rarely ever making a profit, his parents who were very supportive of their son's band simply continued (and had the finances) to foot all the bills. While this is a rather extreme case, it does show the importance of external financial support in being able to sustain activities for a band.

Returning to Naoki (the retiring musician in the introduction), while he was not dependent on his live-in girlfriend for finances, he did report not having much savings and needing to rely on his girlfriend (who he would pay back later) when emergencies did strike. As also alluded to, two of his own band mates however, were partially dependent on other people to support them financially. One of his bandmates also lived with his girlfriend, but as she earned a lot of money as *kyabajou* (hostess) she decided to support him for the time being, taking over rent payments and bills and even buying him expensive designer clothes and accessories from time to time. In fact, his appearance in these luxury items was so in contrast to Naoki's and some of the other band members that even fans noted there was no way he was able to afford those items on his own and it became a topic of much gossip amongst them. However, this band member's girlfriend did give him a certain time period to make it, which she initially set at three years (and then extended to five as their situation did not improve as quickly as expected), and said that if he did not make it by then, she would no longer continue to support him and she

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on a diet until he was deemed satisfactorily thin, only to have to be made to eat all the leftovers again.

expected him to quit the band to start a restaurant or bar with her with her savings.

The most popular member of Naoki's band had a completely different arrangement as he had several *mitsu*. *Mitsu* refers to several things at once. It stems from the word *mitsugu* which means to provide money or gifts to help out/as relief. It also has two other meanings, as *mitsu* can also mean honey and therefore can connote that one is provided with something 'sweet' as a form of temptation. It also refers to the *mitsu* in *himitsu* (secret). With all these meanings in mind, in the context of Visual Kei it basically connotes a 'secret' arrangement between people in which an exchange takes place.

The exact details of the *mitsu* arrangements themselves can be highly varied. At its most basic level it is an 'off the record' personal exchange between two individuals in which money or gifts or specific items (e.g. musical equipment) are exchanged for something else. This something else can range from an introduction, meeting in private as a once off, meeting in private regularly, dates, sex etc. The finer details of the arrangement are negotiated between the parties wanting to enter an arrangement. Prices commanded too can vary from simply paying for meals, a monthly stipend, monthly rent, a one-off large sum, etc. In general, the more prestigious the *bandoman*, the higher his commanding price is rumored to be. However, this too is something that in the end is only really known between the two parties.

Generally, there are four ways to attest to the rough or actual price commanded by a band member. One is at the level of pure rumor which one can find out by asking around for and checking online. The other is to preposition a member directly though no answer is guaranteed. The third is to receive a preposition, whether from the member or someone who may know him personally, and the fourth is when something regarding the *mitsu* arrangement goes wrong and the *mitsu* exposes the details publicly to shame the band member.

Mitsu is one of the reasons that perhaps also adds to the bad reputation of Visual Kei band members as 'hustling swindlers who prey on lonely women'. While this following example consists of second-hand information (as told by Naoki) and I will try to refrain from the moral or ethical implications of such arrangements, because I do not know the actual details from the individuals involved in the arrangement, I will use what information I know from Naoki to illustrate but one example of a *mitsu* arrangement.

Having been in a fairly successful band previously, the vocalist of the band Kou, had come into this band being able to focus fully on band activities, meaning he had no external job to worry about. This was because he had 2 sponsors (*mitsu*) backing him. One was an unmarried older woman who had no children who owned a luxury preserved/dried flower brand and had made a lot of money from both her business as well as a large inheritance she had received from her grandparents. Naoki says that Kou claimed there was no sex involved in their relationship and that this woman was more of a sponsor who believed in his talent and felt like he was a potential investment of sorts. While his previous band had broken up, she was quite proud of his achievements and really enjoyed his performances and had wanted to support him in a way that allowed him to grow into an even greater artist. It seems that almost everyone believed sex or some kind of intimate relationship had to have been going on but apparently Kou insists that there was none. She provided him with a monthly stipend of 250,000 yen a month. She also bought him gifts quite frequently. Kou says that maybe she saw him as the son she never had and as a creative person herself, would have liked to have children involved in the arts. They had met through the CEO of his former *jimusho* who was friends with this woman and had invited to her Kou's previous band's live. This CEO knew of their arrangement and did not involve themselves much in the details.

On top of this *mitsu*, Kou had another arrangement with a girl younger than him.

Naoki does not know the details of this *mitsu* except that this girl was an aspiring singer who received a lot of money herself from her own sponsor and seemed to share some of that with Kou who apparently did have a sexual relationship with her, although she was not his girlfriend. Naoki has no idea how much she gave him or if this was the only other *mitsu* he had, but says that Kou never seemed to have financial problems and often shouldered some of the band's costs on his own as he somehow felt like because the others 'worked' for their money, it was only 'fair' that he covers for their hardships in other ways. When I asked Naoki how he felt about *mitsu*, he says that it's not anything he would ever get involved with himself (and he claims he cannot, because he isn't good looking so he would command a pittance) and that it definitely has a bad image, one he believed was fittingly so, but that after meeting Kou, he also came to see that it is not always so bad if it's between two consenting adults so long as they are honest about what is going on and their expectations. However, Naoki says he dislikes when *bandoman* get involved with their fans this way as he did feel like that had an element of preying to it. But partly because he respected Kou and liked him as a friend, I believe he may have allowed Kou's situation more room for complication and nuances that he may not have given other people who were in a *mitsu* arrangement. Kou's situation aside, one thing I often heard *bandoman* say was that *mitsu* was indeed rampant and that it was something they deplored and would never do themselves. One went so far as to say he hated men who did that and felt even hosts were better because at least hosting "is an actual job!". *Mitsu* was often talked about as if it was that thing that many others did, but never done by the person doing the talking.

For men who occupy such precarious work and economic circumstances and cannot explain their positions in terms of clear institutionally recognized belonging, romantic relationships also suffer under such conditions. Takuya continued to be in a

relationship with his girlfriend who had been with him since high school, but after 3 years of 'going nowhere', things took a toll on their relationship and she told him that she could not envision a future with him, given that he did not seem to be making any 'progress'. Hiro, who had discussed marriage with his girlfriend mentioned that she told him flatly that her family did not see him as 'marriable' even though they continued to date. When I asked him what she meant by this, he said, "Of course they meant in terms of money and my ability to support her, but they also meant this with regards to other things about my life like they didn't like that I was a musician, that I had tattoos…things like that. They saw me as a bum, with no 'real' job." After going out for 8 years, Hiro and his girlfriend eventually broke up. Economic instability and income sources like *mitsu* lead to band members being stigmatized in the following ways: They are labeled as *Himo, Damenz, Kusomen, 3B, Jishou baito*[93]: failure as a man to provide, lack masculine morals and maturity as a dream chaser. *Mitsu* overlaps with sex work, musicians in other genres like to point this out as a reason why Visual Kei isn't really about music: saying that guys only do this because of the quick money and they enjoy being *chiyahoyasareta* (fussed over) by women. Money is often the reason people are not able to continue band activities. Only the successful and stable are able to support their families, they do exist, they are not exceptions, but they are not the majority as well.

The concerns parents and girlfriends have about the various instabilities that band members find themselves in are understandable, as such economic difficulties of the

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[93] *Himo* are men who aim to be taken care of by women financially. *Damenz* (*dame na menzu*) are men who do a number of horrible things to the women they are in relationships with, not just using them financially but often these are depicted as gamblers, alcoholics and violence inflicting hotheads. *Kusomen* are 'shitty band men/band members' whereas the 3B are the "3 types of men to avoid and refer to Bandmen, Bartenders and *Biyoushi* (hair stylists) for they are thought to be flirtatious and untrustworthy. Sometimes Baristas are also considered as a 'B'.

'time-being' have longer-term (some potentially permanent) implications for the potential trajectories and options their sons and boyfriends have in the case of their bands never 'making it' or breaking up. There are limited opportunities for those who only have a middle or high-school diploma, and the increasing numbers of part-time and irregular work options may provide temporary employment, but the longer one spends time in such forms of employment also limits chances for full time employment as companies are "unwilling to recruit those who have been in part time jobs for a long time" (Inui 2010), under the pretext of lacking skills and experience. These are economic realities that many are familiar with as horror stories of the changes in the labor market are never absent in the media, one that constantly comes up with new labels and categories of the latest form of threat to the labor force (Cook 2014; Toivonen 2011) who in their negative depictions are often painted as irresponsible, lacking a work ethic, escapists, self-indulgent youth who value 'lifestyle' and 'leisure' over what they should otherwise really be engaged with; labor that is contributive to both social and economic reproduction. This is labor that is recognized not only in its direct relationship to levels of income, but work that is thought to be 'good' in that it is recognizably work, produces people who are capable of affording to have families, work that goes towards producing something for 'society' (or at least re-productive of capitalism), work that pays the rent, mortgage, bills, loans, work that puts 'real' food on the table, and certainly not *moyashi lettuce gohan* four times a week.

6.2.6 Rainbows End

Even if band members emerge out of the limbo between neither seen as engaging in 'work' and certainly not economically able to really, ironically, 'enjoy leisure', 'making it' itself can have many different manifestations and 'success' can be short lived, can plateau and can be measured in many different ways. There are bands that deemed

successful because they are stadium-class bands, who are household names, ones who perform at *kouhaku uta gassen* and appear in advertisements, bands like X JAPAN, GLAY and L'arc~en~Ciel. And then there are bands who are able to continue activities and earn a decent living through a stable niche fan-base but may never enjoy mainstream success. There are those who continue to struggle, those who get some momentum going but then fizzle out, bands break up every other month for all kinds of reasons and some of those members go on to form new bands. There is no true formula for success. Even looking at the careers of those bands who do make it, there are variables that cannot be replicated due to factors such as luck, timing, a combination of business skills, opportunities, talent, looks, artistry, marketability, authenticity etc. Success can come, leave and also make a comeback, as the revival of many bands has revealed. In the end, even the initial skills enabled by the consumption of music items by families may not matter as this does not guarantee that one will become successful and even when bands find success, the tensions, stereotypes and perceptions about their work do not necessarily disappear. In this section I will examine how these notions linger on, even upon gaining economic stability.

On the surface S has it all. He is in a Budokan-class band, major label contract which means he has more than stable income, he graces magazine covers, his band has been at it for a long time now and have no plans to disband. But unlike the other guys in the band who live quite fabulously, he has to support a mother, grandmother and his 2 younger siblings who he still has put through university. S actually came from a middle-class family and he too grew up playing the drums and guitar, but when he was in his second year of junior high, his father passed away and his family's economic situation began to change quite drastically. But thanks to his being able to make it, things are better for them again. Except there's one tiny issue.

When people ask mom and grandma 'what does your son do?' they don't tell

people what band he is in. They tell people he is 'in the business' (*gyoukaijin*). This is not because he musician, but as he says "I don't think they know how to and don't want to have to explain the content of the band's music to anyone." They may be quite famous, but you won't see much of them on tv because the content of their music is quite explicit. The *jimusho* he is signed to is rumored to be a *black kigyou* ('black company', a company that has abusive business practices), the president of the company, quite notorious for his business conduct even within the business.

Even for parents who come to watch their children play lives at prestigious venues like the Budokan, this does not automatically turn into relief or forgiveness. One band member says that instead of being proud of him, after his first Budokan live, his father who had opposed him entering the music industry told him "Never think for once that you got here because of your own effort. Look around you, you are here because of so many other people."

The stigma of being a Visual Kei musician is also relived in a different way when *bandoman* have families of their own. Kiyoharu (former vocalist of KUROYUME) revealed on an episode of Downtown Now[94] the particular things he contends with as a parent of two daughters. His oldest child attends an academic track school and for any school events in which parent's attendance is required, he wears clothes that cover his tattoos, even the ones on his neck he tries very hard to cover with high collar shirts. Kiyoharu who is usually blond also dyes his hair black during such events. While tattoos and colored hair may not be limited to just Visual Kei artists, he then goes on to say that he would really hate it if his daughter were to date a musician. "Musicians, comedians, actors, any of those are bad. But if it were a musician who could actually make a living by selling his music, then that's not too bad. But ideally, I'd like for her to be with a

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[94] This episode was aired on 20th March 2020.

lawyer or a doctor" (Fuji Terebi 2020). The caveat could not be more compelling; even a successful musician like Kiyoharu does not see musicians as appropriate 'spouse material' for his own children unless they actually are able to get paid for such 'work'.

6.2.7 How long can one play?

With the bursting of the bubble, the socio-economic system of corporatism that gave rise to the hegemonical social order of the day became for many unattainable, as well as called into question. Structural changes and social-cultural transformations appeared to position the possibilities found in play as potential solutions to the problem: what is 'real' wealth? (Harada 1998).

One route of pursuing inner satisfaction was thought to be through an emphasis on lifestyle as opposed to a life of 'meaningless' labor divorced from individual interest. Shifting socio-economic environments in an era in which increasing market segmentation, the proliferation of irregular work and the allure posed by the ideology of creativity (Mori 2009) and dreamwork, the increasing marketability of prosumption as a tool for fulfillment, which has come to be pursued even by the government as it invests in the profitability of the economy of play under the vague label of 'Cool Japan', has come to alter collective imaginaries that transform the boundaries between labor and leisure. But what has this meant for the individuals who form the basis of this part of the economy and their families? At the heart of this tension is the anxiety over their futures: what will eventually become of them if their dreams don't work out?

There is certainly no one reason why people chose to become musicians, but these narratives reveal how leisure shared in the family can equip people with the technical skills, education and exposure which for some form the basis of what will become potential career options even if these were not the intentions of parent or child at this stage in time. But as much as the notions of labor and leisure shift and become part

of an economic reality, it has not been one that has played out clearly, nor has it become actively acknowledged, or desired by all such that it has become the socially sanctioned order of the day. The experiences of those who work in play or play to work reveal that leisure is not merely a product of the structures of constraint, nor are they mere binaries to what they are supposed to 'not be' as these shift, but that leisure is an experience in certain times, that occur over time, throughout the times.

I have also tried to emphasize that the status of Visual Kei *bandoman* also contributes in particular ways to how their social relations develop (or deteriorate) which have to do with the ways in which their work is perceived; in that it isn't easy for many to perceive it as 'work' at all. Furthermore the stigma or negative views about the aesthetic and thematic content of Visual Kei add yet another layer to this obscuring of work, as it is also then perceived to lack the morality of hegemonic values, thus making those who lack this 'common-sense' bad boys, but as we have seen, are in their own ways still trying to be good sons, but due to the nature of the music and the nature of the labor, playing for a living is not as leisurely as it sounds.

It is with this very labor in mind that we turn to the investigation of the next set of skills in order to begin to understand the basics of the work that goes into becoming a Visual Kei specific performer in the next chapter where stagework- the aspects of the craft skills and business skills that are required in order to showcase one's music, will be analyzed.

Chapter 7 The Skills of Playwork: Onstage and Offstage Work

7.1 Performance Skills: Musicianship and Craftwork

Musicianship refers to the core product of playing and making music. Becoming a musician takes years of learning and practice that is not 'seen.' A good musician is believed to be both effort, study and craft, as well as part natural talent (Auslander 1998). Three skills make up musicianship; technical skills of playing an instrument, composing skills and producing skills. Not everyone has all three. Usually bands have one or two members who do, but everyone has the first, albeit at varying levels of skill. Musicianship involves being both a live and recording musician. Improvement is achieved through practice, actual performance and auxiliary experiences (such as classes and specific training). The more skilled you are, the more sought after you are as a band member. Skill is also 'professionally' recognized, talked and written about by 'specialists.' If highly skilled, it is transferable beyond being in a band, one can go into teaching, producing or composing.

Craftwork is a skill that overlaps with musicianship for the Visual Kei performer's performer repertoire and persona is incomplete without it. These skills concern visible stylistic aspects of performance. They involve the presentation of self, ability to entertain and elevate the music by evoking the affect of otherworldliness, described with the intent to '*sekaikan wo produce*' (production of worldview) or as '*bando no misekata*' (method of displaying the band). It is also a way to visibly project and design non-hegemonic existences and otherworldliness.

Craftwork can be first divided into two larger categories, the first involves 'body work'. This is achieved through makeup, hair styling, costume, body modifications (such as tattoos, piercings, implants etc.), fitness, dieting and cosmetic surgery. The second category of craftwork is staging. Staging is both embodied and communicative, it

involves how you move on stage and communicate persona or portray image to the audience. While part of this is enhanced and aided by aspects of stagecraft (lighting, set/stage design, audio-video design, props, theatrics), stagecraft is not necessarily a required performer skill although staging is and therefore I will not consider stagecraft as a necessary skill to cultivate as an individual, although performance requires an understanding of how to interact with and incorporate it.

Craftwork does not just end with the body and performance and particularly skilled band members can extend this to other realms of design for commodity and branding purposes. For example, this may extend to merchandise production, design, collaborations with brands and individual exhibitions. Overall, craftwork is a vital skill in the creation of affect, atmosphere and persona. It is an aspect of 'character' building, even when the character is simply the band man's staged version of himself. It is a means of producing and displaying personality and character through non-verbal communication and embodied actions. By cultivating an attractive artist persona through craftwork, one increases one's commodity potential.

Craftwork is a Visual Kei specific skill. While other genres of music may also involve craftwork, the style and content of the craftwork of Visual Kei is unique to the genre and furthermore, it is at odds with various ideologies that surround authentic 'musicianship' that view aesthetics as 'secondary' and 'superfluous' to the main product of music. It goes against the belief that good music should simply be able to stand on its own. Hence from this viewpoint, Visual Kei isn't really music because of the elaborate craft, which is why some see Visual Kei musicians as engaging too seriously in cosplay in the 'shape' of a rock band (Inoue 2003). It is therefore seen as 'playing' at being a rock band. This is further compounded as within the musicianship of Visual Kei, its eclectic elements and difficult to pinpoint sonic qualities already renders it 'pastiche-y' in a

negative light.

Even when the visual aspects of performance are explained in terms of conveying a message of differentiation, the commodification of this as something for sale is seen as apolitical and simply done for the sake of shock (Mattar 2008), for it never brings about any 'real' emancipation and thus Visual Kei band members are seen as preying upon the insecurities and desires of foolish consumer dopes, seducing them with beautiful but vague alternatives. Anti-hegemonic themes are thought of as simply playing at the politics of difference, just a consumer option, a safe space to enjoy the idea of illicit cultural practices, a place to escape for a while from 'everyday life'.

The level of craftwork that goes into Visual Kei also brings with it other forms of discrimination and stigma. The homology between male beautification and gender/sexuality also invites questions regarding band members sexual and gender identity. Some members (and the scene in general) are thought to be engaging in crossdressing or *josou* for the entertainment of women (Hashimoto 2007, Mattar 2008). Not only is this problematic for it subsumes any non-hegemonic performances of masculinity or craftwork as akin to performances of sex and sexuality, it also relegates women's prosumption of such contents as unworthy and perverse.

In the first part of this chapter which investigates the 'on-stage' work, I will show how musicianship and craftwork in Visual Kei, because they are stigmatized and obscured (the laboring that goes into them is not made clear) contribute to the notion of the labor of band men as not very laborious at all and that this is another way in which their work becomes relegated as 'play' work.

In the second part, which investigates off-stage work, analyzes that which I have termed business skills. Here I look at how entering the specialized circuits and networks is not simply a built-in process, but one that bands have to navigate in order to gain

success and make profits

7.2 The Learning of Craft and Music

Needless to say, unless someone also plays the same (or similar) instruments or has practical knowledge of instrument playing, the labor that it takes to execute the playing of music at an advanced level, to some extent, entails the obscuring of the actual labor that goes into reaching that level of ability. This is because practicing and learning is a process that is mostly about repetition across time and advancement in incremental stages. Personal aptitude, 'natural' talent and drive are but some of the external factors that affect one's skill in the making, but ultimately, all musicians practice. By the time this is turned into some form of product (recorded, live performance etc.) usually, this has taken years of effort. Even if one does not have knowledge of music instruments, this is not a mystery to imagine in theory. However, how does music become 'Visual Kei' music and how do its performers learn it?

In the previous chapter I have shown some examples of how people first learn music and there is a variation of entry points. Some take classes and lessons, some are self-taught (using both offline starter kits and online tutorials) or taught by friends or family. Furthering this skill involves practice and sometimes taking ones learning methods even more seriously by investing in a higher education in music and other forms of formal advanced learning. These are the ways basic technical skills are crafted.

In order to apply and adapt these skills into the genre of Visual Kei, put very simply, begins with the act of prosumption. Usually, people do not enter the Visual Kei industry with zero knowledge of Visual Kei[95]. Especially for former *gyao* who become

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[95] Every now and then, some band will rope in a non-Visual Kei musician friend/acquaintance into joining their band. In these situations the new person will have to 'learn' how to perform Visual Kei which is also an act of prosumption, but it is a different process from the fan to performer process of prosumption which in some ways is more 'organic'.

bandoman, they would have already spent time intensely consuming Visual Kei and would have a familiarity with it as a template; its tropes, themes and hallmark content may be understood quite intimately by such individuals. Simply liking something and executing it adeptly as a performance art though are two different things.

In order to illustrate how one learns how to perform as a Visual Kei artist, I will begin with the example of how roadies learn. These methods are not exclusive to roadies, but entering the roadie system allows them a direct means of access to these channels and I had former roadie informants who explained them to me. When Atsuto first became a roadie, he was attached to the vocalist of the band in addition to general tasks. Atsuto explains:

"On my first day I was so nervous. I had watched them (the band) perform at the Budokan before and I had no idea what they were like as people. I had only seen them in makeup up till then. On my first day the vocal said to me "You want to form a band?" and I said yes. From then on, he provided me with all kinds of help. He thought me how to use my voice properly, told me who to watch and showed me how he did things. He also thought me how to do my makeup and hair."

As Atsuto explains, people wanting to join bands who are roadies may get personal lessons of these sorts from band members. They enter into a *senpai/kouhai* (senior/junior) relationship often with one member in particular (although it may not always be so and the whole band are considered their seniors) usually according to the part/instrument they are interested in taking up professionally. Lessons come from both intense and up-close observation/watching rehearsals and performances, as well as one to one lessons where technique is taught. This is not just with regards to the instrument of choice, but can include makeup and hair styling which may come as a surprise to many.

I will discuss craftwork in more detail later in this section, but for now I will touch on staging and musicianship.

Outside of the band that roadies are attached to (and again this is not exclusive to roadies) band members in training will be asked, invited and expected to watch many bands perform. They may have already done so in their fan days, but they will watch bands now with different perspectives as guest members who are there to study, research and observe the performance as aspiring musicians. They may receive these invitations via their senpai connections and their peers (if they have any). One thing to note is that once one makes the shift from *gyao* to roadie/band member in the making, one no longer attends any lives as a fan, even should one wish to see a live very much. This is a matter of displaying professional consciousness and separating 'play' from 'work'. Live attendance henceforth is only upon invitation (although foreign acts and other genres do not apply).

The point of watching as many lives as possible is to research both the overall showcasing of the live, as well as to study specific parts that are relevant to the individual. Rather than the studying of technique per se (as this is honed in a different way), what is observed at lives are gear setup, staging, set flow, techniques to engage audience etc. The 'performative' aspects and how to project these are effectively become the object of observation. The more one watches and the wider one casts one's research nets, the more ideas and exposure one can obtain before actually embarking on assembling one's own performance.

There is the specified watching (of the band you are attached to) and the general observation which those in training are expected to engage in, but on top of this, personalized classes from active (or former) band members are also another way to learn how to perform Visual Kei. This aspect of learning is almost completely done in secret

and is obscured from the audience. Many fans do not know who has trained who and for that matter, even if they are aware that someone is so and so's roadie, they do not know about the one-to-one classes that roadies receive (or if they receive them even).

As mentioned, one-to-one classes and instruction also takes place outside of the roadie system via introductions or requests. For example, a magazine editor I know was once responsible for introducing young aspiring band members to a skilled active vocalist for voice training and staging lessons. This was done in secret, and it was never revealed to the public even after the debut of these aspiring band men, that they had received staging and voice lessons from this experienced vocalist.

While a go-between like this is common, sometimes aspiring band men contact people they admire directly if they are feeling bold enough and they even receive replies from experienced band men to meet for lessons should they be able to and want to help these people. Former band members also become instructors at music schools (once they have retired as performing artists) and one can learn under them formally. Another way of obtaining lessons and instruction is via a *jimusho* that one has joined, is affiliated with or has joined as a roadie. Some *jimusho* raise and develop their upcoming artists in a similar way to the roadie system, but instead of just one band, one may also have access to other band members or producers in the *jimusho* as potential teachers or instructors. This too is all done in secret and not made public.

Techniques learnt are both on a general musical level and a 'Visual Kei' specific one which include common patterns, compositional phrasing, styles of playing etc. While these are very varied within the genre, needless to say whoever the aspiring band men is learning from has their own specialty carved out of which ever sub-genre they tended to belong to. Thus, it would make sense for aspiring members to contact or apply to individuals whose subgenre they are interested in performing or adapting as well. This is

particularly relevant to vocalists as those wanting to employ metal elements into their music will actually need to learn how to shout, scream, squeal and use 'death voice' in a way that is not causing too much damage to their throats. Misuse of technique can result in chronic damage and while long-term damage is impossible to avoid in loud metal, short term damage can be avoided and endurance can be built via proper knowledge of vocal techniques. For this matter, should an aspiring vocalist not wish to pursue metal, they should try to get lessons or roadie from a vocalist who does not sing metal songs and specializes more in melodic techniques.

The learning of staging also occurs in the same manner through observation and lessons. Staging lessons are also never made public. In fact, the learning, planning and 'choreography' of staging itself is never shown to the public. Bands do this in studios with floor length, wall to wall mirrors and prior to the group rehearsals, band members either practice in front of mirrors alone in studios or at home. Fans are not shown how the staging in line with music is developed by the band and even when they are given a behind the scenes look of rehearsals, the focus in these selected rehearsal clips is the music, which has already been very rehearsed at this point.

All staging, musical techniques and craft begin with 'mere' imitation. One learns simply by following what one sees. Basic techniques and styles are drilled and replicated this way until a certain level of 'flair' and ease of execution is achieved. There is no particular creative input at this point (although it can also be added) and one is basically repeating what is shown. This is actually done for quite a while before actual 'original' input is attached to the repertoire. While this is may sound like a standard practice of learning and it is not unique to Visual Kei, two things are worth noting about this in the context of Japan and Visual Kei.

Firstly, the technique of 'shadowing', 'copying' or 'imitating' the work or style

of a 'master' is as mentioned a process in many fields of performing or creative arts. However, the length at which this is done and executed in actual performance in a variety of performing arts styles in Japan tends to be longer than that which is found elsewhere (especially in the context of rock) and can extend even into the post debut period. Therefore, the audience seeing the or hearing the debut of a new artist may be surprised to find that what they are watching looks almost exactly like something they have seen before. In the context of Visual Kei, what complicates this is that none of this 'shadowing the master process' is made public, and is only acknowledged and disseminated as information by particularly knowledgeable fans who may recognize the new artist as the former roadie of a band they have followed. Even then, while they have knowledge that an artist may have a *senpai*, they do not actually know for sure the extent of instruction they have received or the nature of the relationship between *senpai* and the *kouhai*, as this is not public knowledge. Therefore, new artists often get accused of *pakuri* (copying) and *maru pakuri* (carbon copying) in their earlier days, even if they have the support of their seniors. Sometimes the relationship between artists is semi-acknowledged (just not officially endorsed) and while this may lighten the blow, this still does not stop the accusations.

The effect this has on the new artist is multifold; it at once gains them attention and notoriety but it can also serve to put consumers off for they may see this as a lack of creativity or originality. Knowledgeable prosumers though can connect the dots and assume that some sort of lessons were imparted, however as mentioned, they do not know the extent, content and methods of execution that were utilized and are simply guessing. Sometimes these fans as a sign of loyalty of support to the *senpai* artist may even support the junior artist/band and as they are there from the start, become the *jouren* of the new band. Indeed, sometimes these debut releases or performances can seem like total 'rip

offs' should a viewer/consumer/audience member not be aware of the trail from which the artist emerged, and it can be shocking just how close to some other artist's releases/styles it can manifest as.

This is even more so evident in the case of an artist who (whether out of choice or lack or of inability to access direct lessons), employs the exact same learning techniques without the instruction of a sempai[96]. In reality they are not exactly doing something so different in terms of learning how to perform Visual Kei, but as they lack the 'license to copy' that the *kouhai* has obtained, they are all the more so subject to criticisms of copying. Sometimes this is met with the criticism of the artist themselves (in private, which may lead to some sort of blacklisting or ignoring) should they be sensitive about such issues, but often times experienced artists simply understand what is going on as a normal process and some even take it as a form of flattery.

What this does result in is a 'template' of what Visual Kei is, that can be learnt and copied. Again, while there is much variation within the genre, it is the incremental content across time that forms the basis of the template and prosumers are familiar with the scope. This is why despite the variation, Visual Kei prosumers can actually hear and spot Visual Kei, for tropes and hallmark styles emerge through repetition as executed by bands over time when they learn from the *sempai/kouhai* system.

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[96] For this matter, it is also completely normal for people with no access (or not wanting to seek out that route) to begin by performing as a cover band (band that plays the songs of others). This is a way to also seek out other members and to practice performing in front of a live audience when one does not have original music to perform yet. It is also a way to sharpen one's shadowing/imitation skills, as the live audience can function as critics as they too may have familiarity with the covers being performed and therefore can stand in place of an instructor (although the type of feedback one can get will be of a particular nature). Smaller live houses have these amateur/cover band days every now and then and they are very affordable both for band and audience to take part in, sometimes only costing 500~600 yen to watch.

While originality and personal 'color' can be added at any point (and indeed, some do start right off the bat with their own styles) this is usually only really developed after a certain period of basic mastery/shadowing/copying has been put into practice. This is partly because at this stage, sometimes band members have not fully developed their abilities to perform or compose completely original works. Once again, there is a vast individual difference and depending on personal ability and skills, sometimes band members already have original compositions and styles they have developed on their own before even forming their bands. What happens too easily though is as Haru explains:

> "When I watched the video (of his first live) I was shocked as to how much I looked like I was copying my *senpai*. I was planning to be more like 'myself', but I was so nervous, I think I just defaulted into doing what I had gotten used to practicing since I had become used to that."

What happens often, as did with Hiro here, is that nerves also make one default into 'standard' techniques crafted for they are in the moment of nervousness not able to realize or risk anything too 'new' as they have an audience to impress. While the audience may also be unimpressed with their lack of originality, it is safer to execute a tried and tested template than to risk making a fool of oneself by failing to pull off something original. Only after some confidence and skill development is gained (by adding what one observes elsewhere or crafts on one's own) does an artist then add to the 'template' with their own content. What is commonly found is that rather than completely original content, Visual Kei is original in its combination of content from everywhere and anywhere given that there are no rules that govern or dictate what can or cannot be Visual Kei (where artistic content is concerned) in terms of authenticity. Therefore, it is combination of things sourced from a wide variety of art, subculture, culture and performing arts both in and out of Japan that forms what becomes Visual Kei which is

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added to the 'basic' template that is learnt through copying.

This freedom of creative license is a source of joy to some performers and they even report sometimes becoming Visual Kei because of the liberal approach it has towards mixing and matching things which they see as one of the strongest points of Visual Kei. However, this is also a source of criticism that has already been touched upon elsewhere and will be expanded in the later part of this chapter for it also means that Visual Kei is seen as possessing almost 'no characteristics' except for the formula of music played with makeup and costume on. Also, particularly influential individuals within the scene can give birth to generations of bands 'copying' them which also gives the impression that Visual Kei 'all sounds the same.'

The building of the template by the introduction of one's own original combinations of creation is a constantly on-going process. After some years of developing one's particular style, band members may also want to continue to formally learn new techniques at a more advanced stage and may therefore seek lessons and instruction once again, usually at this point from experts outside of Visual Kei. This is particularly common amongst vocalists who may find that age has changed their voice and they may need to adapt to new vocal techniques. It also happens simply out of a desire to improve upon one's skills and widen one's repertoire of technique, thus building upon the Visual Kei specific foundation one has crafted, and introducing these new approaches into Visual Kei, thus also legitimizing it within Visual Kei. This does not happen according to any specific timeline but tends to happen over time. The basic process however is copy, execute and then develop. This can be an endless process as bands are always watching bands and studying (even their gear and setup, as technologies advance).

As for craftwork, I will now describe some points on how hair and makeup skills are developed. In many ways there is overlap with how staging and musicianship is

developed; one learns from a senior. However, the requirements and standards of just how adept one needs to become at hair and makeup has changed and executing it yourself is nowhere as important as musicianship and staging, as craftwork is also aided by the use of professional hair and makeup artists. However, what many do not realize is that part of the training of roadies (as well as those on their own) does involve learning how to do one's own hair and makeup. One should at least be able to do one's own craftwork should a hair and makeup artist not be available and this is often the case with bands on a budget or bands who use a particularly in demand makeup/hair professional who is particularly in demand and over booked.

This has changed over time. It used to be that everyone learnt how to do it themselves and that professional hired help was only sourced once the band had the funding to do so, as well as in the case of particularly important photo or video shoots. Regular tour live makeup used to be done by members themselves almost all the time. This has changed because the style itself evolved over time and the requirements of makeup became increasingly refined and the standard of the finesse of execution increasingly high. In the past, matte base makeup, bold colored matte lipstick, dramatic contouring and a 'flat' look was the norm for makeup and heavily teased 'big' hair was the go to hairstyle for *kote kei* bands. *Misshitsu* makeup meanwhile is meant to look messy and does not involve much subtle technique (as does Nagoya kei). These styles are in essence not difficult to master and because it was meant to look dramatic, finesse was not so much of the importance as was impact from a distance. However, as styles proliferated and evolved, especially from the neo-Visual Kei era onwards, makeup techniques have become increasingly of the realm of the specialist, for they are not easy to execute, require subtle layering, ability to use a range of tools and are simply no longer as 'flat' or matte as they once were, but are about texture, the appearance of dimension and difficult to

execute without professional skills and knowledge. What this means is that Visual Kei artists post 2006 are increasingly depending on hired hair and makeup artists or using particular kinds of 'set salons'; a service that caters usually to people who engage in nightwork (hence the increasing aesthetic overlap as well as mentioned in Chapter 4).

To backtrack a little, recall Atsuto explaining earlier on in this chapter how the vocalist of the band he roadied for even gave him makeup lessons. This was actually the norm for a long time for band members to also include these in part of the skills they imparted on to their juniors. In fact, many older artists continue to do their makeup by themselves today and even when they have also moved on to using professionals, they continue to touch up and fix their own makeup should artists be too busy especially during the encore period of a live when time is limited and the hair and makeup artist has to attend to various members. Some members develop their own look and techniques to such a level of identifiability that they do not require or desire the use of a professional for only they can replicate and execute their own look how they wish it to look (for example Tsurugi of Sadie does all his hair and makeup on his own). However, as mentioned as the standards and styles for makeup have become increasingly refined and are increasingly within the realm of the skills of the trained professional, less and less bandmen are able to do their own hair makeup and therefore craftwork of this sort may be becoming a thing of a past.

