2014-06-01

Mariko Mori's Sartorial Transcendence: Fashioned Identities, Denied Bodies, and Healing, 1993-2001

Jacqueline Rose Hibner

Brigham Young University - Provo

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd

Part of the Art Practice Commons

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/5489

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
Mariko Mori’s Sartorial Transcendence: Fashioned Identities, Denied Bodies, and Healing, 1993-2001

Jacqueline Rose Hibner

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Heather Belnap Jensen, Chair
Martha Moffitt Peacock
James R. Swensen

Department of Visual Arts
Brigham Young University
June 2014

Copyright © 2014 Jacqueline Rose Hibner
All Rights Reserved
ABSTRACT

Mariko Mori’s Sartorial Transcendence: Fashioned Identities, Denied Bodies, and Healing, 1993-2001

Jacqueline Rose Hibner
Department of Visual Arts, BYU
Master of Arts

This thesis is an examination of contemporary artist Mariko Mori’s use of fashion in her work from 1993 to 2001. Contained within her sartorial phrasing is an involved relationship with the body, female and Japanese, as it exists within technological modernity. Tumult characterizes Mori's body as she images it early on in her career. This highly alienating space in which she positions herself gradually transitions to a space of respite for the performative body of another actor by 2001's Wave UFO. Wave UFO creates a mediated space for healing the modern body plagued with isolation through transcendence provided by technological means. Minimalist fashion, as a kind of plastic mechanization of corporeal experience, helps to accomplish this healing.

Mori’s Wave UFO attendant costumes present minimalist fashion as a location for reconciling spiritual identity in a postmodern age. The flat-panel costumes have the effect of disfiguring the bodies of the attendants into amorphous plasticized shells (much like the backdrop of the Wave UFO) and mechanizing the movements of the wearer. The sleek technological sensibility of the costumes, in conjunction with the stark sterility of the immersive Wave UFO interior, are the culminating expression of the ambivalent liminality Mori’s body takes from 1993-1999. This is a body that floats between absence and presence, self and other.

This thesis begins with a survey of Mori’s 1990s work, including her 1994 self-portrait series that launched the artist into international recognition. The 1993-94 self-portraits present a playful mimicry and a self-aware exploration of regional dress as it is found on the streets of Tokyo. By the end of the decade the play shifts to minimalist self-denial that achieves a transcendence of the imaged body once grounded in the urban self-portraits. After exploring necessary and appropriate contexts of Japanese fashion and other cultural contexts, the thesis culminates in an extended analysis of Mori's 2001 Wave UFO installation. Mori’s suggestion that technology can achieve transcendence of the body furthers the theorization that minimalist fashion overcomes the physical and ideological boundaries of human existence in a modern world.

Keywords: Mariko Mori, Wave UFO, A Détacher, Public Art Fund, Japanese women in art, minimalism in fashion, fashion in performance art, spirituality and postmodernism
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Craig Savitsky for his insight and for holding onto his old *Wave UFO* uniform all these years; Caitlin and Mona Kowalska of A Détacher for their kind assistance and for access to their archival video footage of the “early days,” for your digging around and finding the amazing video that features these costumes, and for being so sweet in working to transmit the video to me; Lisa Darms, Senior Archivist at the Fales Library & Special Collections at NYU, for housing and making accessible the Public Art Fund Archive; Kevin Jones and Meghan Hansen, Head Curator and Senior Registrar of the FIDM Museum, for their kind encouragement and direction in the area of fashion history and collections management; Janice C. Hack and the Lake Forest-Lake Bluff Historical Society for my first fashion research internship and the opportunity to get my hands on amazing historical clothing; the Fashion Research Collection and the Department of Fashion Design at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago for being so inspirational and for making available incredible resources to students interested in fashion; the greater city of Chicago for inspiring an interest in art and design, generally; Balenciaga for creating some of the most inspiring fashion designs that inspire undeniable transcendence of the female form; The University of Missouri and Arizona State University for allowing me the opportunity to present research during my tenure as a graduate student; and Brigham Young University, the Education staff at