There are however younger band members who are very much into developing this skill on their own and are so adept at makeup they even provide tutorials for both band men and a general curious audience. Some of them may be graduates of beauty schools themselves or sometimes simply self-trained. This public giving of tutorials for general consumption is something too that is relatively new in practice. YouTube tutorials by band men of their makeup have also began to surface in recent years. However, the

gap between those who can do this and those who can't is large, whereas self-makeup used to be standard practice. This has also therefore, raised the costs that go into maintaining a band. Some band members are also very good at these elements of craftwork for they attended *biyou senmon gakkou* as Ren who I introduced in Chapter 1 did, although he did not complete his studies. There are also vocational schools such as Vantan that offer Visual Kei makeup/hair as a part of their course as an elective.

A much more personal and individualized element of craftwork is bodywork and body modifications. In general, the favored or idealized physique for Visual Kei bandmen is simply thin if not underweight. This has to do with the costumes and the aesthetic as like many other performing arts, favors a slightly underweight physique. However, it is also not uncommon to see members who prefer a muscular or toned physique, especially amongst loud kei and *kotekei* variations. Weight however, is a personally managed and maintained issue, but social and peer pressure may see band men struggling with this, especially those who are not naturally built with dispositions or body types that are easily kept, seem or 'styled' in a way that favors a thinner appearance.

Similarly, tattoos, body modifications and piercings are also personal choices, however they are very much a norm as they add to 'extraordinary' and 'non-hegemonic' appearance and appeal of the artist. These too change with the times. When *Oshare kei* and *Koteosa* was at its height of popularity, lip and eyebrow piercings were very popular and they have sort of dwindled in popularity over the years. Meanwhile in recent years, 'non-standard' ear piercings (lobes, industrial, tragus, helix, snug etc.) became more popular, as did nail art.

There is another way in which body modifications meld with Visual Kei as they aid in the depicting of particular kinds of characteristics, which also pertain to those pathologized ones discussed in Chapter 6. For example, Tsuzuku of the band MEJIBRAY

reports that his forked tongue was one that he cut by himself in a bout of mania. Again here I do not wish to ascertain or authenticate whether such actions are 'true' or if they are part of the commoditization and objectification of mental illness, but what I simply wish to express here is that these presentations of self which involve the use of one's body as a vehicle of expression that is linked to one's performance and music can also pertain to areas beyond the stage and beyond the craft of a stage persona, but are linked very much to the actual personhood and identity of the performer as is not separate from other aspects of their lives.

Tattoos and body modifications may contribute to a kind of subcultural 'cool', but they are not forced upon the artist. For example, the head of P.S Company actually discourages performers from getting tattoos as she says that the likelihood of 'anybody' regretting a tattoo is high and she asks that her employees (including artists) think very carefully before they get tattoos as it may limit their opportunities beyond the band as well.

As I have also mentioned previously in Chapter 4, cosmetic surgery has also become increasingly normalized at such a rate that the audience has become used to seeing increasingly 'perfect' or 'stylized' facial features that are not transformations brought about by makeup. This actually complicates the meanings of Visual Kei as makeup is a 'known' tool for temporary transformation that is somewhat accessible, but cosmetic surgery is a personal matter which the artist does not need to reveal unless they wish to discuss it. Therefore, the transformation here at the level of the *genkei* (base/ original features) also has health and cost implications for the artist that also become fraught with mixed reactions and meanings for even as it proliferates, it has yet to be 'normalized' in the sense that it is not free of ethical judgement and concern from both fellow performers and fans.

7.2.1 Intentionally and Unintentionally Obscured Labor

Readers are probably already wondering why the development of these skills is kept secret from the public? There are numerous reasons but to begin with, part of this has to do with keeping the air of mystery surrounding Visual Kei intact and the source of its contents as emerging from the 'artist' themselves, thus legitimizing their position as people that take to the stage convincingly. The second reason is to allow the reception and development of the *kouhai* to proceed on his own terms and respecting the debuted artist as an independent unit of his own. The third reason is there is little that is glamorous or impressive about the actual process of learning and perfecting skills itself and if anything, it can be quite an embarrassing thing to reveal (the product before it is polished). Furthermore, revealing this process and what goes into it also takes away from the element of surprise and more importantly takes away from the process of 'Visual Shock'. If every step were to be understood and made public, there would be no confusion and surprise and thus there would be nothing of The Sublime to experience through contact with Visual Kei.

There are also reasons that have to do with the *senpai* in the relationship. Sometimes an individual may not want to be responsible for whatever happens to the career of the band of his *kouhai*, for their failures or for their successes which are thought to be created on their own terms. An 'artist' may also not want to be known as a 'teacher' (this is of course different from one individual to another) but a teacher like status or identity may subtract from a kind of artistic persona they may want to project or portray.

These are the intentional reasons that the laboring over the skill of musicianship and craftwork is obscured. There are also some more normalized reasons which I have mentioned such as the labor of this sort being obscured across all genres simply as norm in that as a final product to be 'consumed' for the entertainment, enjoyment and play of

others, it is not always to the benefit of the enjoyment of it that the labor be made explicit. Put otherwise, the consumer should enjoy the product as it is intended to be displayed; for consumption and not in its unfinished state of 'process' which in reality may not be interesting to witness or know about as it involves repetition, mistakes, experimenting and the revealing of all the 'flaws' of the artist which may take away from both the subliminal experience and the elevation of the individual human into 'artist'. It could be argued that indeed for fans, such trivia may be interesting and it may actually aid in the 'true' evaluation of the artist as a person of 'skill,' but a lot of band members do not feel comfortable showing these sides and perhaps because it is Visual Kei and the ideal of it lies in pinnacle that is Visual Shock and The Sublime, these otherwise behind the scenes type of reveals need to ultimately be selective in that they may show that labor is involved, but never 'in the process of its development' and simply as a skill already 'possessed'.

Furthermore, the audience and prosumers believe that part of the product is to be made together as it is with lives. If the performer were to reveal that they have actually created and directed the direction of the live without the audience (in terms of staging), this too may take away from the 'organic' feelings that the audience believes themselves to contribute to as co-creators. They too wish to believe that they have 'moved' the artist in to particular responses and emotions which are projected and visible in his staging and by gauging his emotional output. Even if they know that the performance is rehearsed and planned (and indeed those who follow full tours know this, as they have seen the same show over and over again, including all of the most 'emotional' moments of the live as expressed by the artists) they are not to know just how much and how exactly it came to be produced. They are also not to know so in case something goes wrong, it can be saved by the artist ad hoc and as an impromptu act.

As much as I have emphasized musicianship and craftwork as an individual

project, it is also something that ultimately the band puts together. It is just as much as group effort as an individual one, despite the individual differences. Individual effort as a skill is examined more closely in a different light in the following chapter, but here I wish to also emphasize that craftwork is ultimately for the overall band's performance and individuals may shine within it with varying degrees of skill (just as musicianship will). Craftwork is also collaborative for specialists and professionals are hired. There is also individual difference in that some members may depend fully on craft experts to 'transform' them physically and they may see their work more as pertaining to that of the music itself. Conversely there are band members that are very involved in their own craft, even specifying how they want the details of their costumes to made and executed.

These minute details once again are not necessarily known to the audience, because it is the final product that matters; the creating of the otherworld. Therefore, the laboring that goes into this which is very much of this world in that just like the mastering of any work skill, while it may be part personal talent and aptitude, is ultimately also routine, repetitive, linear and orchestrated activity built up over time that can only be achieved through *nichijyou no renshuu* (everyday practice) even as it is directed towards the creation of that which is *hinichijyou*. Ignorance is not only bliss, it is necessary for the achievement of the sublime.

7.3 Craftwork and Stigma

As was also shown in Chapter 5, the prosumption of spectacular displays of transgressive and provocative contents are seen as too heavy, depressing, dark, self-absorbed and psychologically unhealthy, evident in labels used to describe people who perform and consume VK (*menhera, chuunibyou, ochikobore*) which all indicate that consumers are dysfunctional; social failures who fail to meet the normative standards of healthy consumption practices. These are not only located in lyrics and musical styles but

in the craftwork: the appearance of male performers in provocative makeup and costume.

Involvement with Visual Kei is also seen as contributing to the commodification of physical objectification and promoting unhealthy body image. Body work is associated with other forms of deviance, especially tattoos and piercings, artists often report being stopped by police for *shokumu shitsumon* (questions by police based on their appearance which leads police to ask them 'what do you do for a living' which is actually a checking in on individuals who look suspect/dubious). Band members often report being constantly subject to this on the basis of their looks. Junjun from the band DOG in the PWO who is frequently stopped by police, once asked a policeman why he stopped him to which he received the reply "Well, there's something different about you…", On tv shows, bands are not asked about their music but instead "how long did it take you to do your hair?" It is seen as 'laborious' (as expressed in the questioning of how much time was devoted to it) and yet it is also trivialized and seen as futile labor, a source of laughter and ridicule.

It should be said though that choosing to embark on a Visual Kei career solely for its established accessibility is rarely the case as has been mentioned several times, doing so comes with various forms of public ridicule, shaming and stigma. From the use of aesthetics and physical appearances adorned, to its stylistic content that deals with the profane, performing Visual Kei means subjecting oneself to the criticism that often comes from musicians of other genres of rock. One common criticism is that if so much décor is required then it isn't really about the music and similarly that it lacks the 'for the music only' spirit that is promulgated by appearing as casual or even as minimalistically tough (which still falls in line with ideas surrounding hegemonic masculinity) as possible. Here, Kiyoharu (now solo, formerly the vocalist of Kuroyume) who is often cited as a major inspiration by many Visual Kei artists, explains what the appeal is of Visual Kei to the performer themselves

"Visual Kei done well necessarily means being able to pull off the 'visual' part of it. If you have good songs, a good vibe and your performance is convincing and cool, then if you also look good while doing that, I think it's a total package that puts you one step above. Being flashy isn't a bad thing…it can be a weapon…so long as there is a meaning to it" (Kiyoharu 2011).

Visual Kei musicians are also stereotyped as not being technically sound. This bias is reported by musicians and I encountered these many times in conversations myself with people. Stereotypes such as "the emphasis is on the visuals so the music doesn't matter". Upon mentioning a widely recognized skilled musician, he is always turned into 'exception': "Oh he is different…" Because it doesn't have a definitive sound, people see it as 'imitating' other genres and that it is inauthentic pastiche meets flamboyant visuals. Then there is the belief that if you wanted to do 'real' music you would just enter that genre. There are sexist biases about fans: "most are girls who can't even tell what a drop-D is". There are music editing programs that can cover up lack of skill on records, so anyone can sound good. There is also the belief that bands don't write their own music: says Ryosuke: "I was asked before 'How much involvement do you have in your own music? I get the feeling people in your genre are not that interested in the music, but more the performative aspects."

Because craftwork is obscured, whether intentionally or unintentionally, many simply believe that the on-stage parts of Visual Kei is 'produced' by experts; makeup artists, costume designers, hair stylists, when in reality, makeup was for a very long time a skill that band members had to cultivate on their own (though this is changing). When musicianship is about the process of imitating and then crafting this 'freely' without genre defining technicalities, this further plays into the idea that the music is simply a pastichey *pakuri* of the work of others. Much of what is seen on stage is therefore assumed to not

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be part of the actual work and laboring of the band man himself, when in reality it is a skill that takes much working at, even work that involves hiding the work that goes into it.

On-stage craftwork skills are not the only aspects of labor and work that are obscured, nor are they the only aspects of labor that go into producing what is staged and presented. In the next section I will examine the work bandmen do behind the scenes, in the 'off stage' arena of planning that involves business skills. I term these off-stage for they are indeed what takes place off stage, even though it is work that is done in order to be able to stage a live. But these are also metaphorically offstage on goings in that they involve the unseen and unknown, behind the scenes aspects of work that like their visible on-stage counterpart, craftwork, are often assumed to be not the work of bandmen at all. While bandmen may have a *jimusho* and staff that may perform these tasks, many bands who are self-managed have to execute these tasks all on their own. Furthermore, even those who have a *jimusho* may have to undertake these responsibilities themselves depending on their arrangements with their companies. *Jimusho* or none, offstage business skills are required of all bandmen. The more one pro-actively engages in developing these skills, the more opportunities and abilities there are to be procured and the more chances there are for one to perform live.

7.4 Off-stage: Business Skills, The Industry and Systems

Business skills involve developing an understanding of how the music industry works and how to navigate it. It is also about how to make profit within exploitative systems (or working around them) and strategizing one's professional career. This skill involves the labor of networking, building connections and then maintaining and activating them.

There are four ways to enter the Visual Kei circuit. As mentioned previously,

roadie-ing places you into a hierarchical relationship with the band/*jimusho* you work for, so it's better to be selective, but it depends on your own abilities and availability. It is an effective way to make connections and meet people in the industry. Being a roadie will also educate a person regarding the various aspects of production of both live concerts and recording.

Roadie-ing is not the only entrance strategy and some people enter by joining a band straight away. They do so either by answering or putting out calls for membership recruitment. These used to be done 'manually' via postings at live houses, recording studios, *senmonten* and magazines but these have switched to online postings. Another way of finding members is through personal introductions via other band men. A band with few connections may audition for a live house in order to start performing but if they have connections or members with experience, they may have access to join a *jimusho* or the band can form their own label and do things *jishu* (independent).

The industry is made up of a good number of both *jimusho shozoku* (*jimusho* attached) and *jishu* bands. There are pros and cons to both, the difference is a matter of control of rights and distribution of profits, network access scale, production scale, capital, manpower, specialization of staff and hierarchy within the overall system. Even *jishu* artists are usually indebted to a larger *jimusho* through interpersonal relations, so depending on your status and position in the overall picture, it can effect the scope of your activities and what kinds of media and channels you have access to. An older *jimusho* may have wider media access or may hold monopoly on certain circuits, therefore if you are on bad terms with someone in a position of power in that *jimusho* (even if this is indirect, perhaps through a *jimusho* you have relations with) you may find yourself shut out or black-listed, thus not being able to appear in certain media or take part in certain tour circuits. What trumps some of this (not all the time) is *chimeido*. If you have *chimeido*

despite status within hierarchy, you can gain bargaining power.

Business skills also pertain to knowing how to plan, manage and execute activities. Understanding the different parts that make up the industry from production, distribution, promotion and publishing etc. and utilizing these effectively. It is also about knowing and developing what sort of projects to take on, developing profitable and effective promotion strategies. Risk taking and creativity are involved. It is a transferable skill if well developed and many who have a good business sense go on to start their own *jimusho*, production companies or fill managerial and creative positions within the industry upon retirement from performing or being an active artist. This too is learnt experientially and one can study about it in a more general sense of the overall music industry, but because a lot of it involves interpersonal relations and communication skills, developing these skills are ultimately in practice.

To illustrate how many of these elements come into to play, in this section I will examine two offstage aspects of industry, the business skills that go into making and breaking them as well as the notions of success that governs the operation of these industrial institutions. First, I examine the *taiban* circuit system (multiband event circuit) to elaborate on some of the overlapping aspects of *chimeido* building, networking, industry and profit making. I will attempt to reveal how *taiban* which is a very basic element of participating in the Visual Kei industry is in reality difficult to 'succeed' at for much goes into the investing of participation that is difficult to turn into clear profit.

As a second example of that which happens offstage, I examine the process from an independent self-run label to making a major debut. Competing notions of success come to the fore when bands go major as they are now subject to the record label's expectations to meet various standards of 'normality' as they attempt to juggle this with whatever brand of otherworldliness or niche market appeal they are thought to have that

led them to garnering enough attention to go major in the first place. Going major is one of the ways that producing Visual Kei clearly becomes defined as 'work', but it entails adapting to a particular worker subjectivity and mindset that can ruin the 'play' for both fans and artists. This is not at all a new dilemma as the commodification of subcultures for a more general audience market has been shown in the past to display much of the same points of contention. However, I will argue that in the case of Visual Kei, viewed through the concept of playwork, the irony of artists finally being able to be recognized officially as paid workers (a thing that they are stigmatized against for previously not possessing) simultaneously results in their products taking on overt hues of 'play' that possess little of the ludic and actually have little general or subcultural market demand. This glitch of sorts reveals much about the assumptions of normalcy and the 'average consumer' and underestimates what inspires and governs prosumer sensibilities and loyalties.

7.5 Taiban System

A fairly large portion of income for bands and their *jimusho* is made through live ticket sales. Once a fanbase has been generated a band can play a oneman[97]/*tandoku kouen* (single headliner artist concert) and do oneman tours. There are also multiband lives that bands can play at that are of various levels of scale from small *taiban* event (multi-band lives) to big festivals. A small band may choose to play at *taiban* or take part in a *taiban* tour as an opportunity for exposure and to deepen industry and peer connections.

Often the distribution of money from ticket sales follows the following pattern.

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[97] There are also twoman, threeman and up to fourman billings. Anything more than four is usually just called a *taiban* event. Twomans and threemans tend to be organized between bands and their *jimusho* when there is an interest between parties to organize such events. They most often occur between bands of either the same *jimusho* or between those who have amicable relations. These can also turn into nationwide or semi-nationwide tours.

A *norma* (minimum guarantee/quota) is promised to the live-house/venue in the form of an allotted number of tickets sales. Anything above the *norma* goes to the band and their management which is then split depending on the agreement they have with one another or in the case of self-managed bands then there is no split. In other words, bands who want to take part in *taiban* have to first pay to perform. They also have to pay the live house for any other additional services they may require such as special effects, equipment rental, recording rights etc. that they may want to utilize during their performance. The settlement, amount and other specific details concerning the *norma* can also depend on whether the live has a sponsor or host, who else is playing at the *taiban*, the number of bands playing, if a ticket promotor was involved etc. Basically, if there is a sponsor, then the sponsor will rent the live house and be the proxy for payments and perhaps shoulder other costs, should they want to or are able to and then the *norma* is negotiated separately between the sponsor and the bands. The sponsor can be an eventer, a band, a *jimusho*, a publication, a Visual Kei *senyou* retailer or even an industry individual. Sometimes just one member of a band will be the sponsor perhaps on a special occasion such as a Birthday or some other kind of notable anniversary. The distribution of profit is basically on a case by case basis with the abovementioned factors as variables.

On the day of the *taiban* event, fans are required at the door (as they present their tickets) to state who their *meate* (band you came to see) band is. Needless to say, a fan may watch as many or as few bands as they wish during the duration of the live but their ticket stubs are allotted only to the designated *meate* artist and these are then counted later when it's time to settle accounts. Should bands fail to meet the agreed upon *norma*, they will have cover whatever losses out of their own pockets. This is standard industry practice, regardless of the size of the live house or the event. The ability to meet *norma* and profit from ticket sales is of course dependent on the audience size one can generate,

but even this is not merely solely a matter of 'popularity' for a band can be very popular and easily be able to sell tickets on their home turf, but not able to in other regions. A *taiban* may encompass an entire nationwide tour, therefore profits and losses are not simply about a single event, but are accounted for given the scope of the tour. A band may choose to participate for the full duration of the tour or for a few stops depending on their schedule, budget or ability to participate.

At the most basic level, joining such a tour provides the band with an opportunity for exposure to gain more fans. They will play to an audience who is there to see other bands, so it is a chance for them to play their music and showcase their performances to a wider audience. The goal is to inspire an interest in these people and have them come see the band at their onemans and other events where they will be the *meate* for them. To put simply while any form of interest garnered is a boost, the ultimate goal is to gain not simply more people to enjoy your music, but specifically to gain more fans who will be willing to pay for more of what your band is offering in the future.

At *taiban,* each band has a certain amount of stage time allotted to them where on average they can play around 5 songs (often a bit longer if they are the last or the hosts/belong to the hosting *jimusho* of the event). Therefore the strategizing over how to maximize the use of their limited time and what kind of performance to put on at *taiban* live needs to consider several things[98]; what songs or kind of a setlist provides for a representative of a sampling of the band, which songs are they best known for (crowd-pleasers), musical performance aside how can they *aoru* (vocally hype up) a crowd that is not all there to see them, how and what should be communicated during their emcee moments, to name a few. At the same time, they also need to appeal to their own fans and

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[98] This is a vastly different scenario from a oneman in which they have more liberties to put on a longer performance according to their liking or needs of the time.

therefore they cannot have the same go-to set that is reserved for *taiban*, but they need to also keep it interesting for the repeat audience, all the more so when it's a *taiban* tour and they may have the same people travelling to see them. So, while the goal is to gain new fans, there is also at the same time, the need to keep the fans you currently have amassed pleased so that they too will be willing to sustain their patronship. *Taiban* is also a way *jouren* try to introduce or get their other friends to come to like a band as ticket prices tend to be slightly cheaper than a oneman and being able to see a few different bands, it may be less of a risk (or a bore) should you not like the one band you were asked to come watch.

Ironically the existence of *taiban*, which is supposed to be an opportunity to provide bands exposure in a specific format, sometimes has the unintended result of producing a *taiban de rakkii* level band. This is the term applied to bands who Visual Kei fans enjoy seeing at *taiban* events that make the overall *taiban* event even more worth attending (your own *meate* aside), but whom you do not feel any need to see beyond that. This is a frustrating category to fall into for what it means is that people do enjoy your music and performance, but only in a limited capacity that does not translate into any monetary gain for your band. Hence the term *taiban de rakkii* which means "lucky to have them on the *taiban*" *period*. Bands like this are difficult to sustain and when they do break up, they do have quite a sizeable group of people mourning the loss of the band, but often enough it boils down to a matter of financial sustainability and in the case of these bands, unsustainability. The takeaway here is that bands have to do more than to merely inspire enjoyment in the moment alone in order to survive.

There are various kinds and levels of prestige of *taiban* events and a band looking to go somewhere will want to be able to participate in a meaningful *taiban* event circuit. This is measured in terms of who is sponsoring/hosting it, venue size and scale of the tour,

the history of the reputation of the circuit, who else is on it and what sort of networking/socializing opportunities it may hold for the band. For example, certain *taiban* are sponsored by *senmonten*, some by magazines, some by *jimusho* and so a band wanting to build a relationship with any of these should try to join these *taiban* tours. Sometimes they are invited by their other band or industry acquaintances. There are old live house sponsored *taiban* too that are almost considered standard entry practice into the Visual Kei industry and these are easier to get into as they involve contacting the live house directly and there are lower barriers to participation.

There is also some level of risk and preparedness over losses that a band starting out or still in the process of trying to build a sizeable fanbase will have to consider when participating in *taiban*, but they are ultimately also a thing that all bands who want to make a career and build a reputation in the general Visual Kei circuit and industry will have to participate in in some capacity. Bands may also want to be selective and careful beyond simply trying to use *taiban* to gain exposure, for depending on who is the host/sponsor this can also lead to building particular relationships with particular persons of power in the industry and some *jimusho* who have beef with one another can sometimes channel *taiban* participants into obligatory participation. In fact, some *jimusho* do not allow bands under their management to participant in *taiban* circuits that are hosted by parties that they do not get along with or have had a problematic past with. It is of course possible to by-pass some of these hierarchies and play to multiple sides or keep neutral, however choosing a side may also lead to clearer paths and opportunities. Another kind of *taiban* is a regionally hosted one and performing at these is a chance to pay respects, homage or simply build a good working relationship with region specific facets of the Visual Kei industry[99].

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[99] Without naming names, I will add here that actually there is one specific region centered label that does

7.6 From Indies to Major

Going major is a different experience for every band who is given the opportunity to walk this path that is subject to a wide scope of variables such as timing, the company one gets signed to, market situation and trends, the very style or subgenre of the band itself, the individuals who comprise of a band's management team and in many ways the maturity and experiences of the band members themselves. Sometimes bands experience going major more than once under very different circumstances.

During the hey-day of Visual Kei, it was very easy to debut under a major record label and there was even a 'major rush' of sorts that saw bands going major very shortly after their formations. Today the situation is very different with Visual Kei bands actually following a formula quite unique to the scene itself where bands tend only to go major upon attaining a certain level of *chimeido*. This has sort of created the impression that they have to 'earn' going major, but this is not something that occurs across genres. As explained by MiA of MEJIBRAY:

> "I think Visual Kei is actually blessed. Look at other rock genres outside of Visual Kei, or like sometimes I head to the venues of other music scenes and it seems that in terms of sales and the number of people coming to see them is very little. The way they try to sell (compared to Visual Kei), these normal bands is different. In the case of Visual Kei, you only go major once you already have gained a certain level of a sustainable fanbase. But in the case of rock bands, you could have only 5 fans to start with but if someone like a producer or a record label sees the potential in you and thinks "This will sell!" you'll be invested in

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not allow bands or rather doesn't like it if bands do not pay respects to them by appearing on their *taiban* but still want to play in their region. They cannot prevent bands from renting time slots at local live houses, but they can severely limit their chances and make the experience of playing in their region somewhat unpleasant in other ways. *Taiban* in this specific sense is a hierarchical obligation.

and only then start to become popular. Aren't there so many cases like this? So, I think fundamentally this is the difference" (MiA 2013)

In other words, Visual Kei bands are only seen as worth the investment by the major labels after they have worked, labored and promoted on their own as an independent band. Major labels will not invest in a Visual Kei band from the start as they would in something they see more 'malleable' and producible for a general audience. One might think that this is perhaps a pattern that could be applicable to other subcultures but it is also simply a bias that has developed surrounding Visual Kei. As Yasuko, a manager of an idol group who used to manage Visual Kei bands says:

"If you ask the label they will say "it's because Visual Kei is not as popular as it was so it's a risk to invest" and they will also give you some examples of bands that went major but broke up very quickly after that and that has given Visual Kei bands a bad reputation as well. But in reality, they debut artists who do not have any fans yet and meanwhile even a small Visual Kei band might be able to reach Budokan easily on their own, but those the record label debut's will never play more than capacity 800 venues. It's because they think they can do less to the band to stretch the profit. They don't know how to market the band and they usually fail. In the end, it is an issue of mismanagement."

I will now bring up an example of this kind of failure to understand the market in the example of the band Merry's going major. Merry[100] were a band who during their indies years (2001~2005) received both critical and popular acclaim for their uniquely adventurous *Angura* stoicism and their daring use of *eroguro* elements. Merry had crafted for themselves a very identifiable sound and image and were able to do well at *taiban* and

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[100] I have written about Merry's use of *eroguro*, in particular in terms of their vocalist Gara's performance in Chapter 5.

their own oneman lives. They even had a fan club set up while they were still independent which was a testament to how much of a core audience they had managed to amass. Merry also received support from respected artists in the scene like Dir en grey[101] and Kiyoharu[102]. When they announced they were going major, there was much fuss and talk and expectations were high for what they could achieve. Unlike the period in the 1990's and early 2000's when Visual Kei fans began to worry when a band would go major due to the high likelihood this would result in *Datsu-v*, most fans were looking forward to this major debut and the mood surrounding their debut was high, that in itself a rare thing in Visual Kei and generally positively celebrated.

However after they went major the band, instead of toning down avant-garde elements appeared to be almost over-doing aspects of it which would come off at times as a rather mindless and at the same time were embarking on aimed at general audience type projects common of major label signed artists (anime tie up songs, Christmas songs) that were neither *Datsu-V* in style and still in keeping with the queerness of Merry, but increasingly ornamentally (surface seeming) so. It was as if the band's concept was now oxymoronically 'Avant garde pop-rock' which did not attract it a new audience and only confused their current one.

It is not that Visual Kei fans have a problem with Visual Kei music being used for anime per se or that they dislike Christmas songs (or Christmas) but it was simply the neither here nor there-ness of the undertakings and approach towards adapting Visual Kei for these releases that fans did not take to. The band and management had also underestimated that their hard-core fans would be receptive towards these projects as they had not *Datsu-V* (and therefore had not betrayed Visual Kei) and were surprised at the

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[101] Gara is a former Dir en grey roadie.

[102] They released some of their indies albums and singles off Kiyoharu's indies label.

lack of general audience feedback as well. Neither projects succeeded and only charted decently due to multiple releases and heavy instore promotion which meant that it was simply once again just their fans purchasing these releases, and with mixed feelings. What this example shows is that it is not simply about toning down one's look that fans are disappointed in, but fans are sensitive towards how Visual Kei is used and even (or perhaps all the more so) when a respected artist uses Visual Kei in a way fans deem superficial, they risk losing credibility and loyalty can be at stake.

7.7 Discussion: Worthless Work and Priceless Play

The labor and mindset involved in making a creative product and the labor and mindset involved in selling that product are not the same. But another aspect that I have tried to highlight in this section is that they are not inherently at odds all the time, but they tend towards different goals. A label lawyer, Nobu, I interviewed said:

> "Most band members don't know anything about how to make money. The smart ones figure it out; you can see them straight away moving up ahead. The bands that succeed, sure their music is good, but it's also because someone in the band figured out how to do things, they read the market, understood the system and had the *pro-ishiki* to act upon it."

Something I often heard from artists was the awareness that their product was not 'profitable' in the sense that it was not *ippan-uke* to begin with and that making music and performing how they liked was important to them. It is not that they didn't want to make money, but they didn't want or know how to compromise. Fans are also very sensitive to what they see as '*datsu-V*'. They perceive this as a kind of betrayal to the ethos of differentiation when transgressive elements are toned down to appeal to a wider audience, thus the band is seen as treating fan sensitivities as unimportant and out to gain profit. This can have a negative effect on their perception of the performer-fan

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relationship, which is primarily grounded in the belief of the shared joy that comes from being able to grow together and play on level terms.

One other important point to make here with regards to stagework would be the various words used to talk about work. There are various words that band men use to refer to labor and work and each of these would come up in different circumstances. An important distinction is words that would be used to refer to public work/labor which they could use in front of fans and words that were used only within the industry or behind the scenes. I will first talk about the public utterances of work and labor.

First, with regards to detail oriented work that required individual concentration such as composing or working on tracks, this was referred to as *sagyou*. This is because *sagyou* often refers to work that involve production and the use of tools, which in this case would mean instruments, computers, technical gear, music making programs and tools. *Sagyou* was something all band men who made music participated in. Sometimes *sagyou* as also used to refer to digital labor such as updating or maintaining websites and other online content.

Playing live, promotional activities and media appearances were referred to as *katsudo* meaning activities. Even though this forms the work of bands, taking part in a circuit of existing activities to promote releases is not called 'work' for a number of reasons, firstly because the emphasis is on these activities as visible, participatory, involving the members in person and public. It also connotes striving towards something and the objective and goals not simply task or economically oriented, which is vital because *katsudo* is where fans can see and participate along and thus emphasizing the action is both a reality of the experience and a means to include the audience beyond simply seeing them in economic terms.

Then there are specific activity/task related words related to laboring. Rehearsals,

whether for recording or live performances were referred to as *renshuu* (rehearsal/practice). The words for photo or video shoots too were referred to by their general terms, *satsuei* (shooting) that emphasized the specific activity. In general, band members have no problem employing these words when talking about their labor and work activity whether in private or public. Note that the emphasis on each of these words to explain their labor, the emphasis is always on the activity itself and it is not actually called 'work' explicitly.

The actual word for 'work' (*shigoto)* however, was used almost only amongst each other, amongst staff and within the industry. *Shigoto* which simply means work, was not a word that band men used to talk about regarding what they did in front of the fans. This was always used amongst them with management or regarding administrative issues. *Shigoto* is something they received as an offer (e.g. an offer to participate in something) and in other times amongst each other, band men would talk about their own *shigoto* if they had jobs elsewhere. A band only called their *katsudo 'shigoto'* in private/behind the sense and more importantly, *katsudo* was only *shigoto* to them when they either already received income from the band. Therefore, calling band activities *shigoto* indicated two important things; economic remuneration and something not publicly uttered in front of the fans. Calling their activities work takes away from the play and sacred space that is the play of fans as well as reducing the meaning of their products to economic relations. Also, so long as the band were not able to make money from the band, it could not be called *shigoto* per se as this would mean they actually had other *shigoto* or *baito* elsewhere to support themselves that was a part from the band. Work is therefore obscured in another way, by the very musicians themselves until it can really be paid work for them.

Chapter 8 The Skills of Playwork: Service Skills

8.1 Effort, Eigyou and Entrepreneurship

Recent scholarship on emergent flexible forms of labor in Japan that channel the avenues of desires, dreams and entrepreneurship have done much to reveal that the neo-liberal situation is one in which 'the freedom to choose' is fraught with various costs and constraints for those who find themselves along such career trajectories (Allison 2009, 2013; Lukacs 2013; Takeyama 2016). Building upon such ideas, this chapter examines the emerging discourses surrounding the concept and practice of 'eigyou' by bands in the Visual Kei subcultural-industry.

Eigyou here refers to a style of personalized, individualized, customer, and trend conscious type of 'extra' service that is becoming increasingly practiced by Visual Kei bands. It is at once vilified for being exploitative and superfluous to the selling of music, as well as simultaneously viewed as a necessary adaptation strategy within the climate of a music industry that encourages artists to embark on variety of new forms of entrepreneurial strategies in order to tap into various markets amidst the decline of the once primary product of physical music recordings. In this chapter, I will attempt to highlight how the practice of eigyou, which in this context can be understood as 'personalized service with a personal touch', is not merely an economic strategy employed to recuperate the loss of revenue from CD sales, but one that emerges out of the values and affectual attachments engendered by a highly pervasive neo-liberal permeated concept of consumer subjectivity

8.2 In Tune with the Times: The Rise of Cheki and Doing What it Takes

In a few minutes, MEJIBRAY will have completed their first oneman live at Shibuya Koukaidou[103], a venue that marks a certain degree of success for any independent artist regardless of genre[104]. They have played a nearly three-hour long set, one that was filled with a visually impressive stage production on a scale unlike anything they have ever attempted up to now. While the other members have already left the stage, drummer METO is the last one to leave and he will exit in an almost signature like fashion that has become familiar to those who have seen the band live. His performance persona is one of a character who embodies various forms of silence; a marionette, a child, a toy. This muted guise inspires an affect of otherworldly potential, through the selective highlighting and subtracting of what constitutes the 'normal' human body, METO's stage manifestations invite and provoke the audience to explore taken for granted notions of the everyday body and other forms of being. He does not ever publicly speak, a choice he has made since the formation of the band and when he leaves the stage, he does so while seated in a wheelchair, escorted off by a black hooded figure who rolls him into the wings.

While most of the audience will stay to watch this routine finale of the performance, enjoying the live till the last band member has safely departed from the stage and the stage lights go out and the house lights come on, signaling with announcements that the live has indeed come to an end, even before METO has fully completed his grand exit, there is another visible commotion taking place amongst the members of the audience. In the semi-lit darkness of the hall, fans have begun darting out of the venue, some dashing at full speed in a purposefully hurried sprint. As some

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[103] This live concert was held on the 22nd of December 2014

[104] Shibuya Koukaidou (Shibuya Public Hall) has a capacity of 2084 seats. It has undergone several name changes over the year and as of 2019, it is currently named Line Cube Shibuya.

audience members are still enjoying the final moments of the live, others are running out almost in a state of emergency. Where are these fans running off to and what's the rush?

What these fans are doing is scrambling to join what will soon turn into a very long queue for tour goods. Worldwide, goods or merchandise are a staple of any live performance or tour. The most globally recognized item would be the ubiquitous tour T-shirt. In Japan the variety of tour merchandise occupies a wide range of items; pamphlets, towels, wrist-bands, tote bags, pouches, phone covers, mirrors, key chains, stickers, tumblers, umbrellas, caps, mugs, parkas, onesies, torchlights, folding fans, baby onesies, lighters, condoms, clear files, jewelry, magnets, badges, credit cards that bare an artist's image and of course T-shirts, to name a few examples.

Goods usually go on sale hours before a live begins, but they are also on sale afterwards. Within the global music industry, Japanese fans have one of the best (if not the best) reputations for the amount of money they are willing to pay for goods (Broad 2020). Depending on the popularity of the band or artist, certain items sell out quickly. Novel yet utilitarian items sell out the fastest, design of course matters, and there is a daily quota of items that go on sale at each venue, allowing fans watching different legs of the tour the chance to purchase these goods. Some goods are limited to certain tour stops only, with tour finals, which are usually the largest concerts in terms of scale of the entire tour, often seeing additional items added to the goods roster and a larger volume of items being sold on these days.

Fans who can afford the time often purchase goods before the live starts, getting their shopping out of the way, but some also buy goods on their way out. Buying goods later rather than sooner sometimes means that you may not have the luxury of choosing from the entire list or catalogue and may have to pick from what's left over. This is why although lives usually start in the early evenings, they can become a whole day event for

fans who have to plan their time of the day around such matters external to the actual showtime itself.

Throughout the 90s and early 2000s, this was the norm at Visual Kei lives for both major and independent artists[105]. However, these past twelve years or so have seen longer lines form more regularly at the end of lives. Furthermore, many of these fans forming the post-live queue have already bought goods earlier in the day when they first went on sale. There is a particular item that most of these fans have hurried out to buy. Size-wise, it may be the smallest, cost of production-wise the cheapest, but surplus value-wise, the highest. The cause of this routine post-live commotion? Instant camera polaroids, better known amongst fans as *cheki*[106].

Prices range from between 300 to 1000 yen per shot depending on the popularity of the band or band members[107] These pictures come in several forms: solo shots of a single member, *tsūshotto* ('two-shots' or two members in one picture) and group shots that feature the whole band. Fans may choose from a category (solo or group) but they cannot choose the actual picture. Thus, for those who want to purchase pictures of a particular

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[105]A long line at the end of a live is sometimes due to special occasions when a particular item unveiled pre-live or tickets for a previously unannounced live have gone on sale. Sometimes to promote the further sale of goods, band members would take over the sales duties at the goods table, encouraging fans to purchase something as well as presenting them with the chance to enjoy an impromptu meeting session with the artist. This is more common amongst smaller artists but major artists sometimes also do so.

[106] While I believe that in the English language these are commonly called 'Polaroids' which people know to mean to refer to instant camera pictures, there is an actual difference between Polaroids and cheki. For one, Polaroids are made by the company Polaroid Corporation and are slightly larger in size. Cheki meanwhile are made by Fujifilm and are smaller. Cheki is also thought to be the updated version, as the camera employs newer technologies. Therefore, while I refer to these as 'polaroids' initially, this was only as a means to introduce the English-speaking reader who may not be familiar with the term cheki, to the object of discussion.

[107] This was the standard price as of 2015. I have been informed that they have gone up slightly in recent years. It seems some bands are charging 1000 yen even for solo shots these days.

member, *cheki* buying is a gamble. Some fans buy one to commemorate the live, others buy tens of thousands of yen worth, sometimes because they collect these items. But some others buy them for reasons that actually have nothing to do with the actual *cheki* themselves, but out of a desire to support the band and a knowledge of how the sales of merchandise is one of the most effective ways to do this. Each *cheki* is unique- they capture a particular moment and may contain signatures and written messages from the members on them. Each *cheki* therefore represents a piece of information privy only to the person who owns it.

In an era where the sales of music recordings no longer reel in the profits they once did, revenue diversification is but one of the many coping strategies adopted by artists and the recording industry. The tour T-shirt may be one of the older forms of the material commoditization of popular music as merchandise, but its utilitarian use and overwhelmingly everyday appearance obscures and excuses some of the ramifications of commodification. *Cheki* lacks a 'practical' use and as visage bearing items, they are clearly tied to the consumption of the image of the artist, a literal snapshot of self-commoditization. That some bands make more money selling *cheki* than they do their music is not an uncommon assumption in the indies Visual Kei scene. The criticisms that accompany this depict consumers and producers, bands and fans, as engaged in a blatant form of superficial prosumption; the fans are more interested in the way band members look and the band members as not 'real' musicians, selling image and fantasy. And there is nothing new to this stigmatization; after all this is Visual Kei, and like its name suggests, is a form of rock music in which the visual and aesthetic aspects of performance and performer forms an essential component to the affective realization of its artists. Moreover, Visual Kei has long been stereotyped for its pretty-boy musicians and female fanbase who enjoy it for its aesthetically pleasing aspects.

But there is more to the buying and selling of *cheki* than this simplistic fans-gonna-fan thesis posits. Despite the easy profit to be made from *cheki*, most artists express that ideally, they would not want to sell them. On the other hand, despite the presence of a large market of *cheki* buyers, fans themselves are critical of the sales of *cheki*s and even amongst avid buyers, there are some perhaps surprising reasons for purchasing these items which have little to do with clear-cut personal gratification or consumption of desirable images. A vague yet present lingering sort of resentment exists on both sides, yet the buying and selling goes on. As the manager of a band once said to me, "When you have a dream, you have to do what it takes to make it". There is the music that people love and love to make, and then there is everything that comes along with it. For a band like MEJIBRAY, selling *cheki* is part of the *eigyou* they have to engage in, one of those little extra somethings outside the core realm of their labor as musicians that they partake in because like any band that wants to go somewhere, they are engaged in the game of doing what it takes to make it.

8.2.1 Changes in the Music Industry and the Labor of Musicians

Since the early 2000's, there has been a continuous decline in the sales of physical albums worldwide (Richter 2021). The Music and Recording Industry has blamed this on the digitalization of music which has fundamentally altered the ways in which people consume and think of music, put otherwise, music is now basically viewed as 'free'. While this has enriched consumer choices and access as well as granted independent musicians' wider exposure, the industry has suffered not only in terms of profit making but also at various levels of production. Furthermore, while various platforms for exposure for smaller artists exists now, it is by no means a level playing field, with artists who have major record deals continuing to benefit from new forms of playlisting (as they have previously on the radio) and the support of algorithms (Senate

Report 2009).

In order to cope with this, a variety of new strategies for obtaining revenue have emerged. These include changing the nature of record deals, downsizing production costs and relying more heavily on merchandise and touring, opting for music streaming and digital revenues and shifting the responsibility to market and promote on to the artist themselves. Despite this, from the point of view of the recording industry and its artists, revenues from digital downloads do not come close to that of the revenue they once garnered from CD's (Arie, 2022).

Furthermore, what we see is a variety of strategies with varying degrees of success and there is no one model that has emerged as the new winning duplicatable global formula[108]. Part of this is because the music industry for the longest time has been pre-occupied with approaching the problem as a question of 'how do we regain what we have loss?'

The situation of revenue decline in Japan is similar. However, Japan is still the 2nd largest physical format buying market in the world. Despite that, Japan too has seen a decline in the sales of CD's which peaked in 1998 and have continued to dwindle since (Mori, 2009). One of the many reasons that explains the continuation of a large CD buying market in Japan is the presence of highly segmented markets in which the infrastructure for niche-based industries is very strong. In other words, there is a market and system to support various genres with strong fan bases. However, this also creates the conditions

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[108] Hybe, a Korean entertainment conglomerate, has throughout the Covid-19 pandemic maintained a more than impressive digital and physical sales record and their sales and management strategies as a company have received a lot of attention. While I would say that they indeed have a refined and unique approach to their music making and artist management strategies, theirs cannot be said to be an actual formula for they have yet to repeat this success beyond their most successful artists, the boyband BTS who are exceptional in many ways. Therefore, it has yet to be seen if Hybe have indeed found something that the rest of the music world can put into circulative practice.

for such industries to really 'milk their market' as they can then exploit fans as a particular consumer category, taking advantage of fan loyalty and collector practices. Two particularly strong strategies in Japan are that of revenue diversification in the form of merchandise intensification and cross media and product tie-ups, and role diversification, in which artists take on various roles beyond that of musician. As a result of this, artists are engaged in more forms of labor and involving themselves with a greater number of commodities and self-commoditization.

However, aren't certain forms of creativity, effort, and 'entrepreneurial' initiative values that have always been celebrated in the modern music industry? So why is it that they appear to be increasingly associated with what it takes for artists to produce a successfully marketable product or desirable self? Perhaps these could also be viewed in light of the fact that socio-economic shifts brought about by neoliberal reform are rationalized and justified through discursive constructs in which certain values such as independence, individual power and self-responsibility are re-interpreted as techniques "designed to produce citizens who conform to the new requirements of global competition or accept the risk for their own failure" (Arai 2005, 2).

It is not that these values are necessarily brand-new, but they enter into circulation in a "socio-historically specific situation in which a new mode to attachment to certain changes and values…is idealized by individuals, social institutions and policy makers" (Takeyama 2010, 234), forming a "matrix of ideas, institutions and interests about socio-economic order and the optimal form of market capitalism (Flew 2014)". These meld with already existing ideas, becoming productive of a potential ideal subject-hood, one that can best survive in the current and impending socio-economic situation or industry-related crisis. These values and the subjectivity they produce gain prominence not only in the value of their currency, but also in that they are tied to multiple forms of

reward and 'pay-offs' in various exchanges.

Such ideas about the rewards for actively pursuing an increasing level of self-commoditization in the case of recording artists can also be detected in the new connotations of the word *eigyou*. '*Eigyou*' which may literally mean 'to do business' is more often now evoked to refer to the ability to market and promote one's product or simply even one's self. In the music industry, particularly within certain subcultural or niche markets, *eigyou* also refers to a style of personalized, individualized, customer and trend conscious type of 'extra' service by artists to enhance consumer loyalty.

Here are some examples of applications of *eigyou* that I encountered in utterances: '*Eigyou ga umai*' (he's good at *eigyou*) which suggests 'he knows how to provide good service'. It also emerged in less positive instance such as '*tada no eigyou bando*' (they are just an *eigyou* band) meaning 'they sell well because they know how to sell themselves well', the implicit understanding here is that they would not be able to sell based on their music alone. Another example "Well, they are not an *eigyou* band so that's what happens…' was used to describe bands who may be good musicians/performers, but aren't good at marketing themselves and therefore fail to go anywhere.

From such statements, we can see that *eigyou* is at once vilified for being exploitative and superfluous to the selling of music, as well as simultaneously viewed as a necessary adaptation strategy within the climate of a music industry that encourages artists to embark on variety of new forms of entrepreneurial strategies in order to tap into various markets amidst the decline of the once primary product of music recordings.

Some of the questions that I would like to address as a result of this situation are: Why have these strategies emerged and why are they effective? How do these strategies affect the relationship between artist and fans? How are artists navigating the current

industry/market conditions in pursuing music careers? In order to answer some of these questions, I will now turn to an examination of how this has played out in Visual Kei.

8.2.2 What's in a Moment's Worth?

As the beginning of this chapter has attempted to illustrate, tension exists surrounding the idea of *cheki* sales. While the cost of production and profit margin of various items may not always be so clear to the consumer, few can be fooled when it comes to *cheki*. *Cheki* cameras have been marketed to young people since the late 90s by Fujifilm as trendy consumer items and are found on sale not only at large electronics stores, but also in variety and stationary shops. A brand-new camera costs on average around 8000 yen and *cheki* film sells for about 60 yen per slide. It was also around the same time *cheki* as an item sold as artist merchandise emerged in the Visual Kei scene, although the practice actually originates from the idol industry. Kasumi Shinjo, the former head of the Visual Kei *jimusho* 'Dear Dolce' is often said to be the first person who brought the practice over into Visual Kei. As he was someone who had ties to various scenes (Visual Kei, Idol and the Anime Song scene), he did utilize some novel/borrowed practices into his Visual Kei productions.

As previously mentioned, a single *cheki* can be sold for 300-1000 yen, thus most consumers are clearly aware of just how much they are paying for the product vis a vis its material cost. What is therefore so appealing about *cheki*? Why are fans willing to pay for them and how do those on the side of production justify this? There is a common saying in the music industry that many bands would not be able to survive these days if they relied on the sales of their music alone. While there is also money to be made from touring, product endorsement and the sales of merchandise aside from *cheki*, let us quickly consider these figures for a moment. Taking the example of one band who in 2013 released 6 CD's whose sales amounted to a total year end tally of approximately around

18000 units. In the same year, this band appeared at 133 events (this includes lives, instores and other promotional activities) which provided them the opportunity to sell *cheki*. On the worst day they sold about 40 *cheki*. And on the best days such as during their tour finals, they sold over 6000. I have not received permission to reveal the actual total amount, but even doing the simple mental arithmetic with those numbers in mind, I think those figures are still able to say something about the profit that was made. Keeping in mind that due to the ubiquity of these cameras, the average consumer is clearly aware of the initials costs and the surplus value generated here, so we may ask why are fans willing to pay for such items?

Like any other piece of photography, a particular moment is captured on film and developing allows copies of the picture to be printed and replicated. *Cheki* cameras capture the moment in the same way, but the printing process is instant, only occurs once and cannot be re-produced as other types of film can[109]. Thus, the allure of the *cheki* lies in its 'one and only' appeal, in that they capture a particular moment in time that has no replica and can be owned only by the person who owns the *cheki*. But there are other ways in which the idea of the exclusive moment can be understood that has little to do with the technology of an instant camera and this is where the 'effort' and 'creativity' of the artist come into play.

Every Visual Kei release is accompanied by a new costume worn by the performer and so in the most basic sense, the passage of time is marked by the comings and goings of costumes. An active band may make up to five releases a year, meaning the band would have five different official costume changes in that year. Costumes worn

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[109] Needless to say, *cheki* can be scanned and technically re-printed, but this is not widely practiced and it is not convenient to re-produce *cheki* to appear in their original format of an 86x52 mm sized photo bordered by a white frame. Nowadays, there are indeed digital *cheki* in which the data is stored for reprint purposes, but these are not used in the Visual Kei industry as it defeats the appeal and purpose of *cheki*.

during the specific promotional period of a release are not likely to be worn again and these costumes form part of what will be the 'visual' life of a release: they are worn not only in the accompanying promotional video of the release, but also during live performances and other promotional instances. Costumes enhance the atmospheric or thematic feel of a release and are often elaborate. Rather than functioning as a 'uniform' for the band, each member's costume is different and is designed with much of the particular band members character, personality or 'charm points' in mind[110]. Pictures capturing band members in particular costumes therefore mark the particular time in a bands career. As Naomi, a fan who has been buying *cheki* for nine years now put it:

> "Flipping through my *cheki* albums is like going back in time. If I had just one *cheki* or a few, maybe I would not think of my album this way, but because I own many, I really get to experience the progression of time through looking at the *cheki*, remembering the time this or that happened, or when the band had that look, that costume, that hair style."

Cheki collectors, through their albums, create a chronologically organized memory photo-log that documents their active live attending fandom and unlike collecting other kinds of tour goods or record collecting, these items are unique to the owner. Fans also expressed that this chronologically and personally organized documentation of one's own time in the fandom is also made more appealing and meaningful when contrasted to the disorienting or real-time bias of fan experiences

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[110] The budget and production process for costumes varies according from band to band. Some bands are very involved in the process whereas others may prefer to leave it up to a costume designer, offering minimal self-input. Bands with a very small costume budget (or simply depending on their concept and preferences) are likely to buy ready to wear retail items themselves and fashion costumes out of those pieces of clothing through modifications. In contrast, bands with a larger budget will have items tailor made for them and bands with some level of fame can have costume collaborations with fashion brands.

available in social media that do not offer fans a means to historically engage or review things so easily as they appear to offer only the latest and newest visuals or pictures that are re-tweeted, re-blogged and shared at random.

But to fans, the clothes alone certainly do not make the man and it is down to the band man himself to skillfully make the *cheki*-moment matter. This is where individual effort and notions of creativity come into play to produce the 'exclusive moment' of the *cheki*. This can be achieved through various means. For example, by changing ones poses. *Cheki* are not just face-shots and by posing I am not referring merely to different 'positions' or expressions but this can also encompass usage of the whole body. Or by adding humorous hand-written comments or illustrations to the picture in addition to a signature. Also, using carefully selected props that offer hints and snippets of a band members personal interests, making the best use of the background[111], incorporating insider jokes, alluding to latest news/trend items, parody etc. These are just some examples of methods to make that one shot matter more, and there is a myriad of 'spontaneous' ways in which a *cheki* can be made to appear more unique.

Therefore, it is not merely a chronological documentation or a revision of costumes over time in which *cheki* gain their appeal, but more so in their functioning as a medium for the showcasing of individual character, personality and competency in

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[111] *Cheki* are often taken the day they go on sale before a live or event upon the completion of hair and makeup. The background setting is therefore often backstage in the *gakuya* (dressing room) or at some location within the venue hours before the audience enters. Costume and background are not the only markers of authenticity of when a *cheki* was taken, but fans are all too aware of subtle changes in length of hair, hair color, weight, additional tattoos or piercings and other physical characteristics prone to fluctuation of band members. What this means is that *cheki* cannot be mass produced in advance as its value is linked to closeness of time in which it was taken e.g. mere hours before it reaches the hands of fans. They are always 'sold fresh' and when they are not, it needs to be made explicit or they are discounted.

conveying this through these pictures that may sometimes involve the very deconstruction of the bands costumes. Because one of the most common settings for the taking of *cheki* occurs backstage before a live, band members may not appear in *cheki* in full costume but instead in various states of dress: a fully made up face but still in *shifuku* or *fudangi* (private or personal clothing/'civvies') or vice versa, the top half of his body all ready for the stage save the fact that he's still in pajama bottoms or track pants, various states of undress, accompanied by marker pen written in self-deprecating/mocking commentary (e.g. 'my left nipple is more purple than the right', 'this would have been so cool if only I were 10 kilos lighter' etc.).

Parody, self-mockery and persona inversion, combine to produce an affect of casual intimacy and familiarity in which the band member is made to appear flawed, his artistry as involving labor, with hang-ups and goof-ups, and ultimately, he in some sense comes to be seen as 'just another person'. *Cheki* offer a window into enjoying these 'humanizing' aspect of a band members character, one that cannot necessarily be projected or portrayed when he appears in a more professional or formal mode of performance as he would on stage or in music videos. *Cheki* are humorizing just as they are humanizing.

As Mariko, a fan, demonstrates when talking about her favorite band DOG in the Parallel World Orchestra:

"Although Mizuki is my favorite member and I am happy when I get his *cheki*, truthfully I enjoy getting Junjun's *cheki* more. I think it's because he knows how to show his character in the *cheki*, he's funny, he makes a lot of effort even though *cheki* is something small and he makes it worth buying. Junjun is after all, very good at *eigyou*. He really knows how to create character."

Here Mariko has made this observation: there is an individual difference between

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band members that is vital in the business of self-commodification. Some people are seen as better at it, not merely because of talent, skill or a flair for marketing the self, but also because of a perceived sense of 'effort'- one that fans appreciate. It is in the willingness to put energy towards producing that little extra something in which performers are seen as giving fans something back in return for their devotion. Furthermore, through the production of *cheki*, even within the same band, the ability to put forth and market one's individuality is linked closely with the notion of the individual effort of a member (as opposed to a group effort), and members who make more effort, as Mariko has demonstrated, become to fans, more endearing.

This notion of effort becomes even clearer in the case of bands that try to not give in to the pressures to sell *cheki*. For the first four years of their career[112]Sel'm chose not to sell *cheki*. They attempted to defy industry norms and to trust that their talents as musicians with the ability to make good songs and play exciting live performances would suffice and be enough to attract an audience, one that would grow over time and appreciate that the band did not subject themselves or their fans to the outright 'cheapness' of *cheki*.

Things however, did not go according to plan. Despite resisting *cheki* for quite some time and despite the 'effort' they made to focus on what they considered the core or more vital aspects of a band's labor, the lack of income from music recordings and live tickets became detrimental to the continuation of band activities. Perhaps even more interesting was that Sel'm had not cultivated (beyond the scope of their own fans who

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[112] Because *cheki* is easily produced, some independent bands at the beginning of their careers have only *cheki* to sell at their goods table. Upon going major, the sales of *cheki* are ideally terminated (or more so made exclusive or for special occasions only) and thus this is a practice mostly applicable to the indies scene. As bands aspire to go major, they also aspire to stop having to sell *cheki* and to be able to diversify their income sources from more 'respectable' forms of commodity.

appreciated their stoic efforts) a marketable attractiveness within the Visual Kei scene. The bands attempts to be taken seriously and to not cave into superfluous promotional activities created for them a 'boring' or *jimi* (plain) reputation, one that translated into potential consumers not being able to grasp what their personalities were like as they appeared inapproachable, lacked a sense of humor, did not know how to *eigyou*, and were simply 'not with the times'; all qualities consumers are able to experience and find through the consumption of items like *cheki*. Ironically, the bands effort to be taken seriously was interpreted by consumers as not making enough effort at all, or at least none where it had come to matter. *Cheki* are therefore not merely a tactic to gain quick profits on the side of production, but have become to the fans themselves, a taken for granted way of communicating personality, one's that pertain not only to the character of an individual as an artist but also about how that artist perceives his labor in relation to the audience. Thus, the profit to be made (and loss) is not only monetary, but has extended to the realm of the larger public perception or market appeal of a band. In short a band like Sel'm failed to create a sense of *shinkinkan* (affinity), the projected notion that despite occupying the special space that is the performative stage, one is flawed, has quirks, can be the girl/boy next door, that 'just another person after all' quality that has been discussed as the secret to the mass-appeal and success of artists, entertainers and *tarento* in the Japanese entertainment industry (Aoyagi 2000; Lukacs 2010).

Part of this has to do with the importance placed on the ability to create, communicate and circulate information present in highly segmented post-industrial affect economies such as Japan in which consumers, most notably in the form of fans, experience intimacy with the objects and subjects of consumption through the accumulation of 'little facts' that may have no intrinsic value to those outside the fandom. *Cheki* are a perfect example of the value attached to little bytes of information that can

enhance the feeling of intimacy between fan and artist as they function to produce affect, a "mode of attachment that can be strategically evoked and directed to translate into something meaningful-and put up for sale" (Takeyama 2010).

Precisely because affect has been demonstrated to be tied to such emotions as intimacy (Takeyama 2016), well-being (Allison 2009; Hardt and Negri 2004), healing (Plourde 2014) and sociality (Galbraith 2013), commodities that produce affect have the potential to become addictive. Writing on the relationship between information collecting and affectual attachments, Anne Allison highlights the manner in which such forms of addiction operates:

> "But what is at once a perpetually proliferating network of data/monsters/connections/capital also breeds– and is bred by – a self-referentiality that lends itself to narcissism and privatization. Once one enters this world, it is addictive – and addictively wired to one's own sense of ease, acquiring more Pokémon, gathering more data that will generate ever more Pokémon for, ultimately, oneself. In this game whose objective is getting (*getto suru* in Japanese, which became 'gotta catch 'em all' in the US ad campaign), the getting – and pursuit of getting– goes on and on. Attachments are flexible here – a Pokémon is at once an object of affection, a tool of instrumentality, a property with value, a bit of information. But the desires driving this return to, and emanate from, the self; the child targeted to ride an ANA Poké-jet is told she will be boarding not a plane but a toy specially equipped – for *her* – with personal 'friends'" (Allison 2009, 96).

Cheki, like the acquisition of Pokemon, almost never ends with the fan satisfied with buying just one. In fact, most fans do not begin buying *cheki* with the intention to turn into avid collectors, nor are they rationally calculating just how much this newfound

aspect of their interest will cost in the long run. While there are many fans who come to device a rational system to organize their spending (perhaps only buying one per live as a memento or no more than twenty a tour), there are various elements that invite the consumer to purchase 'just one or two more' than they originally may have intended[113].

For one, *cheki* are small, easy to store, cheap in comparison to other tour goods and have a trinket like appeal. As Aki relates:

"I started buying *cheki* really without thinking too hard. It only cost 500 yen and I thought it would be fun to use as a bookmark. It's a lot less bulky than buying a full tour pamphlet and I thought it would make a nice *kinen aitemu* (memento) of having watched the live. I was able to pull a nice picture too! It was around Christmas and the two members were wearing Santa hats! (laughs). After that I began buying *cheki* to memorialize every live I went to. I don't think I'm addicted, some people maybe feel they need to buy it, but I would say that I have indeed made it a kind of every now and then thing."

And indeed, Aki's collection stands at a 'modest' 40 *cheki* per year (equal to the average amount of lives she attends in one year), a number which is kept low due to her policy of one *cheki* per live, which she has decided to view as a memento of attendance. Aki does not care in particular which members *cheki* she pulls, whereas some fans approach this far less casually and with a more collector type strategy in mind.

Yuki is one such fan. Last year she attended over 120 lives, 50 of which were lives of her *honmei*[114] band, whom she buys *cheki* of. Yuki's strategy differs vastly from

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[113] There are also '*atari*' (winner) *cheki* which if you do draw from the pile may allow you to partake in special events or prizes. One example would be the winner of the *atari* cheki would then be allowed to take their own *cheki* with the band.

[114] *Honmei* which roughly translates as favorite, or to whom you will be faithful to, is a common term used by fans to hierarchically delineate the many bands they may have an interest in.

Aki's. Within her *honmei* band, she has a *honmei* member and she collects only his *cheki*. As mentioned previously, another element that can make *cheki* buying addictive is that fans cannot pick[115], but instead draw, the *cheki* from a box without being able to see what they are pulling. For fans like Yuki who have specific member's *cheki* they collect, her approach thus resembles a game of chance. She will put down on average 20,000 yen each time, receive her *cheki*, and sieve through the pile she has purchased to select the ones she will keep. The leftover *cheki* are re-sold, traded or given away to fans who are collecting *cheki* of other members, provided that there are indeed such buyers and that everyone isn't after the same one member's *cheki*. Which inevitably happens as band members popularity is rarely ever even throughout the band. Furthermore, fans may not be buying only one bands *cheki* and may have several on-going collections of various bands. It is not difficult to imagine the mounting costs of engaging in various games at various levels of seriousness. When asked why she enjoyed purchasing *cheki*, Yuki echoed much of the already discussed reasons, but to this she added:

> 'I want to find out everything I can about Taku. Many *cheki* are just nice pictures of him and if you consider every single *cheki* he's ever taken, of course there are many pictures that are more or less the same. But what I really love are the few *cheki* in which, when I compare to others (meaning *cheki* in her own collection and to other fans collections), he has written or is doing something really different or weird! They really crack me up and I really enjoy this, it's forever there in the picture. It's nice to feel surprised by him after all this time[116]. Sure, I'm wasting a lot of money, but this is fun to me, and I would waste the money

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[115] Some bands do allow you to name the member you wish to buy, but the draw for the picture is still done at random.

[116] Yuki has been following Taku's career as a Visual Kei bandman for close to 11 years now throughout the various bands he has been a member in.

on other things like clothing or gourmet (enjoying nice food) anyway. My money is for me so I want to use it in a way that helps me make memories rather than towards things that I will just forget. Maybe I will stop one day, who knows (laughs). Maybe not. But for now, I'm still having fun!"

Yuki's statement has revealed several things worth highlighting. First is the confirmation of something which perhaps at this point one has already come to suspect. That for all the talk of the uniqueness of each *cheki*, given that they are ultimately produced in vast quantities over time, the differences between shots may at times be very minute. Posing may be come repetitive, ideas formulaic and as already mentioned, there is also an individual difference between band members with regards to the individual effort made in taking these pictures and thus, some members *cheki* may become passé more quickly than others.

What drives Yuki's addiction (if it is fair to call it that), at the level in which the narrative she provided allows me to contend, is that more than merely being able to enjoy pictures of an attractive rock star, Yuki is addicted to the novelty of 'exclusive information' imparted by the relatively rarer *cheki*. Yuki's appreciation of *cheki* has gone beyond the mere enjoyment that the item is unique. The game she is engaged in is in the thrill of a more insatiable pursuit. It is one that constantly requires more output to reach satisfaction and it not so much really about amassing material items, but an emotion which she described as a 'surprise', a deeper sense of intimacy with Taku where the otherwise 'unique' has now become mundane.

Yuki is however, as her words demonstrate, aware of the 'ridiculousness' of this all when she dismisses her own behavior as a 'waste of money'. This is an important statement in that it reveals that fans are not as blindly fanatical or unaware of some of the perceptions that people may have regarding their behavior towards their passions. It is

also perhaps evidence that even within 'irrational' behaviors of addiction, collections and other fan activities that are stigmatized to be of no re-productive or social value, fans are not oblivious to the notions of an operative 'common sense' that may seek to relegate their consumption patterns and behaviors as bordering on maniacal.

Here, it would be worthwhile to point out that such notions of propriety, of how one should spend money and of how one 'should know better', are by no means uniform within the Visual Kei fandom. For instance, just a quick word search on *Tanuki*, the largest anonymous internet board for Visual Kei, for the word *cheki* yielded the following results for thread titles[117]. The thread titles alone reveal a spectrum of fan attitudes from those who are engaged in collecting, highly specific forms of collecting, harsh critical voices of *cheki* buying, concerns about certain practices involving *cheki* to those who regret purchasing *cheki*. There is even an existentially contemplative thread titled 'How do you suppose band members whose *cheki* don't sell feel?':

> Thread Titles (Top 15 hits)
>
> 1. [For sale] Goods. Cheki [For Trade]
>
> 2. Indies bands cheki [Selling.Trading]
>
> 3. Kazuki of Royz' cheki
>
> 4. Two-shot cheki
>
> 5. How you feel when you pull the cheki of the member you don't want
>
> 6. You know, cheki are…
>
> 7. Those damn fans who sell cheki for more than they cost
>
> 8. How do you think band members whose cheki don't sell feel?
>
> 9. I need this bands cheki!

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[117] This search was conducted on 2015.09.15 and I have included only the top 15 results.

10. Don't you think Band-A's cheki cost too much?

11. Cheki for sale/trade

12. How many cheki do you own?

13. I once spent 30,000 yen at one shot for cheki…

14. Cheki for sale/trade

15. Fans who refuse to buy cheki, gather here!

Depicting fans as part of a coherent subculture or a practice-consistent consumer category is perhaps one of the most tempting things for researchers struggling to describe what makes or qualifies a fan[118]. While Visual Kei has not been extensively written about academically, some who have attempted have also fallen prey to such fan tropes. That it is consumed exclusively by young schoolgirls (Hashimoto 2007; McLeod 2013; Seibt 2013), that fans are uncritical consumers unaware of industry practices (Mattar 2008; McLeod 2013), that it is an apolitical girls-just-wanna-have-fun hobby till they grow up and out of such childish whims as they approach adulthood (McLeod 2013). The list of convenient conclusions that solidify the homology of youth and music as temporal futile resistance is not only cliché, it is a one-dimensional take on human behavior that needs to be re-addressed. Moreover, none of these studies have taken into account the existence of gendered forms of prosumption, that as something that has been around since the 1980's, many of its fans are not just young girls but fans of the band BUCK-TICK and those of the first generation bands may well be into their 40's, 50's and 60's even, and mind numbingly methodologically flawed approaches (e.g., not talking to any Japanese fans[119]) will indeed generate very particularistic results that should not be written about as

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[118] See Lewis (1992), Kelly (2004) for more on the historical depiction of fans.

[119] One researcher claims to have spoken to fans and uses the narratives gathered to write and analyze the

general characteristics of Visual Kei, so needless to say, they are easy conclusions to come to in the face of being selective or perhaps just ignorant of variation and diversity.

I do not doubt that some of these conclusions about Visual Kei fans have some basis in reality, and they may describe the experiences of some, but even with the perhaps tiny (taking into consideration the vast account of practices, performances and other potential arenas of investigation) issue of *cheki* did I come across a variety of opinions of both fans and artists about what they thought was right or wrong about *cheki*, opinions I will continue to discuss in a minute, but before that, I would like to emphasize that the presence and sheer variety of opinions about *cheki* I encountered serve to highlight that fans are by no means as naïve or uncritical (even of their own behavior as Yuki demonstrated) of the economic or 'moral' implications of their choices.

Another fan, Satomi, revealed an extremely sharp awareness of the various layers of such implications when she shared with me why she bought the occasional *cheki*:

"I buy it to support the band. If you don't buy things like this, they aren't going to survive. We fans buy the CD's, but casual listeners won't. They can just listen for free online. To be honest I don't really care for *cheki*. I don't mind them either, but it's not something that gets me excited. I want the band to be able to continue activities more than anything. I suppose I could just hand them the money too right? (laughs) But I don't want them to get the wrong idea about me. I'm not that kind of fan."

Satomi may have bought *cheki* occasionally out of a sense of loyalty and some

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fandom in Japan. What he fails to address is that the fans he spoke to were people in the audience who he identified as 'western' to whom he was able to converse with as they shared the common language of English. The fans he interviewed were visitors to Japan and had the study been about this particular kind of travelling fan, perhaps the data would be more legit. However, he uses this information to write about fan behavior on a general level.

knowledge of the economic realities in which good music and loyal fans can only take a band so far. There are more extreme examples of this in which fan loyalties and feelings of obligation towards artist are indeed at the forefront of *cheki* buying. I witnessed this first-hand when Remi who I had become friends with many years ago invited me over to her house and she showed me her *cheki* collection. She had over the years accumulated 11 fully filled *cheki* holders, an item she bought to store her *cheki* collection, easily found at 100 yen shops and stationary shops. Each holder stored around 252 *cheki*. Meaning her 11 holders stored close to 2700 *cheki*. Remi tells me she has no idea what to do with all these *cheki*. They are taking up room on her already overflowing bookshelf. Also, because there are so many and while sometimes they can remind her of a certain period in time if she were to look at them and wax nostalgia, she actually never looks at them and only remembers maybe the first few she bought well. "After that it was more about what I could do for them" she says. I ask her what made her stop buying and she says "They (the band) broke up. I bought them up till the very end. I did all I could as we real fans do, but they didn't make it." Even though the band has broken up and she could technically 'get rid' of these *cheki* (she could re-sell them online, at second hand stores or even just throw them away), she says that there is an unexplainable pride she has not let go of yet even though it has been 3 years since the band broke up and that it would be sad to let it all go, as if truly making everything seem in vain if she were to sell them. And so, for now, they continue to sit on her bookshelf. These are not items that gave Satomi a moment of intimacy, nor were they a means to validate a member's authenticity or effort, nor were these a direct way of experiencing a connection to her favorite member, but to her, they were the receipts of what she saw as a realistic method to actually contribute to something that was once of value to her that went beyond the material item itself.

While this is an issue beyond the scope of this chapter and is best explored

elsewhere, let me briefly suggest that fans do not follow bands or become interested in bands or music only for their *cheki* or ultimately for superficially seeming reasons alone. *Cheki* is a tiny element in the industry that supports Visual Kei, but it is one that allows us to examine a point of tension that has come to surface when neo-liberally informed values of flexibility (of accumulation), self-responsibility, individual effort, market-orientation and entrepreneurial emphasis come to have new potent connotations in an industry that has always placed an emphasis on market, D.I.Y and self-commoditization. What I have attempted to demonstrate here is that it is not that neo-liberalism 'invents' these values and injects them into society where they operate as ideology, but that these values meld with already existing ideas about labor, effort and responsible earning and spending as they come into circulation and increasingly inform practices of buying and selling and their accompanying forms of material and immaterial desirability.

To demonstrate just how this is indeed a newly informed practice of commodification, let us compare the now common practice of selling *cheki* to the career of a band, who having achieved success in the 1990's (the era of peak CD sales in Japan) have never had to sell such items. "I feel sorry for younger bands these days," says S[120]. He elaborates:

> "When we made it big, people bought CD's. Millions of CD's. Our music was literally 'valued' more. I don't blame younger bands if they have to make their money elsewhere. They need to eat and having a band can actually cost you money, especially if you don't make money from your product, you have to cover the costs to make it in the first place. So what choice do you have? You have to

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[120] Because S is in a major band that have a variety of sponsors and cannot agree to interviews without managerial consent, I have concealed his identity in this manner. This quote was from a private conversation that took place between us in February 2011.

sell products, or find a way, or do something that people will pay for. You know…this will cut into the actual time used to focus on music and if people don't buy your music you have less and less incentive to practice or put out something like a full album. You can just fix things all too easily now with technology and software. So, people spend less time practicing to sharpen their skills, it's almost just for personal satisfaction if you really choose to be known as a 'technician'. It may still bring you a good reputation if you have a technical skill and I would always encourage young people to craft that skill, to be able to feel a sense of pride from being good at the instrument you choose, but from an economic point of view, it has come to mean less, and there isn't much incentive…it's difficult…but whatever it is, I'm glad I never had to sell *cheki*!"

In S's day, the first item on a goods table a new band would put out was most likely a self-made and produced demo-tape, CD or mini disk. It would be awhile before bands would see some form of income as the production costs of starting a band, touring and recording would not be covered until some form of momentum could be gained. While gaining *ikioi* this way is still part of the steps bands take when they want to pursue a career as a Visual Kei artist, *cheki* in this sense is the quickest form of capital accumulation as it allows a band, even one just starting, to 'make up' for all sorts of costs in a way that no other material item can. Rock bands are still engaging with the Do-it-Yourself spirit that is hallmark of various underground and independent music scenes but they do so under socio-economic conditions that allow, encourage and at times force them to channel D.I.Y less towards the control over the means and methods of production, but more so towards a market-oriented logic that does not contribute to constructing structures and systems that valorize their labor, but instead increasingly exploits their notions of entrepreneurial diversification.

How do younger bands feel about this? I would say that there is indeed a spectrum of opinions surrounding the matter and I will here share two contrasting views to illustrate this. Kazuki, a bassist, puts it this way "We are not hosts, we are musicians, yet we have no choice but to *eigyou* and sell these cheki to be able to play our music." The parallel he draws to hosting techniques is a comparison often made by those critiquing the links between the aesthetic and the kind of gendered entertainment prosumed by Visual Kei performers and fans. Like many, he is correct to point out that there is indeed a particular skill in the form of music that forms the core of a band's product, but his statement also reveals that it is a skill that cannot easily or directly be converted into some form of reliable wage on its own anymore or at least how it once used to. Another band member, Kuruha, however, views the selling of *cheki* and other forms of self-commodification in a different manner, "I don't see why selling *cheki* or making fans feel special or cherished at meet and greets is bad. Many fans appreciate this and it's the very least we can do. *Cheki* still includes something of me. It's my face and I rather sell something of myself than something completely beyond myself that I do not feel any relation to. After all it is this body that makes the music I make. I just want to make people happy!"

It is also no coincidence that the 'concept of creativity' (Mori 2009) and 'dreamwork' (Lukacs 2013) has been shown to play a particularly potent role in relation to the context of neoliberal restructuring and postindustrial consumer affect economies; initiation into creative industries is often supported by an indefinite period (potentially permanent) of pursuing ones dream while working in temporary, flexible, part-time forms of labor, work that does not necessarily lead to skill enhancement and may detract timewise from the pursuit of skill enhancement in the creative career of choice. But this is the neoliberal situation which we see present in many different contexts in which the

"expansion of…individual freedom, narratives that celebrate autonomy and individual expression exist at the same time that they obscure their dependence on self-exploitation and atomism" (Hebert and Mincyte 2014, 220).

Thus when Visual Kei musicians speak of 'having no choice' but to *eigyou* and that they are only 'doing what it takes' yet still at least selling 'something of themselves', they are articulating ideas surrounding the tension and conflict of how they should best create surplus value in order to sustain a level of re-production which allows them to keep afloat in a socio-economic situation that no longer valuates their supposed, primary form of labor: making music. In place of this, the strategy that has come to 'make up' for this loss is as I have mentioned is affectively imbued forms of labor and commodity diversification in which artists are 'increasingly invited so invest their subjectivity…as the raw material for valorization" (Lukacs 2013, 48).

8.3 Authenticity Inside and Outside of Eigyou: The Immaterial Labor of Bandmen and the Shadow Cultural Economy of Fandom

At this point, it might seem that what fans seek when they purchase *cheki* could be thought of as an 'authentic' connection. This is because of what the *cheki* is materially, a one of a kind product, and that it is of something directly from their favorite member and a means of contributing to his band. However, instead of viewing this as an attempt to experience authenticity, what fans are actually seeking through their consumption of *cheki* is a display of competence on the part of the bandman: that he works hard enough (taking *cheki* with creativity and enthusiasm) to do what he has to do and this is why fans are also willing to pay so much for something that some of them do not even end up looking at much. In other words, it is not authenticity, but sincerity towards them and his profession/work as a band member that is vital here.

This does not mean that they are not concerned with issues of authenticity, but

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that there are other realms in which authenticity is experienced and evaluated. In this section I will examine the issue of authenticity using one example that takes place with the realm of an *eigyou* practice. In this case the immaterial labor of the band members is the product being prosumed.

This example deals with instore events. Like *cheki* it is a sales strategy promoted by the industry for the purpose of boosting the sales of CDs, DVDs and sometimes some other kind of official merchandise (like books, tour goods, or collaboration items with fashion brands). In these kinds of events, fans buy the one on one time band members in exchange for the price of one (or often more) of the afore listed material products.

Echoing some of that which was explored in the previous chapters, I show how immaterial labor and affective prosumption are essential elements that complicate the boundaries of playwork and that these have intensified in degree as prosumption spaces and activities have proliferated.

8.3.1 Instores: Eigyou and Prosuming Intimacy

Instores come in various forms, but this is the basic premise; a fan buys something and gets 'special' one on one time with the band. I will first introduce some examples of instore formats and I will then go on to discuss the significance of instores with regards to the labor involved in the activity.

Once upon a time, albums sold because people wanted to listen to them and because they were one of the few ways in which you could listen to and own the music for your own use. Today when there are far cheaper (even sometimes close to zero-cost), mobile, space saving ways to do this, thanks to streaming and file sharing apps and services, the appeal of owning a physical album is no longer simply about owning a format that allows you to listen to music. Writing on the state of the Japanese music industry amidst the decline of general audience appeal type artist and the decline of CD

sales, Condry has said "As a result, building core audiences who will buy albums even in an environment in which they can get copies for free (online or CD-R) or cheaply (rental shops) becomes more important than ever" (Condry 2006, 196). In the same light, instores are one of the methods that have emerged to build upon and extract revenue from these core audiences, who in other words are fans.

By buying CD's (or any of the previously mentioned items in the introduction to this chapter) one may get to participate in an 'instore event.' They are called this because they literally are held by and take place 'in stores,' meaning every store that sells the album may potentially have an instore event tie up with the release of a band. There will usually be an instore schedule released with every release and they can be just as extensive in scope and number as a tour[121]. They occur all across the country, usually while the band is on tour promoting the new release as well. What this means (as Ren's schedule in the introduction may have already shown) is that hours before a live, a band may be having one or two different instore events at whatever locale they happen to be on tour on for that day. Instores can also occur directly after lives, a sales tactic that takes advantage of the after live 'high' that fans are on[122]. Buying yet another CD you already may own is much easier to justify to oneself when one is in a state of *yoin* (afterglow) and may want express thanks or simply share this feeling with the band, even if it is for but a few seconds. Instores can also take place at both *senyou* shops and major music retailers (like Tower Records, HMV, Shinseidou etc.).

In order to attract an attending audience, the content of the 'instore tour' will

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[121] While I have tended to emphasize the *toumeihan* regions, it should be said that tour stops include all 47 prefectures in Japan and these can also include instore events in these prefectures.

[122] After live instores take place at the live venue but a shop *buppan* will sell items at the live itself. These are actually called 'out-stores' for they are not at the store itself, but still organized by a store outside of the actual store.

vary. The number of the attendees varies according to the popularity of the band. Lengths of instores can vary as well depending on the band and store schedule. They can last anything from an hour to a few hours. Here are some of the more common formats although there are many others. Sometimes one instore is a combination of two of the following formats:

Autograph session- Official items only (e.g. the sleeve of the CD that you bought)

Autograph session- Private items (usually anything is fine except a few specific items)

Handshake session – Fans get to shake the members hands and chat for a short bit

High-touch session- Same as above but instead of a handshake, they high-five

Hug session- Same as above but fans get to hug the members

Satsueikai- A photograph session (*cheki* usually) usually with a specific member or two who the fans designate (sometimes it is a random member, sometimes the whole band). Some bands allow fans to *shitei* (designate) the poses for the picture and the band members will comply to the fan's directions.

Acoustic live- The band plays a short acoustic set of their songs or covers (3 to 5 songs)

Talk session- A Q and A type talk session where fans can write questions down and the band picks some to answer. The talk can also be themed instead of taking questions.

Game session- A specified game can be played with the members

Kabedon session- Fans get to experience being '*kabe-don*[123]' by a member

    A common combination could be, for example, a 45-minute talk session featuring all the members, followed by a one on one autograph session with all the members. Another combination might be a *kabedon* session (that is also a *satsueikai* of

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[123] A popular 'love confession' scenario or trope in shojo manga where one is trapped with your back to the wall while the person confessing has their hands against the wall behind you such that you cannot escape. The '*don*'' refers to the action and the sound produced of the wall being hit by the hands of the person confessing.

the *kabedon*) and a handshake. Because different retailers have different events, fans end up buying multiple versions of the same item (like a CD) to attend each event. A release may have up to 20 instores, meaning if you have to buy two versions[124] to attend and want to attend all, you could end up with 40 copies of the same release. Fans either re-sell these for a fraction of the price or trade with fans of other bands who also have multiple copies of other bands CDs from having attended many instores. Sometimes fans simply distribute these for free because they cannot manage to re-sell so many copies.

Technically, the instore ticket is supposed to be an *omake*, an 'extra' or service gift for purchasing a release, but needless to say are the main events on their own at this point. They have intensified over the years. In terms of the format, these practices used to be something that was only done every now and then, perhaps when a band were first starting, in order to raise their name recognition or something they did only with a big release or as an exclusive event for winners of a contest or their fan club. Now, they are standard practice even when a band has gone major, as they are so lucrative, one of the few ways to generate sales for physical copies and the consumers have come to expect them to take place as well.

Why would anyone want to buy repeat copies of the same CD only to shake the hands of the artist, maybe received an autograph and exchange a few words for sometimes even less than 30 seconds? Observe the following exchange at a meet and greet:

Fan: Otsukaresama desu (thank you for your hard work)

Bandoman: Otsukare…oh you cut your hair!

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[124] Albums, Singles and DVD's are rarely ever released with just one version and different versions will have different contents on them. For example, Version A of the album will come with an extra song, Version B will have a DVD of the Music Video, Version C will have live footage and so on and so forth. It is not uncommon at all to have multiple versions of the same release and this a practice found across genres in the music industry. Instores usually make you buy at least two versions to receive a ticket.

Fan: Yes...you noticed?

Bandoman: Of course I do! You always come and I always notice you. Thank you for your support always.

Fan: No, thank you!

Bandoman: I like your new hairstyle! It's very stylish. (*signs autograph and writes to Yuki*)

Fan: You included my name…wow, your memory is amazing!

Bandoman: Of course I remember your name (smiles). I hope you like the new album! Do you have a favorite song on it?

Bandoman: I do, my favorite song is… (she is instructed to move by staff).

Bandoman: (Maintains eye-contact even though Yuki is being pulled away and the next person in line is waiting and silently mouths 'thank you' before having to talk to the next fan).

Such moments provide fans a unique and intimate moment and is a chance for them to express themselves in what is otherwise an asymmetrically ordered relationship. But it is also one that the artist, if skilled in the art of conversation, (and seduction) can utilize to make the fan feel extra special. The effort to remember personal details, subtle body language, calculated eye contact and the strategic use of touch, makes every one of these moments a potentially irreplicable experience that is tactile and personalized. Given that the time each fan has is short, this 'invites' the fan to buy more 'time' and so, yet another copy of a CD is sold. *Eigyou* in these cases thus makes a fixed price product 'limitlessly' profitable, contingent upon the effort of band members to make fans return for more.

This mirrors changes in the growth of the service industry in Japan, where value comes not from products on their own, but how the product makes you feel (Galbraith

2013; Plourde 2014; Takeyama 2016). This value is generated through the communication and affective capacities of the artist; thus, the moment of exchange is one that is reflected in individual effort, creativity and ability to read each fan. It is personally tailored and is an individually crafted skill, thus whether one is described by fans as providing '*kami*' (god) or '*kajyou*' (over the top, excessive) or '*shio taiou*' (flat/salty) *eigyou* depends on one's own efforts, capacities and abilities.

8.3.2 Shio-taiou

The example I gave earlier of the 'smooth' instore exchange between a bandman and a fan can serve both as an example of '*kami*' (god-tier) or '*kajyou*'(over the top/excessive) *eigyou* depending on if the fan was left feeling wowed by his flirting skills or annoyed/grossed out with how cheesy he was. Here I will discuss an example of *shio-taiou*.

Shio-taiou (salty treatment) in terms of *eigyou* actually covers several types of perceived styles of treatment or service (or even 'non-service'). It does not actually mean that someone was rude, but it can mean that they were unenthusiastic, 'flat', serious, impersonal, boring, reserved etc. But the effect of this is negatively perceived in that the other party (the fan) is left with a kind of 'salty' after taste that implies the experience was unpleasant or disappointing. In some instances, it is simply the lack of any *eigyou*.

Returning to Naoki's case (the drummer who I introduced in the introduction), he was an example of someone who was not comfortable doing *eigyou* for fans and fans would describe his service as *shio-taiou*. It was a skill which he could never seem to cultivate and that aside, he could never quite reconcile the having¥ to do it with his work as a musician. I have seen him in action at instores and actually he is polite and generally pleasant. When fans ask him questions or have requests of him, he obliges and it is not particularly obvious that he is uncomfortable with the situation. However, what makes it

somewhat obvious (to fans for whom the moment is perceived as 'theirs' and not to outsiders simply observing) is that in comparison to his band mates he 'gives' the least. He does not flatter or compliment fans pro-actively and he waits for fans to talk to him instead of guiding the conversation along or playfully flirting with them. Therefore, if the fan is quiet or waiting for him to lead the flow of things, often times what happened was there is hardly any conversation and it became a simple exchange of greetings, which once again in comparison to the charming antics and humorous conversations filled with personal touches like that delivered by his bandmates, Naoki seemed to be reserved and therefore to some, bad at providing service. Again, like in the case of Sel'm attempting to be taken seriously and having that backfire on them with not selling *cheki*, when Naoki announced that he was leaving and the fans were made aware of the news, talk broke out on tanuki and 2ch that saw people saying "I wonder if he's leaving because he actually hates having to do *eigyou*", "He's the musician type so he is not suited to this", as well as "No wonder he is so quiet at instores, he is actually unhappy".

Some fans began to discuss how it was sad if this was the reason he was giving up (it wasn't, but if readers recall, it was one of many things Naoki found stressful about his life as a band member) because he was a talented musician and a gifted composer, and some even felt sorry him having to do *eigyou*. In many ways his *shio-taiou* was him simply not wanting to fake enthusiasm or encourage and mislead fans into an *eigyou*-dependent relationship with him. He was showing his feelings by not participating and the fans in some sense seemed to have picked up on it, which is why they began to discuss this issue when he was leaving the band. Even though there was no strong evidence to suggest to them that this was a reason, it was something that they had picked up on through their one on one experiences with him at instores.

8.3.3 It's Not All Eigyou All the Time

The clear difference between consuming instores from consuming *cheki* is that instores are face to face, one on one, personalized moments where a fan can evaluate not only the band member's etiquette and professionality with regards to his ability to do *eigyou*, but they also become instances where the fan can gauge (simply based on their own experience and impression) if this is indeed *eigyou* or if the *bandoman* is authentically sincere with regards to how he expresses his thanks and himself in front of fans.

Fans know that it is *eigyou* and they know that this is an exchange of commodities, but it is also one that is enveloped and tied to personal feelings within a relationship cultivated as a fan; emotionally charged, individualized, and therefore to them the commodity exchange here becomes obscured with other personal meaning. This is also made possible by how it is framed by band members who emphasize time and time again in public how much they enjoy meeting their fans in person and how it is fun for them as well and how they look forward to instores because it is 'iyashi' (healing) for them to feel all the love, adoration and to receive warm messages of support directly from their fans. For the fans it is not just a chance for them to personally meet their beloved members, but it is a chance for their members to meet and to feel loved by them: the fans as individuals.

Indeed, the actual financial implications are always present as the band and management profit from these events and fans walk away with memories and buy experiences. Just like in the case of *cheki*, how band members feel about instores is very varied. Like Naoki, there are *bandoman* who are simply uncomfortable with it and do not feel they are suited to it in terms of character, disposition and skill. It may have just been my experience with who I worked with in particular, but the bands I worked with in

general found instores quite tiring and wished that they did not have to do them as often. They did not mind if it was a 'special' thing every once in a while, and indeed depending on the format I also found that sometimes the bands really enjoyed themselves. It was my bias for a very long time based on this that bands would rather not have to do instores.

However, recently I was asked to translate for an online instore event that took place during the Covid-19 pandemic[125]. Because instores are difficult to hold in person at this moment, online 'instores' via zoom have come to replace some of them for the time being. This particular artist had not had an instore event in quite a long time and given that it was online, his management decided to open it up to overseas fans as well which is why I was enlisted as a translator. While I am used to translating for artists, I have never had to translate for fans from over 30 different countries all in one day (Japanese fans also participated and when they did I simply turned off my microphone and camera to allow them their full personal time with the artist, although I was still able to witness the conversation as all members of management do). Overall it was a very new experience for me in many ways as all I really know of instores were the ones I have witnessed in Japan and a few when I was present for work overseas (these too were not instores and more brief handshake/high-five sessions that were short).

I was not prepared for what happened and maybe going into this with a very jaded attitude, I was surprised by how moved the artist was when fans poured out their frustrations over not being able to come see them live or travel to watch them. Fan after fan told the artist how much their music meant to them, especially in difficult times and

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[125] This is the only example of a work experience I actually use because I did not receive payment for it but was given permission by the organizers to join in for research purposes. I have worked previously as a translator for this artist which is also why they were comfortable with me being their translator for the event. I will not mention names due to that previous experience where I did receive payment and am still obliged to withhold personal information with regards to this artist.

how they could not wait to see them again. Although none of what the fans said was particularly new to me and I do not doubt that their feelings were sincere, what was new to me was that several times during the instore, the artist made request for breaks before another fan was let into the chat room because they were so moved that they were reduced to tears and had to collect themselves. This happened repeatedly throughout the event and the artist was shocked at himself for being this emotionally effected. I have never in all these years seen an artist so moved at an instore (I have seen them cry at other occasions but not at an instore in this way). At the end of the event, he had thoroughly broken down and was crying and thanking us staff as well.

While I do think that the circumstances surrounding the pandemic intensified his feelings, I also share this experience simply to show that for all the *eigyou* and profit making that is clearly going on, which may make it seem like the fans are the ones whose emotional attachments and fantasies are being preyed upon, it is also not fair to make it seem like artists are simply 'doing the work' and that they are uncomfortable with immaterial labor and alienated from the music making process by having to *eigyou* in other ways. It seemed like this artist was genuinely very emotionally affected by the instore and it was even his suggestion leading up to the instore when we were discussing the details of the format that instead of the two minutes we allocated per fan to talk, we should increase it to 3 minutes because, in his own words "I want to talk to them too!" Seen in another light, allowing artists to meet their fans this way can be dis-alienating for they come to get to know consumers and their fans as people better as opposed to being increasingly distanced from them as their star power grows.

This however, was just one case, and while I was glad to have experienced it because what I wish to show overall in this dissertation is just how complex playwork is in its nature. It is a mode that cannot be made into simple understandings where work as

reduced to impersonal tasks that need to be completed to earn a money, therefore this one example should be acknowledged, but it does not erase that a lot of the *eigyou* at instores in general is based on a sense of professionalism that is crafted, formulaic in approach and very aware of the dynamics of desire and fantasy that potentially can be activated in order to keep the fan coming back for more. This is exactly what happened in the example I first gave where unable to finish the conversation, Yuki (the fan) bought another round of CD's simply to continue her conversation with the bandman. Her investment was not only the cost of the CD's, but she had to spend another hour waiting in line for her turn again. And, this is still a relatively mild case of *eigyou* in terms of the exchange itself. I have seen how at *satsueikai*, whether under the direction of fans or by the initiative of a band member, some very dubious/suspect physical contact that is sometimes bordering on sexual harassment. I want to stress that this is happening both ways and it not just about one particular party pulling the moves on the other. Sometimes this is 'positively' welcomed and leads to more sales, other times it is completely uncalled for and leaves either the band members dreading a particular fans future attendance at events or vice versa where the fan feels creeped out at the band members 'sleazy' moves.

This kind of *eigyou* is heavily criticized as overlaps with the service styles found in host clubs. But unlike other forms of rock, it is this that allows Visual Kei artists the ability to make more money compared to other genres where people do not consume the artist as a product of desire. But, this service is seen as 'superfluous' as it is not directly linked to the labor of making music. Thus, once again, they are not seen as serious musicians but are instead entertainers who sell flirtatious 'play' and fantasy.

Despite being seen as not the real work of musicians, *eigyou* has increased the workload of musicians. In the past there were no regular instore rotations, no *satsueikai* except on special occasions, and they did not have to update their SNS and display their

personalities and selves online as promotion. This too is individual effort, and fans begin to worry that an artist is slacking-off if he is not active on SNS. As the time and spaces to provide service and promote the self-increase, work and non-work life becomes increasingly blurred. It may be someone else's play, but it certainly involves a lot of work, and one has to do such work, if one wants to continue to play.

This may be all the more a reality faced in genres like Visual Kei where the individual artist himself is so irrevocably bounded to the desirability and communicability of the product itself that their subjectivity is all the more susceptible to commoditization and therefore more likely to be channeled and spread out into various forms of commodity. While artists are more than aware that a certain degree of this may be normalized and even required (regardless of genre), this should not be taken to mean that they do not care about the consequences of the degrees in which this becomes normalized or required as well, as the meanings or the implications of the levels of commoditization on both their own subjectivities as well as that of their fans.

Consuming Visual Kei provides people a *variety* of opportunities, tools, templates and weapons for expressing sociality, for imagining alternatives, and may be play (or work) that allows people to transgress a variety of social norms. Some are met with success and may have deeper political aims, others may be self-defeating, hedonistic or conformist. Within these aspirations the people engaged in this do so not within a subcultural bubble, but very much as social creations who will draw from various tools, perhaps one of which is a neo-liberal imbued sense of the individual as enterprise, which enter into the field of social consciousness even if they do not understand it in such terms or perhaps precisely because they do not understand it in such terms.

Chapter 9 The 'Authentic' Artist, Immaterial Labor and Net Surveillance

9.1 The Artist as Commodity Beyond the Bounds of His Labor

The second realm in which authenticity is at stake is less standardized in form, but is about how a bandman is revealed to treat his fans and exercise his sense of professionalism regarding work/play boundaries outside of official or formal events. As a case example, I use the turning down of *mitsu* from a fan by a band member. This case is particularly multi-layered for it will also give insight into how the internet has come to play an important role in the prosumption of `Visual Kei and the shaping of realities as it functions as a tool for monitoring and surveillance. Here I focus on it as playing a part in what can be seen as a shadow economy of cultural fandom and as a means to gauge the authenticity of a bandman.

What this example will reveal is that what is consumed of the artist himself, is beyond what he produces as a musician or even within the scope of his immaterial labor. Put otherwise, he is the very product at the center of what fans consume. This results in even less separation from the band member at work and his private life in a way that is at once common to celebrities and public figures, but has unique meanings in the context of Visual Kei as a form of playwork. In some sense, it is because what is up for consumption in this case is not even official work or *eigyou* that it can be deemed all the more 'authentically' a part of him.

Here is an example of an attempt to engage in *mitsu* that went wrong. I chose this example in particular for it not only illustrates why a band member may reject an offer in order to maintain a professional relationship and image, but also because it is a good example of how face to face interactions and the virtual world of fandom collide to have consequences that at times render them inseparable. By relegating online gossip to something that simply takes place online and has no effect on reality, this plays into the

fallacy of "Digital Dualism" (Jurgenson 2012) that Jurgenson warns of: the tendency to see that which is online or the internet as somehow separate from the material or 'real' world and in doing so, failing to understand how these are intermeshed as "augmented realities" (Jurgenson 2012). Logically it follows that music based subcultural prosumption, in which much occurs online just as it does off, can also be understood as an example an augmented reality in which discussion that takes place online oftentimes has a direct impact on the 'real' world.

The presentation of this issue will switch between a retelling of what happened as it did in person according to the individuals involved and then switch to anonymous discussions regarding the same issue as it appeared on tanuki (a 2ch like platform that is the largest anonymous internet board for Visual Kei) during the course of this incident.

9.2 Katyusha Gets Cancelled: Net Surveillance, Fandom and an Artist's Reputation

Hiromi is the childhood friend of Taisuke, a vocalist in the band Confiture d'orange[126]. Hiromi comes to Taisuke's lives often to support him but things are actually a bit strained between them, because rather than coming when he invites her, Hiromi comes whenever she wants to and she has befriended many of the fans. She even talks freely about knowing Taisuke. While Confiture d'orange is not a big band, they are aspiring to become full-time musicians and are very serious about making it. Taisuke has told Hiromi to be more careful about who she befriends and that he actually does not like her talking

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[126] I have changed the names of the individuals and the band's as well as due to the posting of the actual conversation thread (which is still accessible online although I have translated it). I did not want the actual individuals involved in the incident to be implicated directly to this as one of them ended up being doxed and her personal information exposed. Therefore, there is no actual band called Confiture d'orange. Should the reader try to google this, they will be met with nothing but images and recipes of orange jam.

about him to the fans. He was surprised she even did it and wrongfully assumed that she just knew not to, but he realized that he had not made this explicitly obvious and therefore bears some responsibility as well.

He then explains to her that he doesn't want any personal information about his life to affect the fan-artist relationship he is trying to cultivate. Precisely because the band is really aspiring to go major, he needs to cultivate a distance from the fans so that they see him in a particular way and take him seriously as an artist.

Hiromi says she does not tell them anything 'important' and that she does not reveal personal details. In reality, she often does let things slip that to her seem harmless, but to Taisuke are not. Things like how he dropped out of university in his first year because he was depressed, that after lives, the band drops him off at a halfway point between Tokyo and the suburbs and his mother comes to pick him up to take him home, she shows the fans embarrassing pictures from his high school days, she has revealed that Taisuke's dad works for the government and things are strained between father and son. None of these are scandal worthy bits of information, but they are nevertheless embarrassing to Taisuke who is trying to be taken seriously as a musician and pursue music with an artistic image as a vocalist who writes poignantly poetic lyrics and enchants the audience with his angelic voice.

Katyusha[127] (who is called this online by fans because she always wears one) is a member of the *jouren* who Hiromi is aware of, but they are not close. Some of Hiromi's closer fan friends do not like Katyusha because they find her creepy and obsessive about Taisuke in a way that they deem as over the top. At one of the lives while some fans of Confiture d'orange are killing time in the lobby waiting for the band to go on, Katyusha approaches Hiromi at a moment she is alone and they chat for a while. She asks Hiromi

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[127] In Japanese, the word for hairband/headband is the Russian word for it, which is Katyusha.

if she can have her contact number so that they can become friends.

Later that night when Hiromi goes home, she receives a message from Katyusha. She asks Hiromi if she would ask Taisuke if he would be interested in 'meeting' with her in person if she were to offer him 80,000 yen. Hiromi is shocked, not because of the offer itself (she is aware of *mitsu* as a practice), but that Katyusha would think to offer it via Hiromi. She tells Katyusha that she doesn't think she can ask Taisuke such a thing. Katyusha then says "Could you just give him the money for me anyway and tell him it's from me?" Hiromi does not respond, because she simply does not know what to say.

She does tell Taisuke and all Taisuke says (according to Hiromi) is "I really appreciate all she does but…" Hiromi tells Yuri (a very senior and experienced *bangya* who is another *jouren* member and is also the *shikiri* for Confiture d'orange) about what happened. Yuri tells this to her other *jouren* friends, including some *jouren* of other bands. Yuri doesn't name names but in one re-telling of this incident, she accidently mentions the word 'Katyusha' and so it then became obvious and people begin to spread this information (in person and online). Hiromi does not act upset with Yuri even though Yuri has accidently revealed who was involved. She doesn't want to create a problem with Yuri given that Yuri knows all the *jouren* and is the *shikiri* for not just Confiture d'orange but quite a few bands.

A few days later on Confiture d'orange's tanuki thread, the conversation takes this turn (everyone is an anon but they actually have a post number assigned to them that resets after 2000 when the thread has hit its capacity. Therefore, when users want to specifically reply to someone they may sometimes refer to that persons post number):

Anon: I need more Confiture d'orange

Anon: I need more money

Anon: So what happened at Sunday's live?

Anon: The usual

Anon: They played a new song. Wonder when they'll release it.

Anon: What did it sound like?

Anon: BOO BOO BOO BWAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

Anon: It's a Taisuke song for sure.

Anon: Katyusha is trying to *mitsu* for Taisuke (laugh)

Anon: Who told you?

Anon: Katyusha…

Anon: I am not the original poster but I too heard it from that old hag.

Anon: The *shikiri?*

Anon: Yuri?

Anon: How does she know?

Anon: I think the new song is such a rip off.

Anon: Well it's Visual Kei so…

Anon: It's a rip off of a rip off so whatever.

Anon: I like it. I'm surprised so many people don't…

Anon: Katyusha approached that Taisuke *tsunagari*[128] and offered money to Taisuke. Taisuke isn't interested...for obvious reasons (laughs)

Anon: Why are we talking about this? Can't we discuss the live? They played new songs and no one wants to talk about it.

Anon: This is tanuki so what can you do? If you want to talk about the music go ahead.

Anon: Taisuke doesn't have *tsunagari*

Anon: Yes, he does

Anon: No, he doesn't

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[128] Tsunagari refers to a person who knows a band member in private.

Anon: Yes he does. Hiromi.

Anon: Hiromi is just a *bangya*.

Anon: This is my personal opinion but I think the new song is a necessary move. They need to get more fans and sometimes this kind of song that is very typically Visual Kei is good for catching new fans at multiband events.

A few days later after a live, back on the same thread:

Anon: Can we stop talking about specific people? You guys are disgusting.

Anon: Because they are *bangya*, they can't help it.

Anon: Male fans who do *furitsuke* are gross!

Anon: Male fans who stand in *saizen* are gross!

Anon: Can we stop this? I mean if people come and appreciate the band you should be happy. I don't get what you people are thinking.

Anon: I watched Confiture d'orange today for the first time. They are so cool!

Anon: Thank you!

Anon: Please come again!

Anon: This makes me happy, thank you for saying that!

Anon: I hate Kazuki!

Anon: What happened?!

Anon: Headband came today. She stood in the back.

Anon: How pathetic.

Anon: I love Kazuki!

Anon (1866): I love Taisuke!

Anon: 1866 must be Katyusha! Too bad Taisuke will never love you!

Anon: Can someone post the setlist?

Anon: Yuri just puts whoever she likes in *saizen*. I had a good ticket number and she told me it was already full and she gave spots to people who had lower ticket numbers.

Anon: Yuto will post it later. Check his blog.

Anon: Katyusha already posted it on twitter.

Anon: She has an account? Can you expose it?

Anon: I don't like her but I feel bad for her. You people really need to just leave her alone…

Anon: Actually, it's good to have male fans in *saizen*. I think the band are happy to have more male fans.

Anon: Can we stop talking about the *jouren* (regulars)?

Three days layer Confiture d'orange have another live. Hiromi texts Taisuke the day before, asking him if it is okay if she can come. He sends an 'ok!' stamp as a reply. She feels relieved he is still responding to her even though she knows he must have found out by now by reading tanuki (because band members do read it) that the offer Katyusha made has now become publicly known. After the live she texts him again, thanking him for letting her come today. He does not reply, probably because he is still really busy with packing up and settling business with the live house. She receives a reply 3 days later. All he says is "Thank you for coming!" She asks him if they can go have a drink sometime soon. He says "I'm kind of busy these days but when I'm free I'll contact you!"

On tanuki after the live:

Anon: Why does Taisuke continue to keep Hiromi around? She just spoils everything. She leaks information, she gossips with fans. Today's live was so fun and then I saw her face when I was walking out today and it ruined everything.

Anon: It's more like he can't get rid of her. Trust me he wants to but he's too nice.

Anon: She's his bank account.

Anon: And how do you know that? Are you implying you're a *tsunagari*?

Anon: I wish he would be more careful about managing such stuff.

Anon: You bunch of virgins. He's a *bandoman*, this stuff is so obvious….

Anon: Exactly. Just enjoy the band. This stuff is endless.

Anon: It's hard to enjoy the band when there are lousy *tsunagari* around exposing the bands private information. What do they get out of it?

Anon: The feeling that they're better than everyone else right?

Anon: Why are you all blaming Taisuke?

Anon: Why are you protecting Taisuke?

Anon: Their roadie has a big mouth too. He leaks stuff to people who try to suck up to him.

Anon: I had fun today and I was thinking to go watch Confiture d'orange more… but if this is what the fans are like…

Anon: Whose fans aren't like this?

Anon: Well not everyone is on tanuki. Most people don't even care to look here.

Anon: Nono...Most people do look, but they act like they don't care.

Anon: Well if they're looking they care right?

2 months later on the same thread:

Anon: So hairband is going to give up being a *bangya*! Haha! Goodbye!

Anon: Nobody wants her anyway.

Anon: Who is hairband? You mean Katyusha?

Anon: LOL hairband WWW

Anon: Go check the old threads. How many times has this question come up.

Anon: Did she post about it on twitter?

Anon: No, but on her blog. She claims it's because she will start a new job soon and that she has been thinking to give up being a *bangya* for a while now. But actually, she still follows SuG and is going to so many of their lives now so it's all nonsense. She is just giving up on Confiture d'orange because everyone knows what she tried to do with Taisuke!

Anon: Her blog is locked, you're her 'friend' and you leaked this? If I were Katyusha I'd be more careful about who I'd be friends with.

Anon: Wait are hairband and Katyusha two different people?!

While there are so many issues to unpack here that may already make some sense to reader having now become a bit familiarized with some of the elements of participatory live culture and the *jouren*/*shikiri* system, what I will focus on primarily here is the issue of *mitsu* and then go on to discuss some of the other issues raised. I was able to talk to both Taisuke and Hiromi separately regarding this. Hiromi explains that she actually had no intention to publicly expose Katyusha's offer or humiliate her and while she did not want to act as a go between in a *mitsu* exchange, she told Taisuke because she was firstly sure he would reject it. Secondly, she did want to Taisuke to know that Katyusha had such intentions towards him and was not just a 'normal' fan. So, while she did not mean to let it spread at the level it did, she did want to expose her to Taisuke. What she did not realize was that Yuri had told a lot of the *jouren* and the gossip had spread quite far. It was also a mistake on Yuri's part to have 'accidently' named names.

When I asked Hiromi why she was sure Taisuke would reject the money, she says "I know his character well and he is not that kind of person." I asked her to elaborate

on this and she says "The band may not have money yet but actually Taisuke doesn't even need it cause his family is well off, so he is not suffering. Also, he simply won't get into such a situation with a fan especially. That is not how he sees fans, like they are 'wallets.' I think he wants people to respect him as an artist and also as a person. He is just not that kind of person!" She later added, "Even if his situation is okay financially, he cannot take that money for the band. You know them right? They are really good guys and with their experience (roadie-ing) they have seen some very dark things. They don't want to get involved with that dirty world."

Taisuke did not initially agree to talk to me about this when I first asked, but it was only quite recently that I happened to meet him again (more than ten years have lapsed since this incident) and I told him I was doing research and about people pursuing careers in music. We ended up talking about *baito* and balancing band life. He did tell me about some of his *baito* when he was still not able to make money from the band. He was actually working at a panini and cured meats stand during the time he was in the band and he also worked at a hotel lounge café. Even Hiromi did not know this and she had actually given some of the fans the impression he was a rich kid living off his parents.

Taisuke is actually now in a different band and I ask him if he still gets *mitsu* offers. He is actually really embarrassed and he tries to play it down saying that he does not get them now that he is an 'old man.' I say to him "But you used to reject them (since this was what I was told)?" and he says:

"Yes. It was not about the amount or anything. I was very scared about what it could entail… I had some offers from fans and actually I was shocked about the amount because it was a lot of money. People say it is easy money, but to me it is the most difficult money to take…your relationship with that fan will forever be twisted. I got into a band because in university I was pretending to be okay

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with doing something I didn't even want to do, I was just expected to. When I got out, I promised myself I would never pretend or oblige myself that way again. I didn't want to become sick again like that. That was my personal reason. But I also had professional reasons. They were fans and as much as I wanted people to support me, I did not want one or two fans to have to pay money as if they were covering on behalf of so many people. As a band person trying to become professional, you want money from many people buying your CDs, goods, coming to your lives. You don't want that same money from one fan, even though it's a big amount. That was not the way you were going to make it, thinking about in terms of the long run."

Taisuke revealed something else about this incident that I felt was really a rare occurrence:

"Actually, I wrote a letter to Katyusha. Once it had spread online, she wrote to me saying she was very sorry and did not mean to cause trouble. I was worried about her mental state because she sounded really sad and in pain, so I wrote to her and said thank you and I always appreciate your support. I told her she should spend the money on herself, maybe eat nice things or go on a trip and that she should take care of herself and not to worry about me. It was not her responsibility to worry about my financial situation as a fan in this way. Fans should come to lives to have fun and to forget about things like their own problems in life."

It is absolutely common for band members to receive letters detailing the mental state of fans where fans 'talk' to them in their letters about their deepest most personal secrets and confessions and sometimes they will reply in a general sense, almost never addressing individuals. For example, they may blog or tweet something like the

following: "I received your letters. It seems some of you are going through a difficult time now. I know I am powerless to really help you, but know that I am cheering on for you as well. Your support always gives me courage. I hope my music can give you some as well"

Even if they may sometimes want to do something for an individual fan, they may not be allowed to directly communicate to their fans online or via letters by their *jimusho* so as to avoid any sort of image of preferential treatment. But this is also not to overtly encourage a fan dependency on band members in a way that is 'outside' of the range of activities that they can monitor and in truth, profit from.

However, as previously shown, band members can address fans personally at meet and greets or instores where the facetime is short and meant to be personal and more importantly (from the point of view of management), the fans have paid for that opportunity. Therefore, the service of communication is an exchange here and not simply for the sake of the fan or for the fan to simply control based on their emotional whims. What Taisuke did here was quite outside any of these norms, as he was simply worried about Katyusha, knowing she had been taunted online and the target of gossip and bullying. Throughout our conversation, he never once implied that Katyusha was in the wrong for trying to get to know him personally or for using Hiromi, but maintained that it was 'wrong for him' to accept or get involved with such financial arrangements, both as a person and as a professional.

His personal conception of ethics aside, what is important here is this sense of professionalism as it is connected to a sense of drawing boundaries between what a fan should and shouldn't do and related to that, what a band member's work responsibilities are. Taisuke seemed to believe that for him it was performing and what he did was for the 'fun' of fans and that fans shouldn't 'worry' about things like the financial situation of the band or band members. Whatever Katyusha's intentions were and Taisuke's grace in

handling the situation aside, it is actually unrealistic for Taisuke to believe that fans are simply able to divorce themselves from the economics of the band when they are in effect the paying customers. We do not see band members telling their fans to spend their money on themselves when it comes to buying multiple *cheki* or multiple copies of the same CD just to attend instores to meet them. Therefore, what is of note here are the terms of the exchange that Taisuke expressed as professionalism. To him a fan and a bandman should not be asking or providing services beyond the confines of 'official products', yet, as kind as it was, he actually breached that by writing her that letter out of concern for her as a person.

This example shows how complicated the lines between professionalism, intimacy, personal concern and role boundaries can become between fans and band members. Hiromi herself is an example of this. Is she fan or insider? Taisuke though not completely ghosting her, increasingly began to treat her too in rather impersonal or professional terms once she did not heed to his requests to stop blurring the boundaries between fan and friend which she continuously pushed. She even seemed to care more about what Yuri and the *jouren* thought of her than of her own friendship with Taisuke. A *tsunagari* like Hiromi can be a hindrance to both the band and fans because they take away something from that vital 'otherworldliness' that enhances the prosumption of Visual Kei with their very grounded in the 'real world' information that they leak. At the same time, for fans who desire to be closer to the artist, people like Hiromi are also to some an irresistible presence to approach for acknowledging and befriending someone like Hiromi can provide them with interesting information that allows them to know more of the artist in a way they have no other means of accessing.

Indeed, as is evident from the complaints about her behavior on Tanuki, this too was upsetting for fans to have to deal this person who was not behaving 'professionally'

as someone with personal connections. Any attempt I made with Hiromi to discuss why she was alright with talking about Taisuke's personal details even after he told her to stop (which was something I heard from her and not from him even) simply dissolved into her ranting about how she doesn't understand why he is 'so different now'. It seemed to me that Hiromi actually could not separate her 'childhood friend' from her 'friend as an aspiring professional' because she did not fully respect what his work entailed even though she complimented him and his band as 'serious' in their approach and ethics. Hiromi was having fun being a fan, socializing with fans; it had become play to her, one in which she had some leverage or status in that was actually contingent on her personal connection to Taisuke, which for Taisuke was not play, but something he was trying to turn into work.

This was all made worse by a platform like tanuki that allowed the information to spread and continued to haunt Katyusha even though she had decided to give up being a fan of Confiture d'orange. Fans actually continued to gossip about her and even went to the threads of other bands she followed aside from Confiture d'orange to 'warn' those other fans about her behavior and that she was someone to 'be careful' of. They included pictures of her which they had found on her SNS accounts so that she could be identified more easily and so fans would not make the mistake of talking to or befriending her.

On one hand Katyusha had been accused of crossing a boundary of play; she had taken it 'too far' by interfering on a personal level and therefore she was met with another form of taking play very seriously in that the punishment for overstepping her boundaries led to her having her personal details and reputation dragged through the mud repeatedly online. Fans here are shown to not simply mind their own business or keep quiet about the affairs of others where the band is concerned, but take it upon themselves to monitor and punish those they see as crossing the line.

What this did for Taisuke's reputation though was that it made him seem sincere in his treatment of fans. Not only did everyone now know he rejected the offer for *mitsu* and therefore would not 'use' fans this way, this also showed to them that he was '*honomono no jitsuryoku ha*' (the real thing making the actual effort type) and it contributed to his reputation as sincere and authentic in his approach to his music career. He was therefore deemed worthy of whatever fans or fame he garnered and indeed, even after Confiture d'orange broke up and Taisuke went on to another band, that managed to be much more successful, fans had said that this was because he had always been sincere and deserving, rehashing the story from his indies days in Confiture d'orange where despite struggling, he never relied on *mitsu*, that he did not use his band man status 'play' with girls and that this was evidence that he was serious about his work as a musician.

Here we have an example of how a band members 'sincerity' and 'dedication' is also measured outside the realms of *eigyou*, but still seen to fans as a reason for his success and him therefore being worthy of it. It is this question of authenticity in the understanding of fandom here that is as I have previously suggested, not all about a musician's approach to mastering his music or performance, but also the sincerity of a musician's approach to his music career and to his supporters that is of importance to fans.

The implications this has on the musician is that his work and career are all the more involved with the immaterial labor (that he is not even consciously or publicly laboring over) that is contingent on his display of character, characteristics and very personhood that fans are able to access and dissect that become consumable as they become information on display online for all to see. More of the musician's actions and decisions are at stake in his career with regards to his abilities to manage the boundaries between what is work and who is playing.

9.3 Authenticity, Net Surveillance and the Shadow Cultural Economy of Fandom.

Here I believe is one of the key points of contention that is captured by playwork. On one hand, as has already been discussed, Visual Kei fans are wrongfully portrayed as superficial consumers who are only interested in aesthetically oriented male performers whom they idolize and not the music. This thesis posits them as consumers who are easily duped by surface appearances. They are assumed to lack the critical mode of engagement with art that music aficionados are thought to possess (e.g. the ability to evaluate techniques, theoretical knowledge, the ability to reference canon works which allows for one analyze authenticity etc.). They are simply consuming and enjoying themselves at the level of the 'visual' and are therefore not musically savvy. Their play is relegated to one that does not require much critical intelligence as it would were it a more complex art. It is 'play' that does not call for much 'brainwork' on the part of its participants.

This distinction does not consider the actual ways in which fans do discriminate and analyze artists based on their own internal systems of evaluation. For example, as has been shown by these examples, the concept of the authenticity of a Visual Kei artist is not one that is necessarily rooted in notions of compositional originality or ability to execute instrumental or vocal techniques as per standards set in rock or metal canon (although such qualities would of course be a topic of praise), but one that has more to do with the practical communicative ability of an artist to display to his fans that he is authentically dedicated to caring about their presence, needs and loyalty. In other words, an artist's authenticity is based on his sincerity in how he treats and talks about his fans both in front of them and behind their backs (based on information leaked online or by 'insider information'). Therefore, an anonymous message boards like Tanuki, while on the surface is a breeding ground for salacious gossip, is also a tool where fans share information that although is subject to made up rumors, is based on their own experiences and impressions

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of artists authenticity.

One may wonder why more common SNS platforms are not used for this purpose and that is because for the most part, fans mostly use SNS to report on positive experiences, whereas in the case of negative experiences, they may not want to be individually responsible or identifiable for those reports, as it could be traced back to them and invite ostracization, harassment or criticism. It is therefore the anonymous quality of tanuki that allows for fans to have otherwise difficult conversations or share their negative experiences in a public place without the individual responsibility of having to do so.

Keeping up with threads on tanuki therefore is in the understanding of fans, a means to cultivating a savvy and informed consumer experience. An outsider may see this as participating in gossip and indeed it is, but what many fans are doing even if they do not actually post on threads themselves but 'roam' (reading only function) is using one of the few open, and in some sense egalitarian, tools available to them to monitor that their own consumption and emotional investments into an artist is 'worth it' and safe.

This monitoring requires quite a lot of effort, there can be multiple threads in which information regarding an artist may appear on. While everything is to be taken with a grain of salt, there are ways of procuring receipts; pictures, screen shots of chat windows, physical evidence incriminating the artist etc. if these are used and a discussion regarding their accuracy or authenticity occurs, they can be incriminating and devastating in terms of the career or reputation of the artist. Therefore keeping up is one thing, but deciding how to evaluate such information as rumors and scandals is another form of labor as one may partake in the conversation, add one's own evidence, take positions in favor or against the artist, attempt to de-escalate the situation should evidence be insufficient etc. the labor that goes into authenticating the sincerity of the artist can become a daily process

that extends to areas beyond the stage and away from face to face contact. Being an aware and knowledgeable consumer requires work. Threads move fast, new threads appear daily.

I would suggest that what the ubiquity of tanuki use and the actual effect it has on a stars reputation suggests is, is that rather than standard or more widely accepted means of evaluating an artist, fans here are seen participating in what Fiske calls the "shadow cultural economy of fans" (Fiske 1992, 30) a system of distribution and production created by fans for fans that lies outside of official culture industries. It is also a medium in which fans are allowed a means to 'see-through' the production process albeit in a limited capacity as they do not have a much of a stake or access in other aspects of production. It is also perhaps an example of what Turkle sees as the net providing a (feminine) space with some emancipatory potential (Turkle 1995), especially in women's use of message boards (like Tanuki) for as "where the structures and constraints of the real world are diminished or removed altogether (Spracklen 2016, 55). While Turkle's views tend to hold assumptions over what constitutes the feminine, Tanuki does also function as a space where (mostly) women can come together outside the male dominated Visual Kei industry to have collective discussions on problematic issues within the fandom that can have an effect on how their consumption should proceed. It is not a futile project, especially in cases where there is enough evidence provided.

Needless to say, while it can function this way, it also can have the negative effect of legitimizing fictions. Tanuki is overall, a cesspool of potential half-truths and it is by no means easy to navigate. However, as fan experiences have shown, it can affect how they will proceed in their consumption activities of Visual Kei. In this sense, it has the ability to alter reality through the experience of consuming its content. In some ways this is reminiscent of Baudrillard's take on the internet as a key-site for construction of hyper-reality (Baudrillard, 1994, 1995) that consumers themselves take part in resulting in a

situation where often, "The hyper-real becomes the only reality we know when the world is sufficiently mediated and filtered through a number of technological and cultural devices-such as the Net" (Spracklen 2016, 55). Users of Tanuki often remind each other not to simply believe things so easily, but this can be for some more easily said than done. Observe this post that this fan made:

Anon: I have been troubled by this for a while now and was wondering if there are other people like me…. Do you no longer know if the band members you really like are actually good people? Like I started to wonder this recently. Especially after two members have now left...I used to like seeing the band interact with one another and I really thought they seemed to get along so well. But after I read some of the things people write on here about the members and sometimes I started to notice in some videos too, there are times when one member is really quiet and no one seems to care….

What should I do? Do any of you feel this way? I guess there is no real way of knowing…. But I can't stop thinking about this…I really hope they are good people.

Here were some answers to the fan:

If you really love the band, then you will believe in them.

That is the meaning of being a fan, that you simply believe!

(Anon)

You can decide for yourself by basing this on your own interactions with the members. Unless they do something directly to you or someone you know that you feel makes you see them badly, then don't let rumors effect you. But even though there are so many rumors on here, sometimes you keep up with it just to be safe right? I know how you feel. It is very tiring.

(Anon)

All bandoman are shit. Just accept that and enjoy the music. That's all.

(Anon)

I wish I could go back to the time when I didn't know of Tanuki yet…

(Anon)

Fans keeping up on tanuki this way in itself is a kind of labor. Their info gathering and evaluative efforts are not understood and judged based on the measures that cultural products such as the evaluation of artistic works is based upon, thus it is not recognized as being a savvy consumer but instead looked upon as an obsessive fan compulsion. As evident from their usage of tanuki, Visual Kei fans are indeed very concerned with determining the sincerity or authenticity of an artist's integrity and character, as this is as Grossberg discusses, one of the characteristics that defines fandoms: "Every fan-of whatever forms of popular culture exists within a comparable ideology of authenticity, although the difference need not operate in just the same way, and the ideological grounds of authenticity can vary considerably" (Grossberg 1992, 62).

In this example I have also begin to show how the play of fans can have some serious implications on the public lives of fans and how internet platforms like tanuki are employed as a method of surveillance and behavior monitoring. In the next section I will examine this phenomenon in greater detail and show how this can have multiple, sometimes devastating effects on the career of bands when fans take their monitoring of their play very seriously.

9.4 Scandal and Celebrity

Particular features have been theorized as framing the interactions between media figures (such as singers, actors, talents and other kinds of entertainment related individuals and units) and the masses (fans, consumers and others subject to the presence of such media figures) in a variety of academic fields. For example, there is the idea that

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the relationship between fans and stars is asymmetrically ordered (Yano 2004; Ho 2012; Nagaike 2012) meaning affection and intimacy is felt by many and directed upon one (or more in the case of a band or group). In other words, intense feelings for an individual are experienced by 'just another face in the crowd' and are thus never quite reciprocal.

Studies of fans in Japan have also suggested that through their consumptive activities centered on stars, they find spaces, texts and personas to identify with (Nakamura 2002; Mackintosh 2012), and ways to experiment and reclaim sexuality (Tsuji 2012; Kijima 2012; Glasspool 2012). The majority of these interactions and relationships are, however, 'mediated' through performances, material objects, staged moments of interaction and of course through the various forms of media that transport the images and narratives surrounding stars and celebrities (Galbraith 2012; Stevens 2004; Lukacs 2010; Yano 2004). Therefore, pleasure and enjoyment is derived not so much from the consumption of or desire for the 'authentic' (meaning of the 'whole', 'real', 'true', 'everyday') but from successful staging and production of intimacy, masterful performances of particular affects and from the acknowledgement and realization of the eternal 'gap' between the 'star' and person that is the star.

It is through the creation of such gaps that stars are able to retain some sense of mystery that renders them inapproachable, otherworldly and in some sense, absent. Fantasy and room to imagine a variety of possibilities occur when fans attempt to 'fill in the gaps' as they imbue the empty space with their desires. Desire is therefore sustained and grasped through further consumption, which in turn makes the celebrity a vehicle for profit-oriented commodities. Japan's biggest celebrities are highly monitored commodities carefully crafted by *jimusho* that require constant upkeep to ensure that the continued production of desire is sustained, even in the case of the desire being non-sexual (e.g. 'Actress A is the perfect 'bratty little kid' or Talent S is the 'kind hearted

widow next door that everybody admires'[129]).

Scandals are therefore, to *jimusho,* to be avoided lest their commodities become 'damaged goods' and are no longer able to convey images and affects or to inspire the desires of fans. But when scandals do occur, one is provided a glimpse of just how taken-for-granted mediated images become. This is not to say that viewers, fans and consumers are simply buying the images at face value, nor are they consumer drones incapable of imagining 'otherwise', but scandals highlight that very 'gap' between the known and the unknown; the star lives, does and says things that we do not know, even while invading our living rooms, commutes, twitter feeds, vending machines and other everyday spaces, both of the public and intimate. This is also visible when, in the discussion of scandals, one of the things often highlighted is just how 'shocking' the 'real' individual has revealed himself to be vis a vis his image (Prusa 2012; Boorstin 1992; Nashimoto 2009). What becomes a problem is not merely the moral issue surrounding the event itself (be it related to drugs, affairs, tax evasions, etc.) but the digression from the public self that people come to know.

The other issue at stake is that the media profits from the generation and production of scandals: copies are circulated, viewership rises, a site gets more hits. Thus tabloid-like tactics such as sensationalism, over-simplification, and an emphasis on real-time 'breaking' news updates that otherwise would require more verification, have come to infiltrate all kinds of profit-oriented media including that of non-tabloid reportage (Rusciano 2010). The other benefit to be reaped by the media here is that through scandals they are able to perform and reify themselves as the voice of morality through the shaming of behavior and action and through the stigma they attach to the fallen (Prusa 2012). They

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[129] I am aware that both examples are all too easily sexualized as well but I believed the reader gets the point.

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make clear the what the punishment and consequences of straying from expectations entail (e.g. star loses endorsement deals, causes *meiwaku* to staff and family, banned from appearing on tv, caved in to temptations due to weaknesses, has brought shame to those involved etc.)

The object of the scandal aside, the other party that experiences a loss is, as previously mentioned, the *jimusho* to which the star belongs. However, the media and the *jimusho* have created an orchestrated mechanism for repentance: the public apology, followed by a period of 'self-imposed' retreat, rehabilitation and depending on the nature of the scandal, the eventual comeback. Thus, scandals sometimes only stall careers; they do not always destroy them and the profit-making throughout the entire process (in the form of tell all book publications, documentations of rehabilitation, the PR gained from the rehab and comeback processes, etc.) indeed, carries on. In short, capital continues to generate profits via commodification of a different nature. Scandals in of themselves can be turned into the raw material for a variety of commodities.

What is left out of this entire equation are the discussions that take place amongst fans, as well as those of the people who personally surround the star. Furthermore, rarely, if ever, in the mass-mediated versions of scandals, do we see discussions or debates over why behavior labeled 'scandalous' is wrong or problematic and little is mentioned and much assumed about how people feel about such scandals. If the public voice that dominates the narrative of the scandal is one produced by the media that seeks to provide an unambiguous moral stance, the star at the center of the scandal is not able to be humanized by sympathetic, and perhaps more so empathetic, voices and opinions that potentially exist. It is precisely because the space for debate is obscured that the mass-media can claim to be 'only giving people what they want' evident from rises in viewership/circulation/hits when scandals break. Thus, consumers appear to be

voyeuristic and interested in over-determined, formatted media presentations. They are witnesses to the spectacle, not participants and as a result, they too become reduced to an oversimplified, overgeneralized mass or pre-determined values packaged in terms of 'fans', 'consumers', 'the Japanese public'.

In this section, I will attempt to address this gap by examining how anonymous internet textboards are utilized by fans of Visual Kei, as a space for not only voicing a variety of opinions, but also a space in which self-generated content potentially undermines the careers of recording and performing artists. I will focus on a particular action of, *sarasu* (to expose), that takes place on these boards where fans contribute, play vigilante, and debate various self-leaked scandals regarding the artists they follow.

I situate this within the larger debate of the rise of digital capitalism and the co-opting of prosumer and other D.I.Y practices in the service of capitalism where consumers are increasingly re-configured as co-producers and co-creators (in other words play-workers) of various products through the free labor and surplus value which they 'willingly' generate in the name of enjoyment, creativity and freedom (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010; Zwick 2008; Spracklen 2014). *Sarasu*, although an act of prosumption, further complicates ideas about consumer exploitation and consumer generated production and the very idea that has come to constitute the trope of what a 'fan' is themselves, for the scandals generated neither clearly challenge the power of the music industry nor are they able to be subsumed by corporations into the larger creation of profit and value. I will also consider the implications *sarasu* has on the potential for the internet to remain as a space for free discussion, user prosumption and the public good.

9.5 Visual Kei in the Larger Music Industry

As discussed in the earlier chapters, many practices in the Visual Kei industry may resemble that of the larger music industry (as well as other subcultural industries). These are marked by identifiable institutional structures and locations of authority and power (e.g. *jimusho*, music related media institutions such as magazines, internet portals, tv programs, radio and net shows, etc.) and dense, opaque network relations (Marx 2012), but one should not make assumptions about artist-*jimusho* relations in the Visual Kei industry based on other, more well documented/researched genre-related industries such as hip-hop, e*nka*, Johnny's idols, idols and heavy metal, to name a few (Condry 2006; Yano 2004; Aoyagi 2000; Dunn 2008; Galbraith and Karlin 2012; Matsue 2008; Stevens 2009; Tsuji and Minamida 2012). A detailed analysis of Visual Kei *jimusho* is beyond the scope of this chapter and has been discussed briefly in others, but each *jimusho* differs in a variety of ways pertaining to its stylistic pursuits, level of involvement in production, distribution of profit and as previously mentioned, many artists also work for and form their own independent *jimusho*.

Overlap with and disjuncture between other forms of entertainment and affect economies in Japan are also visible and present in Visual Kei in terms of marketing strategies and assumptions about the consuming public. These include the portrayal and commodification of a particular type of desirable, non-hegemonic masculinity also found amongst hosts (Takeyama 2010, 2016), the performance of romantic opulence achieved through makeup and costume found in Takarazuka, and the concealment of the artists' present romantic status in order to create the appearance of availability, found across the entertainment industry and particularly apparent in the case of idols. And then there is the romance associated with the 'artistry' of the individual who delves into and embodies his

craft, fueled by scripts of passion, transgression and rebellion, which all add to the devil-may-care, risk-taking anti-hero image of the rock star, found across the globe.

While there exist these intersections, here are the ways in which Visual Kei differs from the abovementioned forms of art and entertainment: It is not just the portrayal of a kind of frank sensuality that is important but, unlike idols, the sexual activities and pursuits of the Visual Kei artist do contribute to part of his appeal (or in some cases, lack thereof). While a Visual Kei artist should not openly speak of his conquests and abilities, he is free to pursue everything and anything (and anyone) he wants and to in turn later incorporate this into his art, performance and music, thus performing a 'sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll' type masculinity without having actually articulated it in words (save lyrics, life history style interviews focused on past personal events, and the occasional suggestive tweets). In other words, the Visual Kei artist does not need to and should not have to pretend to be single or available, but at the same time, they should not appear to be taken by a specific someone. There is neither a 'no dating' policy here, nor is there 'state that you are single so you appear available' type deception. It is simply a never concretely reveal your present status. An artist may speak of the past relationships and of the future he may want, but never the present in all its worldly, tangible mess of realities.

Another difference with other idol-like agencies lies in this; despite the on-stage theatrics being the mark of a good performer and professionalism, Visual Kei artists are quite free to publicly display discrepancies and other interests/parts of themselves via a variety of mediums such as SNS and in various print media. While these are still all within the realm of 'public performance' and should indeed be viewed as such, the room to pursue and to disclose elements of the self is far wider (and therefore more open to controversy and criticism) than more closely *jimusho*-monitored artists like major-contract idols and Takarazuka stars. An example of this is that a Visual Kei artist is

actually quite free to talk about his mental health. While not to dismiss or downplay the actual mental health issues that any person may be facing, this I argue does contribute to the production of 'authentic pain' or 'real struggles' that can be marketable, especially in terms of the meanings surrounding the notion of *menhera* and *chuunibyou* sensitivities (as discussed in the section on lyrics in Chapter 5).

Finally, unlike talents and idols, there is a core product of the labor of a Visual Kei performer by which he is ultimately judged, expected to gain expertise in and held accountable for; that of making music and the ability to perform live. As much as I have emphasized authenticity and value as attached to the immaterial labor of the musician, respect and pedigree is attached to technical capabilities, creativity, and compositional ability as well as to other aspects of their artistic output in principle (although this is not necessarily the main principle to their hardcore fans). Visual Kei artists are therefore held to and are nestled within multiple contexts and standards that need to be understood both in terms of larger music industry/entertainment practices and cultures and ones particular to Visual Kei.

In fandoms where the visible audience is dominated by a particular gender, the manner in which the minority participates is often obscured, along with other acts of spontaneity and variations of participation. Similarly, research on Visual Kei has tended to place emphasis on the most visible aspects of its consumption: fashion, female fans and *furitsuke* (choreographed movements) (McLeod 2013; Seibt 2014; Inoue et.al 2003) thus contributing to homologies that link aesthetic orientations to the 'feminized' as well as to the construction of archetype fan-consumers.

9.6 The Active Collective: (A)Live Space: Online Surveillance and Gendered Prosumption

In the literature review section, it was highlighted that previous research had shown how 'Japanese ways of playing' tended to make play, leisure activities and subcultural participation seem like a calculated choice that its participants could manage well. They were depicted as in control of the clear separation between the them at play and the them who work/school/family. Play was meant to function only as a compartmentalized leisure activity, even when it was meaningful, its participants did not seem to want for it to 'interfere' with 'real life'. Therefore, any sort of rebellious play was shown to be unable to really contain any 'real' politics of difference or resistance. Subcultures were treated as 'safe spaces' that simply gave people a place to play at imagining difference.

What is different here from the spectacular failure of subcultures to sublimate resistance as they become reduced to marketable styles that Hebdige already noted in the 1970's with British youth cultures (Hebdige 1979) and the cooling off of the intentionality of the radical politics of difference present in extreme forms of rock through the inability to resist commercial co-optation found by (Spracklen 2014), is that in the case of Japan, there appears to be no 'source of failure' for there appears to be no failure at all. It is as if participants strategize the scope of their practices and accept that life is to be fragmented.

It is not just narrative evidence which supports such ideas, but perhaps a more potent form of empirical evidence can be found in examination of the physical spaces in which fans actively participate, perform and patron that have been portrayed as spaces of play where the fan experience of enjoyment is largely contingent on being able to achieve a sense of *ittaikan* (shared togetherness), one which is fostered partly by means of routinized and structured forms of audience participation. Such organized bodily

practices are enjoyable for the sense of familiarity, interactionality and intimacy they produce (Galbraith 2013; Inoue 2015; Kelly 2004) and subsequently are compounded over time through a mastery of subject and context. Indeed, in Visual Kei, this is also present as was shown on the prosumption of lives practices and live-going culture in Chapter 5.

However, the high level of the visible occurrence of ritualized uniform practices across a wide genre of participatory cultures or fandoms supplements the impression that because the majority of people participate in collective ways, perform, consume and desire to experience particular affects as they are generated in particular time, space and interactional settings, there is also an agreement/consensus over what is valuable about their participation amongst them and that there is 'shared meaning'.

While every one of these aforementioned studies have generated insights into the ways in which audiences relate to materials, texts and their producers, the focus on such forms of collective cultural practices have obscured some under-explored elements present in all 'fandoms': critique, conflict and confrontation. These elements are central to the question of agency and when not taken into consideration or even brought forth, agency risks becoming but an exercise of strategizing and locating where and when this happens.

I am not denying that these kinds of practices and narratives are detectable, indeed they are as well in Visual Kei as I have attempted to show, and it is precisely because they are symbolically compelling that they deserve thorough investigation. However, when treated and presented as the key feature that captures what is 'meaningful' about subcultural participation and prosumption, this runs the risk of becoming productive of the formation of tropes. Tropes, like stereotypes and labels, then end up reducing what is an important aspect of social practices and performances; that of process.

Process here is not to be equated with the simple linear plotting of a trajectory that lines up in the following order: motivation-embarkation-acculturation-adaptation-mastery. But instead it is precisely because things and interactions are processual and always 'in the making' failure, miscommunication, misinterpretation, spontaneity, panic, overcompensation, ignorance (chosen or simply not knowing), not knowing the rules and learning the rules is never straightforward and always open to challenge. And the acknowledgement and recognition of conflict, variation and diversity of experience should not be treated as 'anomalies' to data, but are in of themselves the raw evidence of what is perhaps more often referred to as agency. In other words, when we try to explain what people do, we should also not 'explain away' the other things they do. In order to achieve this, what is needed is for a re-examining of how people use spaces, including those of online ones that take into account that just as much as fandoms are sites of cohesion, they are also sites of potential chaos.

9.7 Tanuki and Online/Digital Ethnography

The data for this section was derived from a few online sources and then supplemented with information gathered through interviews and conversations with users of anonymous internet boards both in person as well as online. The anonymous internet board that is the topic of this chapter is called *Tanuki,* an online space I have already referred to numerous times previously. It is an internet forum that is used by people interested in Visual Kei. To be specific, it is an internet textboard and follows the same format as that of 2ch. Inside the site, there are 10 main boards that are divided into the following categories the main board (general use), the new board (for new fans), the old board (for older users), the *kotanuki* board (for people below 18), the breaking news board, the men only board (men here meaning band-members), the fans only board, the flea market board, the otaku board (for people who like anime/manga and Visual Kei) and the

'older' users board (for people who on their own accord feel they cannot relate to what is being written on the other boards due to age)[130].

The site describes itself as a 'community' for Visual Kei fans and within each board there are thousands of threads. Anyone can start a thread about anything and rather than only talking about Visual Kei, the boards function more so for users to talk about anything to *people also interested* in Visual Kei. Every day, thousands of comments are posted. Just to provide a quick idea of what kinds of threads are available, I have translated the titles of the top fifteen[131] threads of October 1ˢᵗ 2016 at 14:00:

1. If only this kind of person existed, it would be great (Kanto Version)

2. Wild blond-haired band members

3. Ikebukuro Thread

4. Thread for Kansai Gyaru

5. We love Issei from Buglug (band thread)

6. BLAIVE thread (band thread)

7. Nagoya, ROUB, New Band (Band thread)

8. This is an incident, Kisaki, sold his friends out

9. Come tell us what's bothering you

10. LIEN, Band from Hiroshima, a bunch of old guys who don't have zest (Band Thread)

11. Starbucks

12. Live Tickets for Sale/Exchange

13. Let's talk about the news on TV

14. The STD thread

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[130] While I will suggest that *tanuki* provides a space for open discussion, I am not suggesting it is free of ageism or any other kind of discrimination.

[131] Top fifteen here does not mean in terms of popularity, but of recent posts.

15. Living, but tired and thinking of death

Tanuki is active throughout the day due to the ubiquity of mobile technologies in Japan that even before the advent of the smart phone enabled the popularity of mobile internet sites (Gottleib and McLelland 2003; Holden and Tsuruki 2003). Easy access, anonymous participation and the breadth of topics make it a popular virtual hangout for Visual Kei fans. In face to face interviews, all of them knew what *Tanuki* was and had seen it themselves although not all actively used it and more than half the interviewees claimed to read (or rather 'roam') threads only without posting.

Although there is a list of rules on the main page that make several laws about slander the posting of obscene pictures and illegal forms of usage (to solicit for sex etc.) clear, the thread themselves are filled with 'free' discussions in which slander, the sharing of pornographic materials and 'hook ups' do indeed take place on a daily basis. In fact, much of the 'cybersubculture' (Caspary and Manzenreiter 2003) consists of these elements, which is why unlike the main Visual Kei threads on 2ch, which are limited to discussions about Visual Kei bands or the subculture, those I interviewed hesitated to identify themselves as 'active' users, as being one could imply that one was engaged in such activity[132].

There is only one rule that users are quick to enact and adhere to, and that is the 'no *panpi*' rule. Therefore, while conversations are free to go anywhere, the community and users expect and wish to keep their free conversations limited to like-minded folk, here meaning those who like Visual Kei. The board is however not to be taken merely as a 'space for fans' as its anonymity means that band members, staff members, the family

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[132] Other reasons for not actively using it or not wanting to use it were related to finding its content overwhelming, unreliable, upsetting or a waste of time.

or any kind of *kankeisha* (related individuals) who have a sense of and knowledge or affinity to Visual Kei are welcome to post so long as they fulfil the requirement of liking, identifying and having knowledge about Visual Kei. Often times when a poster displays 'ignorance' (often in the form of the misuse of subcultural lingo or some other kind of faux pas) they are accused of being *panpi*.

The freedom to post anonymously and to converse freely about a variety of topics is a double-edged sword in that because anyone is free to say anything they want, anyone can say anything they want. This results in a hodgepodge of detailed information inaccessible elsewhere, as well as cesspool of lies and rumors. As one poster relates "You shouldn't believe everything that's written here, just 50% of it."

Topics too can determine the quality of information available on the thread. For example, the STD thread is a space where people discuss sexual health and problems and the advice and help offered tends to be given by people with first-hand experience who have detailed knowledge about treatment, diagnosis and prevention etc. The STD thread provides a space for many who are afraid to turn to 'real life' peers (or perhaps have none) to seek for help. Meanwhile on the Starbucks thread people discuss its latest products, their favorite customizations, complaints and simply share Starbucks 'food porn' with one another, none of which is perhaps particularly life-changing unless of course one is that hard-core a Starbucks fan.

It is the band threads and particularly like those numbered 8 and 9 on the list above that contain a vast amount of 'insider' leaked information as well as blatant rumors and lies. When someone brings such information to the fore, this action is known as *sarasu* (to expose). While this may be just written information, one is also able to back claims up with other forms of evidence such as recordings, pictures etc. Legitimate *sarasu* often have 'receipts' of such sorts and when unable to produce these, another means of

legitimizing one's story is to present detailed information to which others in possession of such information (or of similar information) then join in to 'compare notes.' Not every story becomes validated, but much effort is put into proving them true/false and because discussion can continue at any moment by anyone, there are no final words or ultimate resolutions, although some agreement surrounding facts can be established. Within such a climate, how to users make sense of such information? How do users tell the lies from the truths and what makes people leak information or want to spread rumors on such anonymous boards?

There are some other reasons I would like to highlight why the analysis of spaces like *Tanuki* are necessary in the development of understanding contemporary modes of sociality and cultural prosumption. As has already been noted by sociologists engaged in digital ethnography (Spracklen 2014), there remains an academic bias for 'real' data in the form of interviews, physical fieldwork, administered surveys etc. In my own experience, often times social media like twitter and internet boards were relegated to 'nonsense' because of the lack of control over the content by researchers and academics. I had one graduate student in my seminar tell me that 2ch was not worth investigating (for his own topic, the rise of the right wing) because "It's just a mess of people saying whatever they want." Is a 'mess of people saying whatever they want, not a perfect example of a public space? It is as if the 'virtual' suddenly became conflated with 'the non-existent'. For every instance of slander, for every insult thrown, for every 'fuck' directed at a 'you' someone posts on twitter, the very fact that someone out there bothers to type their sentiments and opinions (no matter how inarticulate) legitimizes this as a form of data. Furthermore, precisely because it is online and accessible to all (of course at times necessitated by translation), such data is at once transparent and all the more 'valid' in terms of its un-doctored generation, so long as it is not a bot. And even then, I

argue, bots say something of the intent of *someone* out there.

Hurdles like developing the skill and ability to decipher netspeak and the ability to maneuver massive sites like 2ch are indeed present, but like any physical space in which ethnography and fieldwork is conducted, emersion, embodiment and simply getting used to a space and its properties/elements is merely a matter of time, effort, our individual dispositions, personality, fault and shortcomings, and of the methods and skills we employ. Thus when I was told by another researcher that it is not worth looking at what people tweet (but to him it was fine to use comments from people he stopped on the streets who he recorded) because "people don't behave like that in real life" (referring to tweet content), I believe people just as easily do not 'behave' like they say they do in interviews and when approached by strangers on the streets for their opinions. Furthermore, there is the larger problem here of thinking that people owe us the truth to their behavior simply by their choice of words. Therefore, online user generated narratives are simply that; yet another form of narrative. One that is generated out of a particularly salient context in this point of our lives that therefore renders it all the more relevant to turn our investigations towards.

Finally, in the case of 'fan studies' or 'music subcultures' where researchers wish to empower their subjects and to de-bunk images that paint broad brush strokes of fans/consumers as mindless receivers of culture, anonymous boards like *tanuki*, with a high variation of topics and attitudes displayed by users can undermine points that researchers wish to pursue about such previously discussed 'active collectives'. That they are not necessarily active in the ways that point to coherent values, and that it may not be values alone that are central to the existence of collectives.

9.7.1 The Chinpeace Festival

In the Summer of 2012, the Visual Kei community was rocked by a scandal that remains, even till today, as one of the best examples (or perhaps most joked about) of *sarasu* gone wild and wrong. Sometime in July of that year, fans stumbled upon the ameblo account of a girl who had *sarasu* intimate pictures she had taken of her ex-boyfriend Junjun, the guitarist of DOG in the PWO[133]. Sleeping figure and face shots taken without consent, including nudity, as well as couple-style purikura, are a staple form of 'proof' of alleged incidents as they form a tangible kind of evidence of having had an actual connection to the band member they wish to expose. Two of the multitude of pictures this girl had uploaded were however, unlike any other kind of *sarasu* shots ever posted before.

The first of these was a picture that showed Junjun, standing outside what appears to be the shower room of a mansion, completely naked, aware and giving full consent to being photographed without clothing as he looks straight into the camera, smiling while flashing a peace sign over his manhood[134]. This never before seen level of comedic, 'light-hearted' and cheeky style of photography of a Visual Kei band member had, needless to say, gone totally viral all over *Tanuki* and appeared in numerous threads outside of the DOG in the PWO thread and has since become the subject of multiple jokes, not to mention the fodder for memes ever since. The second picture that added beer to this bonfire was another 'intimate' shot: an 'ass-shot' of Junjun, posing in tight orange underwear with strategic cut-outs that revealed much body hair among other things. Once again, it was not a candid shot, but one which Junjun had clearly volunteered to partake

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[133] The PWO in the band's name stands for 'Parallel World Orchestra'.

[134] Hence the name of the scandal 'Chinpeace', '*Chinko ni peace-sainu'* (Peace to the Penis).

in, evident in the way he jokingly stretches the underpants to their maximum elastic potential.

Why had this girl decided to share such pictures with the world wide web of people? Here we have a case of what is now referred to as 'revenge porn', defined as, "The sharing of private, sexual materials, either photos or videos, of another person without their consent and with the purpose of causing embarrassment or distress" (UK Govt). And the distress and embarrassment intended was 'payback' for all the alleged wrong he had done her, which she then went on to elaborate. She blogged about how they met, and how they began dating, how wonderful he was to her in the beginning. Things started to go south when she started having 'problems at home' (she does not explain the circumstances) that required money. She told Junjun about these problems and he gave her money to help out. Little detail is given and it seems that the problems continued to persist, and while he does give her more money, he finally breaks up with her after some time.

A few months after having been dumped, she writes that she discovers she has stomach cancer and cannot afford the medical treatment. She contacts Junjun asking for money for 'the operation'. She reports that he flat out refuses to help and calls her a 'liar'. Hurt, shocked and disappointed by her former lover's treatment, she posts all their intimate pictures online, including the infamous 'Chinpeace' shot in order to embarrass him and to inform the world of what a cold, uncaring person he is as he "doesn't care if I have cancer, and doesn't care if I die!" As one *Tanuki* user posted, "Well, there goes his career," and as another briefly summarized, "Goodbye Junjun."

While the pictures she provided certainly garnered an impact, and some users expressed shock and anger towards Junjun for the way he had treated this girl, a discussion over the lack of facts soon began that provoked people to question the truth to

her claims. Users, applying common sense, as well pointing out, as in the case of someone with more detailed knowledge of stomach cancer, that in the recent pictures she had continued to post did not appear to seem as if she was sick at all. Comments such as, "Stomach cancer is super rare in people so young," "If she has cancer, why does she have all her hair?" "She makes it seem like all it takes to get rid of cancer is a single operation, as if she doesn't even know what chemotherapy is," and so on appeared on the thread, while others also pointed out that throughout the time that Junjun had given her money, in pictures of herself on her blog, she constantly had acrylic nails[135], hair extensions and wore fairly expensive clothes. Voices sympathetic to her story then began to fade as people demanded more concrete evidence to her claims of illness and questioned her motives for needing money. Some theorized Junjun had dumped her upon realizing that she was "Just kind of crazy" and "Full of ridiculous lies".

Despite the girl's original aim of *sarasu*, few appeared to believe her story in the end, although the pictures she leaked then went on to take a life of their own. Rather than having their 'fantasies' of Junjun shattered and the image of their perfectly made-up, costumed guitar hero torn to pieces, some users expressed admiration over seeing him in a very flawed 'human' state; that he had an 'unusual' amount of body hair that he did not seem to bother to have removed, that his body was not well toned and that it was nice to see someone "so comfortable with his own body" even though he was in a Visual Kei

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[135] The average price of the kinds of nails she was getting done (which requires removal and replacement maximum every three to four weeks) was 18,000 yen at the cheapest. As for her hair extensions, 400 yen per piece is the average going price in Tokyo (at the time) and she was getting about 70 pieces per session. This too requires monthly removal and replacement. Thus, the cost of maintenance for her hair and nails alone, per month would come up to around 50,000 yen at the lowest.

band[136].

Throughout the entire scandal, Junjun was a bit more quiet than usual on his blog, but neither him nor his *jimusho* made any active/public actions to acknowledge the scandal. Four years have passed since, DOG in the PWO went on to be more popular than they have ever been after the scandal and even managed to play at a live performance at Disneyland a few years later.

9.7.2 When Sarasu Ends a Career.

While Junjun may have survived the Chinpeace scandal (though he remains the, all pun intended, 'butt' of all pics-or-it-didn't-happen jokes), self-leaked *tanuki* scandals can and do affect the careers of artists depending on the nature of the scandal and the validity of the evidence provided. This was the case in the multiple scandals that a group of women came together to expose against Katsu[137], a fairly popular vocalist.

While there are six main people who came forward with their stories, since then, there have been more people who have emerged with more details as well as others who came to tell of their own similar experiences. For the sake of space, I will focus only on one of these women's stories as she has evidence that is fairly well documented.

For Mio, the individual I will focus on, it all began when she wanted to buy Katsu a Valentines present. She approached a staff member and made inquiries about Katsu's clothing size for she decided that buying him some nice clothing would make for a memorable gift. Gift-giving and letter writing practices are common in most musical fandoms in Japan and there are formal gift giving opportunities that fans are provided in the form of meet and greets, fan club and instore events. There are also various informal

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[136] It is quite common for Visual Kei musicians to remove all body hair including pubic hair and to work upon keeping a very well-toned, slim, slightly underweight physique, all of which Junjun, according to the standards of beauty common to Visual Kei, did not meet.

[137] The real names of those involved in the scandal have been omitted.

opportunities for fans to give gifts such as during *irimachi* and *demachi* sessions which in some fandoms are also formalized (they are not in Visual Kei as mentioned in the methodology section). In Visual Kei, these fall into the informal category in the sense that there are no hard and fast rules that apply to all cases as these tend to be left up to the management, the particular venues at which these take place and the preferences of individual members. Usually the two former factors come to really shape how such informal practices play out. The bigger the band (and therefore the larger their fandom), the less time members have to devote to individual fans. As for smaller bands who need to cultivate a devoted/larger fanbase paying special attention or 'personalizing' such experiences (e.g. Remembering fans names, thanking fans for previous gifts, complimenting hairstyles etc.) serves to promote and foster a stronger sense of fan devotion to the band or band member.

In order to make sure her gift would be well received, Mio made inquiries about Katsu's clothing size. The staff member approached Katsu directly and told him of Mio's inquiry. He was happy to provide his measurements. Mio then went on to purchase clothing that she said cost around 50,000 yen and passed it to the staff member who soon after that told her that "Katsu was really happy with the present and he said thank you." Mio was very, in her own words, "smiling every day…I would wake up smiling knowing that he had liked what I had given to him. That alone made me feel so happy."

The next time she did *irimachi*, Katsu went up to her personally (usually it is fans who go up to band members as vice-versa would indicate questionable special treatment. Furthermore, in the business of creating desire, it is the object of desire that should appear to be 'chased' rather than them doing any chasing), and thanked her for the present. Because he had made this special move to approach her first, Mio felt 'chosen'. However, what he said next confused her, "I'd really like a pair of boots next." While fans

are able to 'guess' what members like as presents (e.g. From their private clothing, hobbies or things they talk about on their blogs/the interests they share in interviews[138] etc.) it was an extremely awkward and unprecedented experience for Mio who was not sure how to respond, but in the moment felt very inclined to simply agree. Although she now admits that it was actually hurtful to be asked to directly (and so quickly after she had presented him with something), she also felt like she "had no choice, he had asked *me f*or something…" Once again, via that same staff member, Mio received this time not only Katsu's size information, but a list of brands that he liked. Mio bought him his boots and thus began the cycle of years of emotional abuse, extortion and bullying that she would then go on to experience.

From a pair of boots, he then went on to request for other items which became increasingly expensive and unaffordable. It would be easy to make moralistic judgements here about Mio's 'foolishness' and to make fun of what she continued to do for years for Katsu (in addition to buying presents, she would attend almost all his lives, buy goods etc.) but she had come to believe herself 'special' and 'chosen'. Throughout this time, he had never become physically involved with her, but would keep reeling her in by semi-public displays of what she thought were affection or appreciation. For example, some of the things he wore that she had bought him were no longer just for private use but had made their 'public' debut as he had worn jewelry she gave him in promotional videos.

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[138] Gifts can range from a pack of cigarettes or energy drinks passed by hand to members entering a venue to imported sports cars that are sent to the *jimusho* in order to make sure members to indeed 'receive' such gifts. I know of one band member who this happened to because he had written on his blog that fans should not waste their money on gifts to him (which he meant literally, for he was receiving many perishable food items, cigarettes etc. beyond that which he could consume or even giveaway). But, it ended up giving the impression of 'don't bother buying me anything cheap' because two months later his *jimusho* informed him that a fan had bought him a sports car and that he was to either have it sent to the *jimusho* or he could pick it up himself.

Actions like these made her feel a sense of intimacy and of 'ownership' over someone who she otherwise could not have a 'real' relationship with.

But the mind games did not end there. Katsu would at times completely ignore her to purposefully hurt her. She found his behavior increasingly confusing:

"When you love someone, sometimes the most obvious thing, you doubt, and you wonder if they say something to hurt you only because they want you to know they know they can. How do I say it? Something like that could only hurt because I loved him and him doing that affirmed to me 'He knows I love him' and it a very complex feeling."

Quickly, after giving her the cold shoulder, he would then move to 'make-up' for it. For example, he sent her a direct message telling her he reads what she writes. She could not believe that he was "paying attention to me, directly to me." From then on, he had another means to manipulate her feelings as now he would ignore messages and then selectively give her attention and share himself with her whenever it suited him. Little did Mio know, he was also doing this to other very devoted fans as well. One day he sent her a message saying "Why do you watch all these other bands as well? Don't you love me? If you really love me, why are you wasting your time and spending money on those other bands? You could be with me only."

Mio can now say that she knew all along that this was not 'right' and that she was spending and doing more than she could afford to, financially and emotionally. She highlights two incidents that she sees as leading to her wake-up call. The first was when the band announced that they were breaking up. She was devastated as she says "Of course I was stupidly devoted to him, but I loved that band, I liked all the members and I had spent years of my life following them." 2 weeks before their final live, Katsu once again 'went up' to Mio on his own volition and he said to her "I want a Chrome Hearts

wallet chain" and he specified the model he wanted. Mio who had spent a lot of money buying tickets for all of the bands final tour (including needing to spend money on hotels and transportation for their final tour which included around 26 dates across Japan), said "I can't buy that for you. I can't come up with the money in two weeks.…" The chain that he had requested for cost 500,000 yen, a price that was really beyond her, but that aside, she was disappointed that with two more weeks left of the bands career that he was not thinking of her feelings as a 'fan'. "This important thing…that I thought was important to all of us was ending and this was what was on his mind?" His response? "If you can't buy the that one, just get me the next cheapest one, it's only 300,000 yen."

It would take Mio a few more years to remove herself from the mess she had found herself in and it was only when things began to get worse for Katsu (he went solo and was not as successful) and he threatened to sue her and some other *jouren* for illegal use of his image that the girls came together to expose what they had gone through. Their stories were credible, they had kept receipts, taped conversations, screen-capped line/twitter conversations with him and they turned to tanuki to reveal to all what they had been subject to for all these years, a space that they felt would provide them a sense of 'justice' where nothing illegal had transpired. They were all 'willingly' his devoted 'sponsors' after all. Mio's story is not even the worst of those involved. Some of the other people who have come forward with their testimonies were subject to multiple forms of abuse.

With the mounting forms of evidence that came to the light detailing his ways, Katsu is no longer considered a bankable artist and is seen as a very untrustworthy person. After Mio and the others exposed not only him, but themselves on tanuki, he could no longer attract an audience to his lives (he was self-managed) and other *jimusho* and other artists themselves refused to associate with him. His ex-band members have erased his

existence from all of their social media. In fact, the exposé destroyed his career and Katsu no longer even lives in Japan.

9.8 Discussion: Views and the Effects of Scandals

There are various motives for *sarasu* and for participating in how it develops: revenge, accountability, jealousy and even ones that may not be so clear at first (if they ever are). Tanuki users tended to be very critical when there was no evidence provided, which made 'evidence based' claims stronger. While photos were sometimes thought of as incriminating evidence, they were not the only accepted forms of evidence. Sometimes other forms of documentation were also provided and accepted (scans of bank books, multiple witness claims, screen shots of conversations with accurate time stamps etc.) Demands for proof beyond worded claims is indeed sometimes an infringement of privacy, but the logic is such that it also serves to prevent wild rumors from simply spreading.

The presence of a variety of opinions shows that a general fan opinion or simply the functions of space and the sociality that is enacted within them cannot be so easily generalized. As shown by the comments on threads I have shared, some fans are emotionally affected by scandals, others find them humorous, some are simply aware that some scandal has broken but are not up to date on the details, some mature through scandals, others behave impulsively or defensively, some fans simply get bored halfway and fall out of the information loop. Some exercised sympathy, demanded for justice and the application of logic and reason. Others used the space to voice their sexist, ageist and racist ideas shamelessly. The prosumption of fans with regards to the treatment of these issues may also differ over time. Sometimes people come back to a thread after a long time-lapse, sharing their newer insights and views that have changed since they last visited.

When the Chinpeace scandal first broke out, many had assumed Junjun's career was

over. But as more evidence and discussion emerged, many sympathized with him instead and also saw him as the victim in the incident. In this case, the assumption that fans can only handle 'untainted' stars appears here to not hold true. It was an embarrassing incident for Junjun that continues to haunt him, but the majority of the public forgave him because he had not actually committed any wrong with regards to his fans or his work itself.

Can scandals add to the marketability of a star as they do in the case of leaked sex tapes for celebrities abroad as they did for Kim Kardashian and Paris Hilton? In the case of Visual Kei artists, the answer seems to be that they gain notoriety which may gain them attention, but this does not turn into them utilizing the scandals for popularity for they go completely silent on the issue and in fact may enter a sort of *jimusho* or self-imposed period of restraint from being as active as they normally would with their SNS or other activities, although this is not ever official in form, as it is for those in the Idol scene in Japan.

Related to the formalities practiced in other genres of entertainment, another difference from mass-media scandals here is that there is no pre-fixed format of apology-rehab-reintroduction upon self-imposed exile-reintegration formula that allows for a star or talents comeback. Because tanuki threads are constantly bumped and fans continue to play vigilante, artists either have to simply grin and bear it if they want to stay active by trooping-on; the overall display of public endurance is the best means of surviving scandals, because unless they are involved in actual potential legal trouble, most Visual Kei artists simply put on a brave front and do not have a standardized method to address it publicly (although this too depends on the content of the scandal) that allows them a guaranteed to re-emerge safely comeback.

Moreover, new found notoriety and attention does not turn into garnering new fans even if the attention does result in some curious people who may not have been so

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familiar with them before the scandal, checking the bands work out. There may be a brief increase of hits and views, but these may be voyeuristic or simply curious in nature, and these people do not in general turn into fans as a result of scandals. In fact, they may feel put off by the trouble of associating themselves on a more visibly personal level with a band member or band embroiled in scandal. Also, while Junjun was able to recover somewhat, it was not Junjun that went on to become more popular, it was the band, the entity larger than Junjun which can be credited to the head of Resistar Records at the time (the jimusho that DOG in the PWO are signed to, who are a subsidiary of Free-Will), who upped the visibility of all of the bands under their label with more intensified promotion on YouTube in the form of variety programs and other activities.

It should also be mentioned that while some do see Junjun as a victim of revenge porn, the content that was leaked continues to undermine his attempts to be taken seriously as an individual at times. Junjun himself often claims that one of the things most often said to him are "Hey, you are *actually* not a bad guitarist!" Also, opposing ideas continue to emerge, some admire that he simply went on and 'survived' and there are those who believe he should have quit, because he will forever be remembered as the 'Chinpeace guy'. The variation of opinions shows that fans have shown room to consider the 'person' that is the star and are empathetic and sympathetic to multiple potential 'victims' of scandals. Discussion threads and scandals do indeed show much disagreement of opinion and are evidence that even as people do participate in collective behavior and value the feeling of togetherness that prosumer activity may generate, expressions of public, visible forms of communal behavior should not be taken as evidence that they necessarily share values and identities all the time in their fandom or that they are of importance to them in other areas of their fandom.

Posting is a prosumer-led activity that exists outside the continuum of the usual

celebrity profit-making machine we see present in the cases of mass-media generate scandals. On tanuki, a form of discussion that is not visible in mass-media forms of scandal is possible and it is one that doesn't just die down when the hype of the scandal is over. For example, people continue to keep tabs Katsu's activities and attempt to warn others of his past actions when they appear not to know.

Users are able to affect the production process in that the transparency they seek to create can destroy careers (as in with Katsu's case). This too serves as evidence that online content generated by people shouting into the void cannot be relegated to not having any real effect in real life. Katsu is not the only example of this. In a bid to distract fans from a scandal that had broken out regarding one particular individual's bullying of his fellow label members and his spreading of STD's via unprotected sex, this same band member attempted to distract fans and gain sympathy by fabricating a scandal of his own. He claimed that his car had been stolen amongst several other alleged threats to him, making him look like he was being hunted down by a faceless mob. What fans had managed to prove by their banding together on Tanuki to investigate the facts was that images of his 'stolen car' were actually stolen stock images themselves and that he had fabricated the theft. Said individual and Katsu have had their careers destroyed once exposure revealed them to be dishonest, amongst many other things deemed problematic and intolerable.

Fans are not the only ones who participate in *sarasu*. Band members on the men only thread too participate in *sarasu*, reporting on *jimusho* abuse, *bangya* to be weary of, *mistu* deals gone wrong, money being stolen by former members or staff, etc. Once again, this is subject to lies and slander, but artists are actively engaged in the prosumption of tanuki as well. I knew of one major label Budokan class band member who was so addicted to reading and keeping up on things on tanuki that his manager put a cap on how

many hours he could look at it while at work. He was not allowed to look at it on official work days and days where there was an activity schedule for the hours he was at work, as the manager felt his mood and morale were too effected and subject to what he read about himself or his band on tanuki and this would in turn effect his performances.

It would appear that online discussion boards like tanuki can function as a space in which public accountability and coming together/sharing not for the re-generation of profit alone is visible and active. This form of prosumption could be seen as a kind of D.I.O (doing it ourselves, together while acknowledging difference, conflict, confronting scandals and problems and sharing a space for debate) can be potentially far more powerful than the kind of D.I.Y promoted by prosumer capitalism in which individual consumers are 'empowered' and encouraged to participate in the production process.

This presentation of empowered fans has also emerged in the attempt to rescue fans from appearing as mindless passive consumers, as fans are then said to be active and creative in their readings and re-interpretations of text much to the chagrins of producers (Jenkins 1992). Scholars have noted that this has come to produce the increasing rationalization and formatting of how consumers participate. At the same time giving fans the impression that the gap between them and their favorite stars, brands and products is being closed and that desire and actual productive and emotional connection can be obtained through such forms of participation. While such methods do increase room for communication and feedback, scholars have noted that they have also created closure for spaces for resistance as even that can be co-opted by capital as raw material for future products.

What I have tried to highlight here with the use of Tanuki and by focusing on the act of *sarasu* in context of the breaking of scandals is to show how a do it yourself or prosumer logic can be used in a number of ways to achieve particular goals and how

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prosumption can also be used to challenge such goals. Prosumption here refers to both the willing generation of content by users as well as the coming together of people who possess different skills, opinions and knowledge to contest these goals in order to make sense and validate the 'facts' of the alleged scandals. Unlike the mass-media presentation of scandals previously discussed, here there is no pre-fixed format that allows for the inevitable comeback but instead room for variance, debate and for multiple submissions of facts to displace facts which is actively produced not for the (direct) service of capitalism, but by a multiplicity of actors within an atmosphere that seeks to promote both 'the right to know' and to then go on to ask 'why is this right' and to review it.

9.9 Expose It Yourself: We've Overexposed Ourselves

Ironically and also perhaps to some, predictably so, the presence and use of an anonymous digital space like tanuki while effective in providing information at times where there may be no other means, has not resulted in a general state where the Visual Kei scene is held to higher or improved standards of treatment for its prosumers nor has it empowered prosumers to demand for tangible changes in a directed way. It does hold some people accountable for what they have done in terms of the court of public opinion, but what is has simultaneously produced as well instead is an atmosphere of doubt and distrust, one that floats over into other arenas of consumption (as shown by the fan who could no longer discern if the band members were 'good people' earlier in the chapter). Even if one's favorite artist is not revealed to be a creep in disguise, sometimes their friends and band members are. And even when they are not involved in an identifiable scandal, the sheer number of lies and volumes of vicious rumors a user may stumble upon can sow the seeds of doubt. Tanuki is constantly described by its own users as a shitty, dirty, cesspool of lies and darkness and so if one is going to spend time rolling (or put more accurately scrolling) around in the mud, one is perhaps going to end up feeling dirty.

The flipside any sort of egalitarian or democratic potential that a space like tanuki may display also comes at the cost of an intensified surveillance for both bands and fans. Many have blamed tanuki for the disintegrating of various social fan practices that were seen to have had communicative value in person. Before the advent of Web 2.0 and the explosion of social media and tanuki, fans used to gather at *shuukai*, weekend or pre-live meetups where simply through the connection of liking Visual Kei, large groups of fans would group in public spaces, form friendships, talk, take pictures of themselves and parade their like for Visual Kei proudly in public. These practices were so visible that one who may not even know of Visual Kei somehow vaguely knows of images from the late 1990's and early 2000's of 'cosplaying youth at Jingu-bashi in Harajuku' or at Osaka-jo park without even realizing that these were actually Visual Kei *shuukai*. One of the many reasons this practice has disappeared is that with the growth of Tanuki, gossip, surveillance and cyber-bullying led to many cosplayers and people participating in *shuukai* to simply no longer want to be subject to these forms of harassment. Their looks, cosplay skills, conversations, behavior etc. became gossiped about online leading to *shuukai* becoming spaces where participants no longer felt welcome or safe. I do not want to paint a one-dimensional causal link between the rise of the web with the loss of such public spaces, so while it is not within the scope of my research or of this chapter, I do want readers to be aware of some of the reasons you do not see Visual Kei cosplayers of fans out in places like Jingu-bashi on weekends anymore. This also has to do partly with the internet but it was because as the images of these girls began to spread across the globe and their faces used as part of the montage of 'Contemporary Tokyo Youth' in thousands of documentaries, television programs and other forms of media without their consent and without context. This invited more and more tourists to come to see them at Jingu-bashi snapping pictures of them and harassing them as if they were zoo animals. It

may not have been the intention of tourists to actually do this, but they had become a 'thing to do' on trips to Tokyo that were never investigated or respected but simply an event that had entered the imagination of tourists and thus tourists from all over the world (and Japan as well) would come to Visual Kei fan meetings with their cameras and invade the space leaving the girls with not only no room to conduct their own practices as they did, they were also now subject to global gaze, objectified and misunderstood on a global scale.

This led to the shifting of social gatherings to simply be located in smaller or more micro-forms. Fans would gather before lives, but what this led to was groupings not of Visual Kei fans, but simply of particular bands fans. Nor did any of the surveillance disappear, but instead within band fandoms people became more and more aware of 'who to avoid' or 'what someone did the other day at a live' as the fandoms shrunk into themselves and into their own smaller online communities within 2ch and tanuki (and other once popular platforms like older bbs, mixi and ameblo). Today Twitter, Twit cast, YouTube and Instagram are the favored platforms (also because these are the platforms that band members use for their official accounts), alongside tanuki which continues to operate as I have described here.

"Visual Kei used to feel really rebellious, just look at the way people dress. I mean back in the day when a Visual Kei fan or bandman would get on the train, people would not only stare at them, they would move to sit elsewhere" says Nagisa, a former band member. Today, Visual Kei fans stare at one another and then quickly to their smartphones and sometimes depending on what they've read of each other should they identify one another from their profiles on twitter or Instagram, they may move to stand elsewhere.

Needless to say, not every fan is so deeply affected by the internet, indeed some

have done well to not care. Nitta even has a uniquely positive spin on how to view it that he shared with me "Actually, I think 2ch is a creative way to think about how one can really resist caring about what others say. I'm not saying we shouldn't be concerned about safety, but there is something kind of cool about not caring about what others think."

Net surveillance not only effects the sociality of fans, it deeply concerns the practices and conduct of band members. As was the concern of Taisuke, one's image, reputation and privacy are now at the mercy of Tanuki that functions as a vehicle of prosumption. Even when it is not a scandal of the Katsu scale, with potential voyeurs around at any public moment, band members lose much of their sense of privacy and ability to even have it at times. There are threads on tanuki simply reporting on who was seen where and doing what with who that can be updated by anyone who claims to have spotted a member. Sometimes pictures are included.

As has been shown, because details and information that involve anything to do with the members are also consumed by fans as a means to keep up on the sincerity of the members and as a safety net for their own consumption and devotion, details that may seem mundane are never that to the fan who seeks to cultivate a closeness or experience a kind of intimacy with the artist. If enough sightings of an artist in a particular area are reported, he can be assumed to live there. Is he spotted alone? What sort of places does he haunt? What items was he seen purchasing? Even if he is not being stalked by a particular stalker, his movements can be documented, his living conditions analyzed by the anonymous crowd. How otherworldly, enchanting, mysterious and different can he remain when he steps on the stage when even his daily chores are subject to consumption and potential ridicule. This is not something band men are unware of, they intentionally take the least crowded cars on trains (they check the information on, you guessed it, the internet), when they go out with their wives, girlfriends or children they avoid high traffic

areas at high traffic times. They wear hats, masks, and sunglasses at all times. Their private time, leisure and play are all areas that have been colonized by their work as artists. It is for reasons like these when even if they may not want to, they come to resent 'Visual Kei fans' even if they know that not all their fans would subject them to this or perpetuate such forms of surveillance.

For some fans, especially those who become the target of net users, Visual Kei can become something they no longer feel enjoyment about, or at least not so easily. The live space that provides them their enjoyment and wherein lies that otherworldly potential can cease to be a place of solace. They not only feel watched by other fans, but they can come to doubt the sincerity of the artists. Fans describe becoming *ningenfushin* (to lose faith in humanity/people) after long term exposure to tanuki. There are no communal gatherings of any kind at a general level organized by fans themselves as there once was with *shuukai* and fans tend to stick to their smaller groups of friends these days. I will not go so far as to extend this to all prosumers of Visual Kei, nor to say that this is the fate of their prosumption, but this is a fairly common experience where the joys of play for fans is ruined by the nature of work it takes to validate and authenticate their prosumer experience. The immaterial product that is the band man's sincerity and authenticity towards his profession and work in turn, involves labor he is has little control of as it bleeds into his private time, leaving even leisure to be potentially colonized by his work. The effort it takes to play smart, has left some with no room to play at all.

How does one continue to feel motivated, inspired or even find meaning in work one has chosen that began from the simple joyous act of play that now turns all encompassing, invasive and consuming? It is with this in mind that we turn to the final skill, that of reconnaissance and monitoring, the 'skill for the self' that is practiced and rationalized in order to keep one's goals, motivation and self in check and on course.

Chapter 10 The Skills of Playwork: Reconnaissance and Monitoring. Playwork and Prosumption Over Time and The Life Course.

10.1 Staying and Leaving

In this chapter I will briefly describe the final skill, that of reconnaissance and monitoring, and examine how prosumers use this as a way to continue to pursue their activities. Basically, this the skill to keep going, how people self-motivate and communicate their commitment to themselves and to others. It is reflexive, something that changes with time, and experience. It is interactional and relational in that one cultivates this in comparison to others, just as one is influenced by how others craft, justify, and defend their paths. As utterances, it also contributes to notions of self as an artist within the frame of Visual Kei. Without this skill one can become jaded or may want to exit (which many do).

In this chapter I will also examine cases of both people who have continued to pursue Visual Kei careers and prosumption for over a long period of time and cases of those who have left, whether they have *intai* (retire) from the industry or they have *agaru* (get off) as fans. I also examine what sort of effects having prosumed Visual Kei has had on their lives in the long- term sense in order to see if subcultural affiliations have any lasting meanings over the life course.

10.2 Reconnaissance in Practice

In this section I will introduce four cases of artists who have decided to stay in the Visual Kei industry. The first one is a younger artist who could be said to be very strategic about his approach to career. The second artist was less strategic and emphasized mutual respect and enjoyment. Despite their very different takes, what they both have in common though is a sense of responsibility towards 'not betraying' oneself and the audience and respecting individuality.

The next two are older artists who have been in bands since the 1990s. One very much wants to continue making music and is active in his approach to embracing newness and changes. The other continues somewhat indifferently and actually has an interest in other things, but finds himself obliged to continue music, also because he does not want to betray those who have supported him; his fans. They both also emphasized an idea of music as almost a kind of higher power and attached almost religious properties to it when talking about it. Both of them also accorded the respecting differences and being flexible with regards to change as reasons for being able to continue on in their music careers.

Given that the circumstances and context in which these individuals 'rose to fame' are very different (they are all slightly different in ages), they each present divergent takes on what it takes to continue one's career. Yet all of them did present philosophies on how to keep going which involved negotiating work and play.

10.2.1 The Three-year Plan: Ikioi, Branding and Professionalism

Akiya is 27 years old and has been pursuing music since he was a teenager. He roadied straight out of high school and has been in 3 bands so far. He says that the difficult experience he had in his first band of being the youngest but most ambitious member made him realize that without concrete plans and strategies, bands would only be able to go so far and would plateau. Being the youngest in his first band, he was told by his more experienced older members that he was 'over-planning' and expecting too much. To him they were too caught in what they took for granted as norms, too embedded in the limits of the Visual Kei industry and therefore underestimated the fickle behavior of consumers. Akiya says "Actually everything, your success and where you will go, you can see it within three years. It never takes longer than that. You need to build that momentum within 3 years. Any longer than that and you are not likely to succeed." I ask him what the momentum consists of and how one builds it and it was to him something that was

very much grounded in tangible achievements that mirrors the pyramid of *ikioi* as per live venue capacity expansion that I introduced in Chapter 6. He also adds,

> "If you can mirror this and at the same time push your band in two firmly understandable concepts, what you have is a good recipe for media, market and the audience to understand what you are about. Then you need a string of releases that show you can do this in more than one pattern. So, let's say you hit them first with a hard 'classic' track, then you do the same thing but you add some catchier pop elements, next a ballad, then a mid-tempo song. You need to keep the momentum going."

Akiya is adamant that this has to be done in three years and is a good recipe for success. He has already managed to achieve his first success this way, which he attributes to his second band coming from the same understanding as him that this was a logical, realistic and do-able strategy. This 'three-year plan' strategy was something that I had heard of before, but was expressed particularly strongly by Akiya and seems to have gained currency amongst band members of his generation. Akiya was also able to verbalize it beyond a simple upping of capacity of live house and of audience numbers, as he tied this to several other aspects such as branding and market-trends:

> "There are many reasons, but I think the biggest reason this has to be done in three years is because after that, you lose your freshness in the eye of the consumer. You can only really seem 'new' for this period of time. Just look at the history of any music, not just Visual Kei. After three years, if you can establish yourself to a more general audience or have succeeded in building a core audience, something revolutionary will come along at this point and your concept and 'newness' will fade naturally. So even if you have a name and support, it will be hard to grow it even more from then on. Consumers will feel

they already know what you are about, your brand, even if you personally feel 'But I'm just starting!"

Akiya went on to emphasize that the three-year time-line was necessary for the artists own realistic expectations and for their well-being. He found that it motivated him and his band as with each goalpost they reached, they knew they were 'on-track'. This self-monitoring was not simply a feel-good pat on the back, but he says that it also functioned to make sure they were not wasting their time becoming over-invested in things that may matter more to the affairs of artists:

"To be honest I am also very particular about things (*kodawari ga tsuyoi)* and I understand when artists have very strong ideas about what they want to do, like maybe the audience won't like it but it's interesting to them. However, I will say to these artists, what is your purpose for the band? You cannot be that way and expect to sell and then lament when you don't. You need to find the balance between what you want to make and what the rest of the band's needs are. You need to respect the input of the other members because they probably have the band's overall interests in mind as well. And if your aim is to sell, then you need to see the bigger picture and not be particular about those small things that you may feel an ownership over just because you created it. Don't waste your time on that."

Which is why checkpoints on the plan also functioned for Akiya and his band as a mode of reconnaissance; to make sure that they were not just doing well, but actively ascertaining that their strategies were working in tandem with their goals which he felt also kept them realistic about their direction. Without even touching on any of my ideas about playwork, Akiya even brought up what he felt enabled him to turn music into work:

"Because we planned from the start this way, we could say our band was work.

I could really call it work, because there was tangible proof (earnings and records set) and that brought more work opportunities both for the band and as individuals. If I we didn't have a plan or just expected or hoped that people would understand our music somehow or if we took it slowly, then it might have just been 'band activity' that many people do, but they cannot call it work, because they still have to do other work to survive."

While it may seem to be about earnings and being able to support oneself solely through one's band or music, what the statement above also indicates is that work is both an economic reality and a mindset towards it. It is also interesting that Akiya did not bring up 'luck' or timing as a factor, which was something many said about the successes of the bands who had managed to gain a mainstream audience in the 1990's. For someone like Akiya, individual effort (and the coming together of individuals with this mindset) and having a strategic professional consciousness was what he attributed as a difference between those who made it and those who didn't. He also repeatedly emphasized respecting the other member's input and not having one person dominate and dictate activities.

"Form a band with people who you can respect creatively as well as professionally. I think another important factor is keeping the mutual respect. In my first band I felt they didn't respect me, because I was younger and inexperienced. Whatever I said had no value to them. The next band I formed, I listened to the youngest member and always asked him what he thought. We are all so different, so having a different view is normal, but the important thing is to respect that so people feel like they are participating rather than being forced to do something."

Despite being very economic-minded about things, being able to turn music into

profession was to Akiya also a way to maintain and meet audience expectations. "The fans want to see you rise. They support you and want to see your dream come true. It is also a dream for them. So being able to sell is not some dirty thing that people make it out to be. It means you respected the fans support in you. If you have many great songs but no one except a few people are listening to it, they will say "I wish more people knew this song." Therefore, I say, make their dreams come true and sell."

10.2.2 The Fourteen-year No Plan: Extensions of Play

Gen could not have been more different from Akiya. He says he began his band with his friends while he was in *senmongakkou*, simply as a place to have fun. "Somewhere along the way, other people told us "Hey, you guys are really good!" and so we managed to bring more people into our circle…the next thing I knew, we were playing lives all the time. It felt so good to have the thing you love to do for fun be recognized by other people and turn into their fun as well."

I ask Gen if he and his band members ever had a 'three-year plan.' He laughs and says: "No, no, no! I think such things are dangerous…I mean it's expecting too much! Someone will crack under that kind of pressure. I think it's more important to always keep enjoying yourself…that is why we are still together, 14 years now. Kacchan (their drummer) always says (when asked how they stayed together) "This is the extension of our play!" and I think it's true. We wouldn't be able to continue if it was some kind of obligation to living out a plan."

The other reason he attributes to the continuation of his band is communication. He says there have been times when having spent so much time with one another, it is easy to assume that no communication is needed and things get taken for granted. After a particularly heated fight between the members, they decided to create a separate group chat (they already had one), for 'after thoughts' that may have been difficult to voice in

the moment or for expressing ideas and feelings that maybe had changed.

> "The point of making a separate chat for this was so that there was a space to talk about these things that wouldn't get dismissed in our everyday talk. It was also a way of telling each other that it is okay to change your mind and it is okay to tell each other, we are here to listen to each other and we respect each other."

For Gen, the reconnaissance he and his band mates practiced was more about creating spaces of care by checking in with the members and making their voices heard. It was one that was contingent on the mutual sense of respect that they shared for one another. It was also expressed in ideas that work should be enjoyable: "It's often said that our work is high risk, well there is some truth to it. But I think I can also say that because we chose to do something we really like, it also doesn't feel like work! It is so much easier to withstand difficulties when it is something you really love."

Mutual respect and loving what you do would then for Gen would also naturally turn into the willpower to keep going:

> "Actually, the audience can tell when your heart is not really in it. They are very sensitive to such things, because you cannot lie at lives. You cannot really make people enjoy themselves if you yourself are not enjoying it yourself. If you are suffering and doing something you don't want to do, then you are not just betraying yourself, but also the audience. If it reaches that point, your performance and feelings about what you are doing will be half-hearted, and it will show."

Despite a very different approach and values from Akiya, what both of them felt was at the heart of being able to continue was a sense of respect and honesty that first had to emerge from oneself in order to be really practiced within the band. They both also spoke of not 'betraying' the fans and rewarding/returning their support with results;

whether showing them you are serious about your work and can therefore sell, or showing them that you are sincerely having fun and offering them 'authentically felt play'.

10.2.3 The 'Music in Me' and Letting People Be

Like Akiya, Atsuto became a roadie after leaving school and now twenty years later, he is still a Visual Kei musician and his band have never stopped activities. They have experienced going major, but are now under their own indies label. Atsuto says the biggest reason they have stayed together is that the five of them do not have arguments about music. They may argue or clash from time to time about other matters, but they have always been on the same page about their music. While they did not renew their major contract after failing to meet the labels expectations, he also emphasizes that it was because the label was trying to make them into something they were not, which was an issue the whole band was on the same page about. While his bands 'color' is strong and his voice is particularly identifiable and unique, Atsuto says, "Our sound is recognizable, but the weird thing is, we all have very different tastes and interests and maybe our sound ends up being a combination of those different things we bring to the band. We don't ever fight about 'musical direction', because we never set one direction to begin with." And it is this *shibararesuginakatta* (not over-bounded) aspect of the creative process which Atsuto credits to their being able to continue making music. If it were not for that, it would result in what he calls a bad work atmosphere, leading to a breakdown in communication between band members.

Atsuto also extends this to matters outside of his band. "When the members want to do something else, I let them. I never stop them from their side projects. If they have other things they may be interested in pursuing then they should. If they are just bound to the band then it can feel like a cage. It is better just to let a man be." Some of the other band members have other musical projects and one owns an izakaya. In many ways, like

Akiya and Gen, what Atsuto also saw as essential to the maintenance of a working relationship was respect for the individual, except in his case, age was something he brought up explicitly:

> "You will change as you grow older. This is normal and so maybe there were things you didn't get to do because when you were younger, you put everything in the band because it was sacred to you… it was more than just work. I think this is why many people in our industry don't last. It is not because they hate what they do, but they love it too much and when you are really passionate, it's easy to get burned. I could keep that alive, well I experienced many hardships…but I never once felt like there was nothing more to make. There is always something new I can do. There is still music in me. I don't know where it comes from. But I can still hear it. So I keep going."

When ask if he finds his work fun, he is very amused and he says "Of course! I am so lucky, I get to do something really fun. I never wanted to do anything else. I think it is so great to do a job where you make the happiness of others." Atsuto also mentioned that he felt that Visual Kei was unique in that age did not limit it, but because there were many older successful bands who stayed together and because it was an eclectic genre to begin with, that one could remake it however one liked, no matter one's age. "I don't like fixed views like "Adults don't do that" or like "You should act your age". My idols who are older than me are all still in bands and I respect them. All you have to be at any age is honest with yourself."

10.2.4 Respecting the Audience: People Want Music of Me and Being a Professional

Unlike Atsuto, Jo, who was older than Atsuto, did not feel he was able to be totally honest all the time. "Actually, I want to do something else, but people seem to still want music of me. In a way, I realize I was gifted or chosen, so I continue music because

other people still want to hear my songs."

Jo has seen many of his peers from his youth quit music to go on to do a variety of things. He envies the quiet peace of their lives, but he also feels that he would not have been satisfied with a life like that: "I know what I am good at. When I was younger I was so confident, almost to the point of being an idiot (laughs). Things were different then. Rivalries were stronger and for no reason if you didn't defend yourself and believe in yourself, it gave room for people to attack you. That made me very strong, that made me what I am now."

Jo is active both as a solo artist and in a band, but things are not actually okay between the members, who Jo says do not meet outside of live performances or obligatory promotions. He credits the advancements of recording technology whereby it is not even necessary for the members to get together to make music anymore. Although he is used to this situation, he says that they stay together because they agree that the band is still important to them, and more so to their fans.

"Even if we are not best friends, the point is, we understand what we have to do and also it is still important to us. Our fans have supported us for so long, so what is the point of breaking the band up? It is not like we hate each other or we hate our band. We just don't really need to talk to each other outside of music. But we respect that place (the band) that we have made and we respect our fans who still come to see us."

One of the reasons why Jo can probably do this is because he was not of the generation where he had to provide any individualized service or sell his time to fans and therefore, has always maintained a personal distance from them. In other words, the style of consumption his fans are used to and his unreachable position has always positioned him as 'otherworldly' and therefore the members relationship with one another has always

been shrouded in a kind of celebrity mystery that are not held to the same standards as bands that are more accessible than his are. Jo's sense of professionalism can therefore be located in simply showing up and performing rather than having to convince his fans of his authenticity and sincerity towards his profession in a heated way. Put otherwise, Jo is accepted as a professional and he enacts this. This is actually the complete opposite of Akiya who because is much younger and has not reached the established success of someone like Jo (although Akiya is quite famous, he is nowhere near Jo's level of fame) has crafted a very strong script of professionalism with his concrete ideas of branding and strategy. In comparison, older artists like Atsuto said nothing of strategy and were more concerned with interpersonal relationships and accepting differences between members and simply finding a way to accommodate for those differences. The older artists also spoke more about music to them in a very personal almost spiritual like sense (Atsuto with his 'music in me' and Jo's idea of being 'chosen' by music) whereas Akiya and Gen who are very much tired to the service skills required of the bands of their generations spoke of their music as having value when it was recognized by others. This could serve as evidence of the effects of labor on their understanding of the location of the value of the product, the older ones seeing it as residing within the artist and the younger ones as seeing it as present when it is recognized by others.

As working musicians, what all of them had in common was this; they had all developed a script of professionality regarding the topic of the fans/audience and they attributed how and why they were able to continue in terms of some sort of respect or honoring the demand their fans had bestowed on them. The ways in which this was phrased was also interesting as the word *uragiru* (to betray) was something that they all used as not wanting to do to their audience. This worked not only to reaffirm the shared social meaning and relevance of their music, it also served as a form of self-monitoring

and posturing to authenticate their attitudes and believes about their chosen professions and sense of professionality.

10.2.5 Professional Consciousness

It is this notion of *proishiki* (professional consciousness) that was mentioned that is in of itself a practice of monitoring. This refers to what kind of sense of professionalism one should have to be a realistic worker vs. just an immersed dreamer who is just playing. How to believe in and also sell otherworldliness. How to balance what you like to do vs. what has to be done and the multiple roles that need to be accounted for, as an *ongaku hyougensha* (person expressing themselves through music), bandman, musician, entertainer, artist, affect producer, service provider, craftsman, technician and that 'this is work.' The need to perform *proishiki* can be so strong it overrides 'i*shiki*': consciousness about what one is actually doing, happening and wants to do, hence the reconnaissance needed to combat the monitoring as we see with Jo who actually does not want to do music anymore, but says he goes on for the sake of the audience. Akiya's roadmap meanwhile was quite widely talked about amongst musicians for a while as due to his success, people wondered if maybe there was some truth to it. However, no one found it to be actually completely do-able or applicable to their own circumstances and there are many musicians who for reasons I cannot really go into here, felt he had overemphasized his individual effort and had put down many others at the same time. Furthermore, his band broke up and many know that the reason made public was not the 'real reason' of dissolution. Mastering and possessing all various skills, checking of all points from a strategy, being able to turn it into paid work does not necessarily 'equal success' as the band as a unit is far more fragile than any one person's skill set.

10. 3 Agaru and Intai

In this section I will introduce several former musicians who have left the Visual Kei world and some fans who have also given up their fandoms. *Intai* (retire) is straightforward in meaning (but not in reality of experience as I will show), but the word used to denote the leaving of the fandom deserves a bit more attention here for there are several layers of meaning. *Agaru* is a verb that is thought to be used in the same way as *shigoto o agaru* (get off from work) or *ame ga agaru* (rain has stopped) which indicates the ending of something. However, some fans feel that it means to emerge and 'rise up' from the 'darkness' that is the otherworld of Visual Kei into the light of the 'normal' world. It also means to lead a life as per 'normal' standards (not in the darkness of a basement floor live-house or doing nightwork to support your bangya hobby and lifestyle, and out of the dark feelings that come from identifying as a *menhera/yandere/chuunibyou*). What is interesting here too is that *intai* recognizes that a position or status that is very much tied to work and labor is the thing being left but *agaru* in the case of fans carries a weight of a loaded meaning of leaving behind a negative lifestyle.

What I wish to show here is a variety of post Visual Kei prosumption trajectories exists and people leave for a variety of reasons that are not always clearly anticipated or clean-cut. The process itself was neither emotionally or mentally easy for any of these people for Visual Kei had come to carve a space in their lives to which much of their own sense of self had become tied to. The outcomes were quite different, but what many of them had in common was that they were at once in awe of the strong feelings, dreams and passion Visual Kei evoked in them when they were active in the scene and they also engaged at the same time, in the humorizing and re-affirming some of the stigma surrounding Visual Kei.

10.3.1 Agaru: Ordinary Joys, Kuro Rekishi, Empty Normalcy

Contrary to popular belief, fans did not 'grow up' and simply quit being a fan so long as they still found their fandom to be enjoyable. In fact, many active older bands like BUCK-TICK, D'ERLANGER, LUNA SEA etc. have fans who are around the same ages, as well as older than the band members themselves. This is not simply a handful of fans as these bands continue to play large 10000 plus capacity venues every year and the majority of their fans are in their 40's and 50's. I know many fans who have spoken of the joys of 'growing' older together with their favorite bands. Band members themselves like Sakurai Ao of cali≠gari and Die from Dir en grey often mention being motivated by and glad that the heroes from their youth who were their own inspirations to form Visual Kei bands, are still around and active.

However, many people do *agaru* from their fandoms, but it has less to do with actual age itself and there are numerous reasons. For example, as shown in Chapter 9, Katyusha was actually bullied into giving up seeing the band she liked and she made it seem like she was giving up because she was going to start working full time once she graduated from school. In reality, she went on to watch other bands but continued to be bullied which resulted in her leaving completely. In Chapter 8, I showed how Satomi did not give up being a fan and still held on the *cheki* even after the band she loved broke up, but somehow fell out of the fandom as she did not find another band she liked as much. When the band she loved broke up, she was already 33. Other people report being forced to give up temporarily from attending lives (once having children and engaged in child-care) but returned, sometimes even years later once their schedule allowed them to. Sometimes people become so involved in a particular fandom and there are *ningenkankei* (interpersonal relations) issues that have nothing to do with the actual music or enjoyment of lives, but squabbles amongst fans that make fans give up their activities. Some fans

agaru from a particular band only, but continue to like Visual Kei. Then there are fans like Mio (the girl who was abused by Katsu in Chapter 9), who were subjected to some really awful experiences and therefore left her fandom quite traumatized.

What I did find was, when fans actually *agaru* for good there were mainly two reasons. The first was a change of heart and feelings about the scene (or a particular band) that would linger, affect them emotionally, and change their perception about Visual Kei. The second was a more 'natural' progression of falling out of the loop which was not intentional, but usually caused by moving on to a different station in life which was most of the time work or family related. In such cases, sometimes they either changed their ways of prosuming Visual Kei or found it hard to continue to make a space for it in their lives and so gave up.

When Remi's favorite member left the band she liked, she was in total shock. She says she wanted to continue supporting the remaining members, but after they revealed the new lineup and released new music, she found that the band dynamic had changed and she no longer liked them the way she used to. Remi was once a *jouren* for this band, travelling all over the country to see them. She continued to watch other bands for 7 years after the breakup of her favorite, but she never found another band to be as passionate about and she only watches one band a year now. She describes her feelings about Visual Kei this way:

"After the members left, there was a huge hole in my heart. It was never filled again…I tried to simply carry on with my life and I tried to enjoy Visual Kei lightly. I still like it but I cannot say I like it the way I used to. It put so much into supporting them and I don't think I can ever do that again for anyone." Remi considers herself an ex-*bangya* because seeing one live a year and no longer keeping up with any news, she feels there is no 'activity' which makes her a fan anymore. Here, we see how a fan leaves because their

feelings change, but it is almost as if she was traumatized by the shock of how all that she had invested into the band simply went 'nowhere'. Furthermore, she did not just quit but attempted to adjust her consumption in a more casual way, which did not work for her as she continued to feel empty and confused about what had happened with the band she loved. She says her life is peaceful now as she isn't stressed out about fandom issues, but that she has a kind of 'empty normalcy' that she also dislikes and she wishes to be passionate about something again one day but she doesn't know when that will happen.

When I ask Remi if she feels Visual Kei has affected her life, she struggles to explain it and I can understand why. Remi, like Satomi, still seems to partly feel a kind of lingering regret about the band she loved not going anywhere and like Satomi, invested so much of her time, money, effort etc. into them. Viewed from the outside, many would see her past behavior as an obvious risk and even foolish, but Remi really believed they would go somewhere and therefore received a rude awakening from her dream. She is not able to completely put it behind her, which is why she does not laugh about it or make self-deprecating remarks as others (who I will later show) did when they had digested or 'made peace' their clear departures from the fandom. Remi actually cried during our interview. She says while there were other fans like her who also gave up when the members changed, she does not know how they feel and when she was asked by the other *jouren* as to why she wasn't coming anymore (once they restarted with new members) she did not explain her feelings to these *jouren* as well, as she did not want to seem like *onimotsu no furukabu*[139] (old baggage) still holding on to the past.

Another fan, Hisae, gave up being a fan as her husband got transferred to Singapore and she literally fell out of the (physical) loop of being able to keep up with

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[139] The literal translation would be 'old stock that is now baggage/a burden.' *Furukabu* (old stock) refers to a person who was there from long ago.

her fandom here. Somehow the distance and major change of environment had pulled her out of her old life so much that she did not even feel compelled to check up on things online, a situation that was compounded as she got pregnant while abroad and soon became too busy with her baby and work. Hisae used to even 'foster' band men back in Japan as she was the *mitsukano* of a band member who she even lived with for a while. She actually feels much better about herself now as she is with someone who supports her instead who she feels confident enough to have a family with. She says she still loves Visual Kei and will always be a huge hide fan, but she doesn't care about being active and doesn't have the time and space for it in her life anymore.

One amusing thing about Hisae is, she continues to dress and do her makeup in a very 'Visual Kei' style that is no longer even found in Japan and so despite having *agaru*, she continues to like the aesthetic and does not feel a desire to tone it down even after becoming a mother. She finds this empowering and she says it makes her feel unique. She also mentions that she would not be able to do this in Japan so easily but somehow being abroad makes this possible and she even enjoys the compliments she gets from people who find her aesthetic cool or unique. Hisae feels this perspective of herself is *saikou no anti-aging (*the best kind of anti-ageing) as it allows her to not become preoccupied by defining herself as a mother, which she says she feels many Japanese women all too easily fall into once having children.

Kanade meanwhile stopped going to lives once he was transferred to a company in Gifu prefecture which was quite far from the city area (where there are live houses). He says that in his first year there, he made effort to still try to watch bands if they came to the city, but he eventually got too tired to organize things by himself and he also began to develop other interests and hobbies that were more interesting to him which limited the amount that he could spend on leisure. Kanade found himself in a situation where he

slowly began to lose interest which he says was a surprise to him, as he did not intentionally give up his interest but gradually found this happening. He says though that he still enjoys karaoke-ing old Visual Kei songs and he was really amazed to find out that many of the bands he liked when he was younger were still active and together. Kanade had a very positive take on how being a fan affected him as he says that he believes Visual Kei fans (and he also extends this to other kinds of otaku) actually develop amazing organizational skills and are very knowledgeable about utilizing services (transportation, payment systems, how best to travel) and that they can actually easily apply a lot of their knowledge to work. Kanade has an interesting socio-historical interpretation of Visual Kei and he says that maybe people were so into it at the end of the last century because they might have contemplated a 'great end' coming with the turn of the millennium, which didn't ever come to anything as the world simply rolled into the 2000's and he says this is why young people in the 1990's were so into the 'darkness' and 'other world' because it how they felt about the future(!). He also says this is why the Visual Kei boom ended: the world went on with itself and so there was no reason for many to continue to contemplate fatalistic endings anymore, but they simply had to live on. I ask him if the otherworldly darkness has any appeal to him anymore and he says,

> "Personally no. I mean sometimes when I listen to an old song I feel this wave of nostalgia and power within it which I think is very special and unique. But now, in my life…it doesn't have to be something fantastical or strange to impress me. I am just simply touched or impressed by ordinary things as well. Ordinary everyday joys. I think this is a good way to live."

Momo was another fan who like Remi, left the fandom after a disappointing experience, but unlike Remi's which was not really a consciously made one, Momo pinpoints the exact moment that was the straw that broke the camel's back for her. Her

favorite artist who she had loved from since the time they debuted who she had 'grown up with' went 'too far' in his commoditization and she felt that this was disrespectful to fans, especially ones like herself who had done much to collect almost all the things the band put out, up to a certain point. But the over production of merchandise (not even the bands, but of his solo work) which was increasingly becoming more and more expensive made her feel anger and disappointment towards him. She says "It is not the even about the management. This was his solo work that we knew was directed by him. What does he think we are? ATM machines?" Momo even says that she felt betrayed and was really shocked that an artist she respected so much would subject fans to these things. "I didn't want to defend him like some of his other fans were doing saying that 'oh but artists of this level' or saying things like 'oh maybe he has a family now so he needs to support them'…so?? I am supposed to support his family too?"

Momo continued to go to lives but felt angry and distracted so she decided that her perception of this artist had reached a point where she no longer was able to enjoy lives even. She no longer watches or buys this artist's music at all and she says the whole thing made her remove herself from Visual Kei because even though the main problem were the actions of one artist in particular, everything reminded her of him as she had spent almost 20 years following this artist and there was no Visual Kei to her without him. She even feels he ruined Visual Kei for her in some ways and she admits,

"Actually, there are many other artists I also like, but somehow the whole world was tainted in his color and I just wanted to get away from feeling so bad and angry about it, so it was easier to just let go of everything. I went to watch some other bands a few times, but it is just not the same feeling anymore. Maybe I myself changed… I don't know."

I would count Kanade and Hisae as amongst some of the more positive seeming

individuals with regards to their old selves and old fandoms, as they did not belittle their past experiences and were able to continue to still enjoy the music in a distant way. Remi and Momo, while not able to quite make peace with what happened also did not engage in putting down the scene as a whole and they did not make fun of their past behavior. Although Momo does feel she wishes she had spent her money more on herself or maybe even on other bands instead of her former favorite who she ended up feeling quite bitter and annoyed over.

Many others I met who had moved on, expressed feeling embarrassed (most of the time it was jokingly so), calling their fandom days *kuro rekishi* (embarrassing or 'black' past), describing their behavior as *itai* (painful or cringy) and when they showed me their old cosplay pictures or shared stories, they would describe this act of sharing as them engaging in an act of *sarasu* on themselves. This was of course all in good humor, but sometimes, people would say things like "Why did we do such stupid things?" "I want to crawl into a hole and die thinking of it," which while also perhaps meant to function as self-deprecating humor, would also result in instances where they displayed an antagonistic attitude towards Visual Kei, thus aligning with much of the stigma displayed by outsiders. For example, one former fan went so far as to say "When I look back, actually if someone got bullied or made fun for liking it in school, then actually that is no surprise" or "Actually it's so gross now to think that these adult men were wearing all this makeup and doing these things, what was I thinking?" While I do know that these are meant to be funny, there is actually nothing funny about an adult saying a school kid deserves to be bullied in any way, let alone over something like an interest in music and she may not have intended for this, but her throw-away statement makes her complicit in the normalization of any sort of bullying simply on the basis of being 'different'.

10.3.2 Intai: Giving Up on a Dream and Becoming an 'Adult'

When band members gave up music, they often used two words in particular to describe what they would or had become. If they completely left the music business then this would be self-described as 'becoming a normal person'. However, they did not call themselves *panpi,* as *panpi* is used to denote normal people who 'know nothing' or have a disdain towards Visual Kei. For band members, there was no un-knowing what they had experienced. For people who continued on in music related work but had retired from performing and being an artist, they would not become 'normal people' but they would describe their presence as shifting to one that was of the *ura butai*(backstage) or *kage* (in the shadows)

The other common word that arose in describing their post-Visual Kei lives would be that they had become *otona* (adults). Part of this has to do with the simple issue of time having passed and to say that they had 'aged,' but more than that, this also had to do with their own notions of what their former lives 'lacked' such that they were not *otona* when they were still band men. Those I talked to did not even apply this in an intentionally condescending way and many of them even spoke positively of their experiences as Visual Kei musicians, but they expressed this very much as if it were a 'matter of fact'. This was especially true to them if they went on to have families, held full time employment or had started their own business, but 'adulthood' also contained some specific meanings in relation to 'dreams' and 'metaphorical deaths.' In this section, I will explore some of the meanings and interpretations of what it meant to become 'a normal adult'.

When it was not out of their own volition and due to other causes (another member wanting to leave, financial issues, health etc.), when band members found themselves in a situation that would result in the dissolution of their bands, they would

have to consider whether they would could continue doing music or not. In Kenji's case, although he wanted very much to continue, after joining 4 different bands and having them breakup he also wondered if maybe he should try something else as a break. He continued to do *baito* in the meantime when he was contacted by his former classmate who was looking for people to work for a boutique hotel he was opening, Kenji decided to join his classmate's startup. While he went into it with just the expectations that it was for the time being and he was initially treating it just like 'another *baito*', Kenji ended up learning a lot on the job and was happy to be in a work environment where he felt he was making something from scratch with his friends. He says that even though his "dreams of being in a band have died" he likens this feeling he experienced in this startup to forming a band saying that,

> "I guess in the end, it doesn't matter what the thing is, whether it's a band or a business, but if you can make something with people who you feel are good people who are serious and passionate about what they are doing then some of that rubs off on you and you also have the motivation to improve yourself. I felt this way when I first joined a band."

Kenji also felt a pride in finally being given a chance at being employed full-time with benefits. He says he knows maybe he was 'late' to it, but he felt really good about no longer being dependent on anyone. Even though Kenji has a new-found confidence located in his economic stability, he had this to say about his roadie and band experiences:

> "I don't think it was a waste because I was very serious about it. I just never got lucky and I don't know what else I could have done differently. I was actually really upset that my bands kept breaking up and it was always something that I could not control. But I think that anyone who has ever had to give up their dream

is actually very strong. It takes courage to also 'give up' because it is very scary when you have thought of your life only in one direction for a long while. When your dream dies, you die a kind of death with it. So, if you can keep going, you are already stronger than someone who has never experienced that."

Kenji also says that he thinks band men despite being thought of as 'not real men' are actually very tough,

"Especially us who roadie, we have to do all the work that is very tough and there is nothing glamorous about it. We really endure a lot and sometimes your superiors can be really tough on you because you are the lowest in the hierarchy. If you can get through it, you can get through anything. It may have been the 'otherworld' but actually the skills and mind set you develop is very real world!"

For Hiro whose band broke up due to financial reasons, he also spoke of this 'giving up of dreams' as a personally difficult thing which he says took him awhile to get over.

"I was still in a kind of mindset where I didn't want to accept it was over. I really felt like we could have gone on and there was still more to do, but the other members were tired. I still have leftover feelings and hard-drive full of songs that have nowhere to go. It took me awhile, but time was the thing that just went by and eventually I accepted it."

In Hiro's case, it was particularly painful as he was in a band with friends who he had made in high school (one of them was even in the same elementary school with him) and so his members were to him not just people he could replace so easily. He says he resented them for 'destroying everything' for a while, but they eventually made up and are still friends today. He does not blame them anymore and he says:

"Well, when you are young, you have all this fire in you and it is easy to let it go

to your head. Of course, it wasn't just that. I really had big dreams of us making it and I put my everything in to it. But now that time has passed and I have children of my own, I also understand the other members better now since I became an adult."

I ask him if he feels he was not an adult at 28 when his band broke up and he says: "Ah…I wasn't. I think I had rose tinted lenses on and while I was full of passion, I also did not have *yoyu* (space/leeway) in my heart and that was actually selfish. I think being an adult is not just about taking care of yourself in terms of independence, but it is also about being able to take care of others, even their 'mental care' where you realize that you should not just live by the plans and rules you set, but have space to compromise and accommodate others needs as well. I'm a dad now of three so I really have no way to just think of myself only!"

I ask Hiro if he has any plans for his hard-drive full of music and he says recently he opened some files and he was washed with a painful nostalgia.

"I can say the best thing about pursuing music as hard as I did was that I know I tried really hard and I was never half-hearted about that. I think that in itself was an important experience. How many people can say that they put their everything, really…everything into something. We really worked so hard. Maybe too hard which is why it was so awful when it came to an end. I can still remember making a whole room of people cry at out last live...I can still see the fans crying faces and I remember telling myself "You let everyone down…" But I can say now at least I lived a life where I had a dream instead of being someone who just dreamt and did nothing. I forgive myself now, I can say instead "you did well".

At Yue's last live, his band held a 'funeral' for the members and the whole theme of the live was 'funeral' (and they broke up on Halloween) so they asked the fans to come

all dressed in black as well. As morbid as this may sound, Yue says that he says it was actually done in a humorous way, yet when it was time for his burial "Suddenly I realized, I really was dying because when the next day came, this person would cease to exist. In a weird way it was really my funeral and now I am living my second life." I ask Yue to tell me just how his second life is different and he says:

> "My first life was about me, a dreaming child who could believe that you could will something into reality. In my second life, I am an adult who understands that that is a beautiful thing, but it simply doesn't happen to most people. Maybe only 1% get to live out their childhood dreams."

Yue who now works in real estate in Fukuoka told me that the other day he had come to Shinjuku after years of not being to Tokyo and he happened upon a guerilla live that was happening near the east exit of Shinjuku station. He at once recognized that it was a Visual Kei band and he was overcome with the strangest sense of deja vu:

> "I saw myself that I had killed. I don't know who they were even, but I saw it…that amazing thing that even changes the atmosphere. It is the strangest force. I realized even though I killed it, it lives on."

When I ask him how he felt having to face Visual Kei again he said "How do I say it? Hello darkness my old friend[140]?"

There are some former band men who continue to be 'public' in ways that have nothing to do with Visual Kei but continue to speak of their current positions as former

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[140] While what he really said was *hisashiburi ni ano gokochi ii yami* (after a long while, it was that comfortable darkness again), I have translated it this way in the manner of the lyrics of 'The Sound of Silence' because I feel it captures well the nuance of what Yue said whereby he meant to convey the intimacy with the affect of darkness that is cultivated when one is intensely involved with the prosumption of Visual Kei. He was also saying it to 'no one' except to the existence deep within himself which he thought he had buried.

Visual Kei band men including Sizna of Moran (who is now a FX trader and a stocks and investment expert) and Hiro of the band nue who owns his own esthetic salon and specializes in massage. Sizna credits his wanting to not have to do *baito* so he can fully concentrate on his music with his position he has now, because stocks were the one thing which allowed him to earn enough while not having to spend actual time 'working.' He eventually was able to earn quite a lot and decided to pursue it, realizing he had a talent in it and he had after all already achieved all he wanted as a musician (Uchida, 2018).

Hiro on the other hand continued to use his brand and fame as a former musician to make himself stand out as a beauty and esthetics expert, which he also credits to Visual Kei. He says that Visual Kei saved him previously and gave him a sense of confidence, as he was able to 'transform' himself in order to join a band and succeed in one and he says this also allows him to see the value there is in feeling good from improving your appearance (he says that he was obese as a child and it was Visual Kei that made him work hard to change his outward experiences which transformed his life).Thus, he has turned his former aesthetic work into his current esthetic work. He continues to cater to Visual Kei fans which, marketing strategies aside, Hiro claims is because he did not want to disappoint his former fans and turn over a new leaf to betray them in his new life, but wanted to show that he was still thankful to their support and he was not ashamed of Visual Kei, because he really feels that it changed his life once and could also continue to work for the better for his 'second life'.

It seemed that for band members who had gone on to find stable work or new meaningful activity in their lives were not bitter or did not shun Visual Kei. Most of them seemed to want to try to connect their former experiences with who they are now and found that it was a source of strength and they had learned valuable albeit painful life lessons from having left their dreams behind. I would like to add though that this does

come with a caveat and that I happened to talk to people who were able to move on, sometimes towards more stable situations which brought them peace of mind and a new kind of confidence but this was not the only experience. There are quite a few young men who in the scene who have taken their own lives when their dreams do not work out or when they cannot see a future. There are some who have left heartbreaking suicide notes behind and these only circulate when there is approval from their families or when they 'matter' enough because there is some level of fame to their names. I know of one person who continues to live in limbo after the breakup of his band and I do not have permission to write the details of his story here except to say that he never 'got over it' nor did he or any of his friends ever imagine he would still be affected by it all these years later.

While I do not mean to say that it is 'easier' on fans, leaving Visual Kei seemed to have lasting impacts more so on the band members for whom music was really the center of their lives. The majority of fans always had 'another life' outside of the band (although once again, some fans really did center their lives around supporting a band) but for band members, this was simply their lives. Therefore, they took those experiences with them in quite deeply profound ways as they really saw it as pivotal in shaping their attitudes towards life, work and relationships with people. Another thing worth noting is that none of these band members ever saw what they did as 'play' even when they gave up and saw themselves becoming 'adults'. While they inevitably ended up making it seem that their former Visual Kei selves were 'not adults', they did not do this in a belittling way and they did not extend this to other people, but spoke of this in terms of it being a process of maturity. However, as shown, some fans having left did relegate both their own prosumption and the things bands did to a trivial thing of shame that while they spoke to me about knowing I knew what Visual Kei was, they also mentioned they would never tell their current friends or partners anything about their participation in the subculture

for it was simply obviously something you don't tell *panpi* because as one fan put it "No matter what it'll just end up making you look like you are some perv for men in makeup."

Nevertheless, there remains this reiteration of the prosumption of Visual Kei as something that is a part from the world of adults that they re-affirmed through such utterances. I believe this is another tenet of playwork in that in this case it is not about the vilification of Visual Kei due to its thematic content, but the inability for many involved to reach a level of socio-economic reproduction that is strongly associated with the meanings of adulthood. This is not just about the divisions imposed by economic realities, but is also a moral one as Hiro showed when he talked about adulthood as 'caring for others' which he ultimately located in his current position as a father of three who was able to support his family.

They may now see themselves more as adults, but it is also worth noting that they did not infantilize their own experiences nor did they reduce it so some sort of trivial youthful play. Former band members all used words like 'dreams', 'suffering', 'hard work', 'toiling', 'putting everything into my music' which shows how much they viewed their previous experiences as full of labor, one of love perhaps, even if they were not successful into turning it into stable paid work.

Chapter 11 Conclusion: Playwork as a Mode of Play

11.1 Answering the Research Questions

In this final chapter, I will summarize the main arguments presented in each content chapter while considering them specifically within the characteristics of the concept of Playwork. As I have proposed, the concept of Playwork, which is inherently prosumptive in nature as it involves consuming and becoming intimate with the subcultural template that is Visual Kei in order to re-produce and innovate it, is able to capture much of the struggles, marginalization and obscuring of the labor of Visual Kei band men for a number of reasons that are directly concerned with the blurring of the boundaries between work and play that are observed within various aspects of their work.

In Chapter 1, I introduced two case studies of musicians. First, of Ren, who is aspiring and struggling to go pro and then the retiring musician, Naoki whose career had plateaued; he is at a point in his life where he is not sure if he should continue with music. What they have in common is they both chose to pursue something they felt passionate about and had personal attachment to, one that began as an act of consumption; they wanted to turn something they first enjoyed as play into work. This is the first aspect of that is core to the idea of playwork in that it emerges from play, which means it is inherently felt and initially experienced as coming from a place of personal interest and enjoyment. Furthermore, these two examples were presented because they allow us to begin to see some of the various dimensions of how Visual Kei musicians, in both their private and professional lives, struggle with having to confront the culturally understood and socially normalized meanings and notions of what and how one should work and conversely what is thought to be just play. Their cases bring forth some initial vital puzzles and paradoxes, as both were shown to be working very hard, but are seen or see themselves as playing.

These formed the setup for what were the research questions, of which there were two sets. The first set of questions addressed the empircal aspects of the study by addressing its contents, the actors and institutions involved in the phenomenon and how and why it is prosumed: What is Visual Kei? How can we understand this cultural phenomenon and how and why do people engage with it?

Once the empirircal base was thoroughly examined, the second set of questions dealt with Visual Kei under the context of the digitalization of music, the proliferation of immaterial labor and production, the commoditization of intimacy and the use of the internet as a prosumptive space. Here I focused on showing how Visual Kei can be seen as Playwork throigh an investigation of how one carves a professional career in Visual Kei by asking the following questions: What are the skills that musicians have to cultivate in order to sustain their careers and how has their labor changed? How do they balance crafting otherworldliness with the demands of digital capitalism? How is 'success' envisioned and realized? What are the ideologies that inform notions of success? How does their labor affect other arenas of life and what do these impacts entail? How can we understand the nature of their work? Each chapter functioned to answer these questions and I will now go on to review how I attempted to address these questions.

11.1.1 The Prosumption of Visual Kei

For the first set of questions, Chapters 4 and 5 built on one another because they served to provide an understanding of what Visual Kei is beyond simply viewing it as a subculture or as a culture industry or as located simply in practices or text. Chapter 4 covered the history, characteristics, changes over time and debunks some previous misunderstandings or simplistic translations of Visual Kei by revealing it to be a complex whole of interacting, prosuming parties and elements. First Visual Kei is shown to be used by musicians in a myriad of ways be it as a deconstruction or experimental form of

aesthetic expression, which can also extend to other arenas of expressing differentiation. But a commonly detected idea is that of a performative world that exists as a separate 'other world' where societal conventions surrounding the boundaries of definition need not apply. Its wide eclecticism is meant to challenge a variety of fixed or confined ideas, definitions and boundaries that concern propriety and normalcy. These exist within the space of Visual Kei as portals of 'otherworldliness'. Initial contact with Visual Kei is often described as the psycho-somatic experience of 'Visual Shock,' which I interpret as evidence of The Sublime. This feeling and the affect of otherworldliness is what is found to be vital and cherished by prosumers and it is detected in the words they used when I asked them what they like about Visual Kei or what they found special about it.

While the immaterial product of consumption is this ephemeral otherworldliness, what is also consumed is the person who makes the music; the persona and the joint experience of sensory engagement with the artist who approaches the sublime. Because both consumers and producers contribute to the realization of this 'worldview' and the circulation of ideas that surround it, it is in this sense that the dichotomy between production and consumption is not always clear. Both parties prosume Visual Kei. There are many ways and degrees in which this is done, but on a general level it is one that is centered on an affectively charged intimacy, whether with the music, the artist or otherworldliness.

Having established up to this point the various components and ideas of what constitutes Visual Kei, I then go on to offer my definition for how to understand it:

Visual Kei is a template for sonic practices that involves the use of sound and visual to express differentiation within an already established, accessible circuit of production and consumption. This differentiation is not standard in content, but it aims to create an affect of otherworldliness in an attempt to approach the

sublime. Furthermore, it is not overtly anti-capitalist in its nature or goals, but one in which individuals come to cultivate an intimate relationship with the sublime that is never fully achieved. Crafting this affect of otherworldliness involves not just music, but the delivery and visual presentation of a self that is transgressing various forms of conformity by utilizing costumes, makeup, employing inversion, aesthetic violence and testing extremes of sound. One of the products of which is that the artists display a flashy, risk taking persona and demeanor that audiences find desirable, thus attraction is not simply to the possibility of deconstruction via otherworldliness, but also to the person who pursues this on stage; the artist is consumed as part and parcel of the product. Consumption has many forms, but in each of these a desire to seek an affectively experienced intimacy and engagement with the product is present.

With this definition, I have answered the questions what is Visual Kei and how can we understand it. The next question, how and why people engage with it were answered in Chapter 5 which provided an analysis of the prosumption of music and lives as spaces to experience the affect of otherworldliness and how lives are spaces prosumers feel an intense socio-psychological release of energy that is therapeutic through the exercise of communal, positive and organized aggression. Communal as this is, there are indeed many points of disconnect as to how fair participation is. I discuss this in terms of gendered prosumption, differences between performer and fan opinions, as well as some global perspectives regarding the authenticity of emotional expression to show how prosumption is uneven.

Then by revealing through the reception and analysis of lyrics, I found that they can be generally categorized into two forms of reception, *hinichijyou* and *mijika*. They both allowed for listeners, emotive outlets to articulate otherwise difficult to express,

'negative' or suppressed emotions. They functioned as portals into the otherworld where the possibility of transformation was presented. Because a lot of the lyrical content deals with taboo subjects, listeners found that sometimes theses provided them a means of validating their own traumatic experiences when they mirrored themselves with the subject of the songs. It is precisely these kinds of lyrics and topics that fans found not present in other genres of popular music that they found a kind of solace in. The very personal and emotionalized range of topics were seen to be refreshing and honest. This provided listeners a means to experience a range of emotions within music that these listeners came to value precisely for its rare relatability.

However due to the nature of the topics and extremity of emotions and also due to the oppostional sense of self in contrast to that which is deemed normal, heteronormative and 'healthy" that is crafted through the prosumption of Visual Kei, there is stigmatization both within and outside of the subculture. These are often generalized and stereotyped into three separate labels/identities of stigma—that of the *chuunibyou*, *menhera* and *yandere*. All of them connote a sense of mental and emotional turmoil, instability and feelings of illness that can be traced not only at the lyrical and performative level, but in the identities, discourses, appearances and that which is even publicly displayed by prosumers of Visual Kei. In recent years the internal embracing of this image has escalated and has also resulted in stigma, discrimination and stereotyping of prosumers.

I included statements which showed how non-fans felt Visual Kei songs were over the top, unrealistic and not displaying healthy, functional ways of being where they questioned the character of those who listened to it. Another reason for the presence of the stigmatization is sometimes, fans and performers do exhibit/suffer from a variety of mental health problems, thus the image has some truth to it. This is both observed and

admitted and perhaps what most poignantly solidifies this is the suicides of many band men due to depression and visible self mutilation. While not the majority, their visibility contributes to the image that this is a scene wherein many 'unwell' people gather.

I then showed some examples of how mainstream media posits the bangya lifestyle, aesthetic and identity as self-absorbed and anti-social. The openness in which Visual Kei music deals with personal pain and trauma seems to be received by outsiders as a glorification of the self that comes off as both self-absorbed and self-defeating. Rather than showing concern for any mental health problems they may have, outsiders are more bothered by how prosumers of Visual Kei go about displaying their problems, which trivializes any sort of actual pain that an individual may be experiencing. It is as if they are viewed as 'playing' at being sick and are thought to be merely doing it for attention.

Examples showed that associating with Visual Kei is not a neutral experience and it is one that comes with stigma. The self-declaration of these states of illness therefore can be seen as a positioning of the self as authentically embracing the reality of one's emotions and trauma, as opposed to giving in to social pressures to behave in the healthy and 'normal' fashion. Nevertheless, this perpetuates the idea, as seen from the outside, that participation meant 'consuming' sickness, and was therefore unproductive and nothing but self-imposed misery, while impotently playing with the idea of a politics of difference. Hence, prosumers are marginalized for they are seen as merely playing.

11.1.2 Visual Kei as Playwork

Having answered the first set of questions, I then moved on to the second part of study where I endeavoured to show how musicians cultivate the necessary skills for success and how the concept of playwork provides a means to understand the nature of their work. Also revealed was how their labor effects their notions of self in society. Chapter 6 examines the transition from play to work when people begin that first step to

turn their hobby into a career. Here I introduced the necessary skills musicians spoke of and how these skills were informed by particular notions of success. Each chapter in the second part deals with a separate skill. The basic idea behind this is what band members felt 'making it' meant and the skills are 'what it takes' to make it. Together this constitutes and informs (albeit incompletely) their work ethic or workworld.

The first skill I focused on was that of how they began to craft their musical skills. This chapter also highlighted the long-term implications a leisure practice that families provide for their children: that of music lessons and the consumption of music related media had. The main finding was: while developing and crafting a musical skill and pursuing it in a rigorous manner is seen as a 'healthy' form of leisure and could be taken as evidence of good character traits, particular kinds of music, taken *too seriously* and pursued beyond the realm of leisure is a less-desirable outcome. This is what makes Visual Kei music a kind of playwork, in that it is thought by outsiders to only be tolerable (and even so hardly) when not taken seriously, at the level of a mere hobby.

This was shown by focusing on the narratives of musicians, both aspiring and professional, who were encouraged by family members when they were young to pursue musical hobbies, but who now face a variety of difficulties as adults who have embarked on musical careers. These pertain to issues related to social reproduction, career and income stability, family and romantic relationships and are experiences shared by individuals of various social backgrounds and degrees of career success.

The two main sources of tension were that of income and future instability and this is compounded by it being Visual Kei, adding a layer of stigma and confusion with regards to its contents. I identified four patterns of this period of trying to turn play to work: still in employment, education and band, *hanbaito hanbando*, the option to roadie and semi/fully sponsored individuals. Each entails different forms of economic instability

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or not being seen as independent, which adds to the element of it being viewed as not real work. Also the stigma of being in a Visual Kei band was shown to remain, even with some success or some level of stability: members parents still remained embarassed, or when band members have their own families, they feel pressure to conform out of concern for their children. This is another key tenet of playwork: work that yields economic risks and instability is difficult to concieve of as work so long as the individual involved in it cannot turn it into stable paid work.

Chapter 7 investigated stagework which I divided into two different sets of skills: onstage skills and offstage skills. Onstage skills involve craftwork; this was shown in the form of crafting basic performance skill and how band men become Visual Kei band men specifically, focusing on their musicianship, staging and body work. The particular aesthetic inclinations, difficult to define styles of musical contribution and varying levels of obscured labor with regards to craftwork is shown to render their labor 'superficial' and is cause for ridicule and stigma. Theirs is a rock which outsiders believe to be only 'playing' at the ethos of that which is alternative and therefore, is seen as inauthentic despite the actual meaning it has for its own prosumers. Visual Kei craftwork is a labor that is not respected or seen as valuable in the eyes of society and by musicians of other genres. This is yet another facet of playwork; work that despite minute, specialized skills and laboring is not 'respected' for its value is not well understood and stereotyped and dismissed as only playing at some other imagined to be more authentic thing. The level of craftwork that goes into Visual Kei also brings with it other forms of discrimination and stigma. The homology between male beautification and gender/sexuality also invites questions regarding band members sexual and gender identity. Some members (and the scene in general) are thought to be engaging in crossdressing or *josou* for the entertainment of women. Not only is this problematic for it subsumes any non-hegemonic

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performance of masculinity or craftwork as akin to performances of sex and sexuality, it also relegates women's prosumption to fetishism.

The second element of stagework that I investigate is that which occurs 'off-stage' and these are termed business skills. Having these skills allow musicians to showcase their music and performances more effectively, in that they concern opportunities to raise ones name and profile within the specialized industry. Here I showed how entering the specialized circuits and networks is not simply about gaining entry, but one that bands have to navigate in order to gain success and make profits. Both these on-stage and off-stage elements involve very different aspects of labor and skills, but they come together to make the products that showcase the core products of a band.

Two examples, of *taiban* and of an unsuccessful attempt at going major, were produced to illustrate the various aspects which make it difficult to succeed. Both require the band to understand and cater to Visual Kei specific interests and prosumer tastes and sensitivities, yet these compete along side more general level assumptions about consumers, which bands also have to consider. Both examples also revealed how there continues to exist this idea that Visual Kei bands should 'transcend' Visual Kei and have some broad appeal, even as they continue to pursue an alternative style or ethos.

To illustrate how these elements come into play, I examined these two aspects of the industry, the business skills that go into making and breaking them as well as the notions of 'success' that governs the operation of these industrial institutions. First, I examined the *taiban* circuit system to elaborate on some of the overlapping aspects of *chimeido* building, networking, industry and profit making. I tried to laydown the basics revealing how *taiban* which is a very basic element of participating in the Visual Kei industry is in reality difficult to 'succeed' at for much goes into the investing of participation that is difficult to turn into clear profit.

Competing notions of success come to the fore when bands go major as they are now subject to the record label and record company's expectations to meet various standards of 'normality' as they attempt to juggle this with whatever brand of otherworldliness or niche market appeal they are thought to have that led them to garnering enough attention to go major in the first place. Going major is one of the ways that producing Visual Kei clearly becomes defined as 'work', but it entails adapting to a particular worker subjectivity and mindset that can ruin the 'play' for both fans and artists. I argue using the case of the band Merry going major, that in the case of Visual Kei, viewed through the concept of playwork, the irony of artists finally being able to be recognized officially as paid workers (a thing that they are stigmatized against for previously not possessing) simultaneously results in their products taking on overt hues of 'play' that possess little of the ludic and actually have little general or subcultural market demand. This glitch of sorts reveals much about the assumptions of normalcy and the 'average consumer' and underestimates what inspires and governs prosumer sensibilities and loyalties.

This chapter functioned to show how offtstage/business skills often involve work and aspects of planning that the audience may not be aware of, even though they are very involved in the activities themselves. Thus labor is also obscured from the very audience themselves and the work of bandmen misunderstood as not theirs at all, but assumed to be that of specialists and industry workers. This is also what renders is playwork.

Chapter 8 looks at service skills which I examine under the context of the rise of the digitalization of music, immaterial labor and neo-liberal subjectivities. I demonstrate how notions of service, using the example of the practice of '*eigyou*' in Visual Kei are involving more and more of the investment of the individual's efforts and very sense of personhood as labor and that this subjects them to a type of self-commoditization that is

at once normalized, but also thought to be irrelevant to the ideals of 'musicianship' and artist.

Eigyou here refers to a style of personalized, individualized, customer, and trend conscious type of 'extra' service that is becoming increasingly practiced by Visual Kei bands. It is at once vilified for being exploitative and superfluous to the selling of music, as well as simultaneously viewed as a necessary adaptation strategy within the climate of a music industry that encourages artists to embark on variety of new forms of entrepreneurial strategies in order to tap into various markets amidst the decline of the physical music sales. In this chapter, I highlight how the practice of *eigyou*, which in this context can be understood as 'personalized service with a personal touch,' is not merely an economic strategy employed to recuperate the loss of revenue from CD sales, but one that emerges out of the values and affectual attachments engendered by a highly pervasive neo-liberal permeated concept of consumer subjectivity.

I use the example of the selling of *cheki* which was an emergent practice. They yield a very high profit margin that is unprecedented in comparison to any other merchandise item and sometimes, they are a main form of income for bands. Band members are individually responsible for desirability of *cheki* and it has become a means to communicate various things such as appreciation, creativity, humor, personality that is about individual effort. When the selling of *cheki* is rejected by band members who wish to focus on music or be taken 'seriously' this has the unexpected result of coming off as aloof, boring and simply not with the times. Therefore, it is not just profitable, but now a normalized communication tool that signals how a band member perceives his labor in relation to fans.

Because *cheki* lacks a practical use and is literally a snapshot of blatant self-commoditization, it is perceived as 'proof' that fans care more about the members than

music and that Visual Kei is ultimately all about the 'visuals', image and fantasy. I then went on to show how fans don't just consume mindlessly, they can be critical and buy for variety of reasons, such as an awareness of economics of the band not selling and of the exact profit being extracted. Fans displayed many different rationales for buying. Band members also revealed a variety of opinions over having to do this, some seeing it as a necessary evil vs. those who displayed a proud sense of entrepreneurialism. But both were 'doing what it takes' to make it. The irony here being that *cheki* are so profitable they never get out of it even when they do make it. A strategy like this is more likely to become pervasive in a genre like Visual Kei where the band member is an object of desire.

Instores were shown as another site in which we see much of the same individualized service-oriented labor as a means to gain revenue in action, but here is it face to face. The clear difference between consuming instores from consuming *cheki* is that instores are one on one, personalized moments where a fan can evaluate not only the band member's etiquette and professionality with regards to his ability to do *eigyou*, but they also become instances where the fan can try to gauge if this is indeed *eigyou* or if the bandman is authentically sincere with regards to how he expresses his thanks and himself in front of fans. Fans know that it is *eigyou* and they know that this is an exchange of commodities, but it is also one that is enveloped and tied to personal feelings within a relationship cultivated as a fan; emotionally charged, individualized, and therefore to them, the commodity exchange here becomes obscured with other personal meaning.

An example showing how there actually are artists or instances where it's not always about being a service provider, but artists themselves might enjoy or find instores meaningful because they get showered with appreciation, attention and feel support as it's one of the few times they get to have personal contact with their fans as individuals was provided as a counterpoint. However, this does not erase that *eigyou* at instores in

general is based on a sense of professionalism that is crafted, formulaic in approach and very aware of the dynamics of desire and fantasy that potentially can be activated. Thus, once again, band members are not seen as serious musicians but are instead entertainers who sell flirtatious 'play' and fantasy.

The next chapter continued on the issue of authenticity and sincerity towards work, but the space in which this is prosumed now moves to that of the internet. This chapter investigated how a bandman is revealed to treat his fans and exercise his sense of professionalism regarding work/play boundaries outside of official or formal events. Investigated here was an example of an attempt to engage in *mitsu* that went wrong. I chose this example in particular for it not only illustrates why a band member may reject an offer out of a sense of professionality, but also because it is a good example of augmented reality, in which the online and the face to face are intermeshed and impact one another. What this chapter revealed is what is consumed of the artist himself, is beyond what he produces as a musician or even within the scope of his immaterial labor. He is the very object and subject of consumption itself. This results in even less separation from the band member at work and his private life that has unique meanings in the context of Visual Kei as a form of playwork. In some sense, it is because what is up for consumption in this case is not even official work or *eigyou* that it can be deemed all the more 'authentically' a part of him.

Following this were two case examples of how net surveillance is able to effect the careers of artists and how information is processed. The focus was on the action of *sarasu* that takes place online where fans contribute, play vigilante, and debate various self-leaked scandals. I also considered the implications *sarasu* has on the potential for the internet to remain as a space for free discussion, user prosumption and the public good. As a main finding, assumptions that Japanese fans couldn't handle scandals does not seem

to hold true as discussion threads showed much disagreement. Fans were shown to be able to effect the production process, especially when there were evidence based backup to the scandals and the scandals don't just blow over with time as people continue to play vigilante.

The downside to this culture of surveillance and exposure is that is has brought about a general atmosphere of doubt and distrust due to the intensified surveillance on both fans and bands, which in turn changes ways of socializing and social practices. This also entails a loss of privacy/private time for band members as any moment is subject to becoming 'information' for consumption/analysis and colonized by their work. Fans too are targeted, which for some ruins the joy of play for the work it takes to validate and authenticate their consumer experience and the effort it takes to play smart, has left some with no room to play at all. Both fans and band members in this sense are engaged and subsumed by playwork.

Chapter 10 looks at both those who choose to remain prosuming Visual Kei as well as those who leave and this is analyzed under a skill I term 'Reconnaissance and Monitoring'. While it may not seem like a skill in a more classic understanding of the word in the context of work-skills, I suggest that if viewed through the playwork analytic, it involves the reflexive skill of monitoring, motivating and positioning of the self within the web of the aforementioned competing ideologies of success and is therefore a kind labor 'for the self'. It is interactional and relational in that one cultivates this in comparison to others, just as one is influenced by how others craft, justify and defend their paths. As utterances, it also contributes to notions of self as an artist within the frame of Visual Kei. Following this I also examined cases of those who have *intai* (retire) from the industry and those who have *agaru* (leave) as fans. I also examine what sort of effects prosuming Visual Kei has had on their lives in order to see if subcultural affiliations have

any lasting meanings.

It was revealed that different age cohorts, who were engaged in different forms of labor had different ideas about success. Younger band members who were used to service work and immaterial labor crafted strong scripts of professionalism. In comparison, older artists were more concerned with interpersonal relationships and accepting differences between members and simply finding a way to accommodate for those differences. The older artists also spoke more about music to them in a very personal almost spiritual like sense whereas younger artists spoke of their music as having value when it was recognized by others. This could serve as evidence of the effects of labor on their understanding of the location of the value of the product, the older ones seeing it as residing within the artist and the younger ones as seeing it as present when it is recognized by others. What all of them had in common was this; they had all developed a script of professionality regarding the topic of the fans who they felt they should not 'betray' or let down. This worked not only to reaffirm the shared social meaning and relevance of their music, it also served as a form of self-monitoring and posturing to authenticate their attitudes and believes about their work and sense of professionality.

I then discussed the meanings surrounding *intai* and *agaru*: *intai* recognizes that a position or status that is tied to work and labor is the thing being left but *agaru* in the case of fans carries a loaded meaning of leaving behind a negative lifestyle. A change of perception or heart over Visual Kei (the breakup of a band) and moving on to a different station in life (work, family) were the two main reasons fans gave up.

As for intai, band members often used 2 words to describe what they had become, if they had totally left the industry they were now "a normal person". If they were still working in the industry, but not as an artist, they would describe themselves as in the shadows. But more commonly, they would use becoming '*otona*' because they now had

families and more stable employment, but this also was more due to their own notions of what their former lives 'lacked' such that they were not *otona* when they were still band men.

Otona carried another meaning which had to do with the death of their dreams and along with that their former sense of self. Former musicians talked about how giving up a dream takes strength as a part of you 'dies' when you give up, but you gain strength from experiencing this that others don't have. Another said that his past-self had no leeway because he was so hell-bent on his dream, so becoming an '*otona*' to him is about not just taking care of himself but others (a thing that he feels deeply from now having a family) and that you have to compromise and accommodate the needs of others.

When bandmens 'second lives' were stable they did not shun their former selves and they were not bitter about what didn't come to fruition. One said that the experience not a waste because he learnt a lot from bandwork, which is tough work, but equipped him with practical skills and a strong mindset. Another said he had an appreciation that his musician dream allowed him the experience of going all out, making effort with so much dedication. However not everyone is like this, sometimes people continue to live in limbo or worse.

Overall, former musicians positioned past experiences as pivotal in shaping their attitudes towards life, work and relationships with people. Even though they employed an adult/child dichotomy, none of these band members ever saw what they did as 'play' even when they gave up and saw themselves becoming 'adults'. While they inevitably ended up making it seem that their former Visual Kei selves were 'not adults', they did not do this in a belittling way, but spoke of this in terms of it being a process of maturity.

Nevertheless, there remains this reiteration of the prosumption of Visual Kei as something that is apart from the world of adults that they re-affirmed through such

utterances. I believe this is another tenet of playwork in that the inability for many involved to reach a level of socio-economic reproduction that is strongly associated with the meanings of adulthood. This is not just about the divisions imposed by economic realities, but is also a moral one. Former band members all used words like 'dreams', 'suffering', 'hard work', 'toiling', 'putting everything into my music' which shows how much they viewed their previous experiences as full of labor, even if they could not turn it into work.

11.2 Discussion: Playwork and Stigma.

Playwork itself, can be thought of as but one potential 'mode of play' found within the socio-cultural moment that is the present, where we see the existence of that which I termed the double paradox—a situation where there is a culture of overwork, that simultaneously exists alongside a culture or turn in which meaningful existence is thought to be found outside of work or in leisure and lifestyle choices in which play is a central component. Amidst this is a socio-economic situation that sees shifts such as structural changes in the workforce, an entrenched recession, and deregulation accompanied by the proliferation of irregular work and new forms of labor and employment.

At the same time, we see the second co-existing paradox. This is where play (particularly within the context of Japanese society) and leisure seem to be highly regulated and managed by participants such that it is presented as an activity in which it is compartmentalized and functional, providing a space away from work, family and 'real life' concerns. Alongside this functional view of play, we see play increasingly permeating all facets of life, as activities, approaches and interfaces. It's characteristics at the core of all mobile technologies, consumer activities and even increasingly a facet of work itself where things are increasingly mediated and filtered by play. This is a situation which has given way to modes of play, like playwork, in which each aspect of the

'paradox' is present contextually and able to explain some of the nature of the work of band men, but none alone in isolation have the ability to. Within the double paradox, one may find many other 'modes of play,' which may share some characteristics with playwork but perhaps lean more towards one contextual axis, depending on how play configures in their laboring processes and how perceptions of play affect how labor is seen. For example, much of what I have analyzed could also be relevant to other genres of music, but in the case of Visual Kei, the particular thematic content and the stigmatized meanings render it a marginalized form of entertainment, thus it lacks the seriousness of genres like classical or traditional forms music in which the opportunities for steady employment may also be limited, but the cultural prestige high and its image one that does not involve the questioning of the moral character of its musicians and listeners. This is visible not only at the level of image, but in the institutional support, official pedagogy and cultural merits to be garnered that exist for these genres that show how they are accepted as appropriate, normative and respectable forms of music to pursue. Therefore, these should not be considered forms of playwork. Meanwhile, it is entirely possible that careers in other forms of alternative music that deal with content that is controversial could potentially also be forms of playwork. The point to be made here is, not all forms of music work should be analyzed as playwork, although they can be analyzed as a different mode of play that exists within the double paradox. While this would entail a detailed study on its own, I suspect several professions that have emerged in the digital economy such as being a YouTuber, Podcaster, or TikToker could also be thought of as playwork. Other possible realms for investigation are extreme sports, self-styled sexual advisors, BDSM experts, work that involves recreational or hallucinogenic drugs, professional gamblers and competitive eaters to name a few.

Similarly, not all forms of the pursuit of becoming a professional within a field

of leisure activity is playwork or a mode of play necessarily. Take for example more traditional or widely played forms of sports (excluding extreme sports or esports) like soccer or baseball. Stebbins has noted that amateur status alone does not entail marginalization. In his study of amateur pursuits in leisure, it was sport that received the least disrespect. Archeology and theatre had dimensions people found dubious eg. Archeology was associated with grave digging and theatre sometimes led to questions about sexual behavior (Stebbins 1992). It is not leisure alone, but the kind of leisure and the associations that go with it, some of which stem from stereotypes and the image it holds in the public imagination. Sports has a strong association with health and is often rewarded and encouraged in a variety social and national level institutions. It is put on a pedestal in the national eye in terms of global sporting events like the Olympics. Music on the other hand, while it has a ubiquitous presence in everyday life, is divided along lines of prestige and judged as per the genre. Classical or traditional genres of music having prestige and as previously mentioned, are also institutionally rewarded, whereas alternative or more extreme genres are relegated to marginalized positions. Marginalization however is not the same as being labeled deviant and this is what those involved deeply in the prosumption of Visual Kei experience. The labeling of deviance comes from aspects that are not just to do with economic returns, but specifically from the aesthetic and thematic contents that deal with taboo topics and varying levels of challenging normalcy. However, economic precarity works to further demote the status of the musicians pursuing Visual Kei as profession.

I would say here that playwork is a specific intermeshing of play and work in which the elements of play are cause for tension, marginalization, labelling of deviance and stigma. This is what separates it from all the other concepts that investigate the blurring between the boundaries of work and play, labor and leisure. Playwork involves

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specific forms of labor and skills that are not clearly viewed as laborious or deemed worthy of being called work. These are of course all prescribed views and not once do I believe Visual Kei to be the apolitical play it is often stereotyped to be.

As was shown, each skill is informed by different and clashing ideologies of 'success' that are not only contingent upon ideals formed within the frame of what it means to be a Visual Kei musician, but also by a variety of institutions and larger socio-cultural norms that individuals are subject to and are a part of such as the family, social adulthood, masculinity and the work/play divide as it continues to be informed by time, space, morality and heteronormative socio-economic reproduction.

The dynamics of these conflicts are captured by the concept of 'playwork'. At the most basic level, this describes an amalgamation of work and play in that they chose to pursue a career in an area that involves play; playing music and the intrinsic enjoyment of creative work, and that they produce the play of others. Playwork however also captures the effects and tensions found within such careers in that it is not only that their labor is obscured by the conflicting demands of the necessary skills and the competing ideologies of success, but that the product itself and the nature of the content is relegated to mere play; the engagement with otherworldliness, non-conformity and the time, efforts and methods spent on sustaining these activities are ridiculed as unproductive, hedonistic, self-absorbed and politically impotent. Therefore, prosumers of Visual Kei are seen as deviant and dedicated engagement is stigmatized.
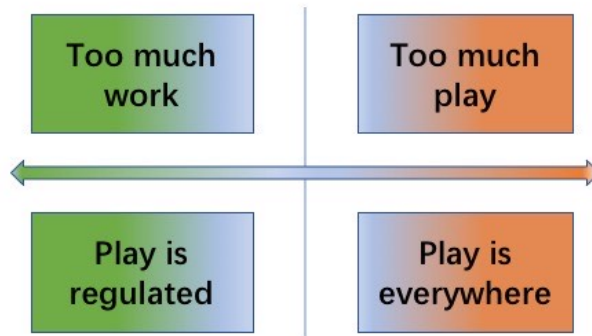
Diagram 1: DOUBLE PARADOX

Back to the spectrum of modes of play, the relationship between play and stigma is that as you move from left to right, you start to lose the moral high-ground and people who occupy more right positions are more likely to be subject to stigma. At the most obvious level this is because they lack the economic security that may come from having stable work and knowing how to regulate play. This is not absolute, you could be working very hard at a low paying job, but the right involves less economic security. It could bring you great economic rewards if it works out but there is high risk involved in choosing work or to work towards this kind of an approach to your play.

Stigma is however not only economic, but it is also moral for choosing right over left and will also put people in positions where they are seen as less contributive productively and as a result reproductively. Hence the 'right to leisure' is also linked to notions of responsible citizenship. This leads to a questioning of character, priorities as one deviates from morally sanctioned ways of being. The left is a kind of tried and tested, experience of the majority and is legitimized by professional scripts and ideas about responsible citizenship. The right is high risk. Visual Kei is relegated to 'play' that

shouldn't be taken too seriously and is not worthy of being seen as 'real' work just as prosumers are also *playing* too hard and struggle to turn this labor into stable, paid and recognized playwork.

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Appendix A

Interviewees Information

Fan Interviews

Ages indicated are at the time of first interview

Name	Age & Gender	Occupation	Fan since	Education
Miyuki	39, Female	F&B	1998	Vocational school
Haruka	41, Female	Publishing	1997	Vocational school
Yuka	28, Female	Freeter	2002	High School
Yuu	34, Female	Masseuse	2003	Vocational school
Mina	30, Female	Freeter	1999	High school
Eri	28, Female	IT	2000	4 year university
Akane	40, Transgender	Nursing home	1996	Vocational school
Satoko	34, Female	Designer	1999	4 year university
Naoko	31, Female	Insurance	1997	4 year uni
Towako	36, Female	Pharmacy	2000	Vocational school
Chiaki	20, Female	Student	2006	Still in college
Remi	39, Female	Editorial	1999	4 year uni
Aki	25, Unsure	Barista	2003	High school
Mai	28, Female	F&B/Freeter	2005	High school
Sana	29, Female	Nailist	2004	Vocational school
Nitta	21, Agender	Student	2008	Still in uni
Echizen	30, Male	Trading company	1997	4 year uni
Sei	22, Unsure	Freeter	Since childhood	Jr. high school
Rika	26, Female	Bank Employee	2000	2 year college
Satomi	30, Female	Office Worker	2001	Vocational school

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Naomi	31, Female	Insurance	2000	4 year uni
Mariko	24, Female	Job hunting	2004	High school
Yuki	27, Female	Cosmetics	1999	Vocational school
Remi	34, Female	Education (admin)	1998	4 year uni
Io	27, Female	Freeter	?	High school
Hiromi	26, Female	Retail (sales)	1999	Vocational school
Hisae	34, Female	F&B (manager)	1997	2 year college
Kanade	31, Male	Engineer	1998	Grad school
Momo	40, Female	Wine Importing	Since 1998	2 year college
Aya	30, Female	Copy writer	Since 1995	Grad school

Producer Interviewees

Name	Age & Gender	Role/Status	Years active	Other
Ren	20, Male	Guitar, Active	Since 2011	Roadie experience
Toma	25, Male	Bass, Active	Since 2005	
Naoki	35, Male	Drums, Retired	Since 2001	Roadie experience
Tomoya	45, Male	Vocal, Retired	Since 1999	Band manager
Yune	29, Male	Vocal, Active	Since 2011	
Tana	41, Male	Guitar, Active	Since 2003	
Yuito	30, Male	Vocal, Active	Since 2004	Major experience
Yuma	23, Male	Vocal, Active	Since 2012	
Takuya	28, Male	Bass, Retired	Since 2001	Roadie

				experience
Yuya	28, Male	Guitar, Retired	Since 2001	Major experience
Kazu	31, Male	Vocal, Active	Since 2004	Label head
Hiro	33, Male	Guitar, Retired	Since 2001	Label head
Masaki	26, Male	Vocal, Active	Since 2012	
Makoto	45, Male	Vocal, Active	Since 1988	Major experience
Shuuji	30, Male	Drums, Retired	Since 2003	Roadie experience
Sora	24, Male	Guitar, Active	Since 2009	
Yuichi	27, Male	Drums, Active	Since 2003	Roadie experience
Kenji	24, Male	Drums, Retired	Since 2008	Roadie experience
Haru	25, Male	Guitar, Active	Since 2008	Roadie experience
S	41, Male	Drums, Active	Since 1994	Major experience
Kazuki	32, Male	Bass, Active	Since 2003	
Taisuke	31, Male	Vocal, Active	Since 2003	Major experience
Nagisa	38, Male	Bass, Retired	Since 1992	
Nobu	55, Male	Lawyer	Since 1996	
Akiya	27, Male	Guitar, Active	Since 2008	
Gen	37, Male	Bass, Active	Since 2007	Major experience
Atsuto	38, Male	Vocal, Active	Since 1999	Major experience
Jo	48, Male	Vocal, Active	Since 1990	Major experience
Yue	37, Male	Guitar, Retired	Since 2002	

Yasuko	53, Female	Tour Manager	Since 1998	
Kana	41, Female	Magazine editorial	Since 2003	
Ryosuke	25	Guitar, Active	Since 2010	Roadie experience

Other Interviewees

Name	Age & Gender	Occupation	Relation to VK	Education
Makiko	47, Female	Fashion Stylist	Personally none	Vocational school
Shinobu	26, Female	Graduate Student	Boyfriend is a fan	4 year uni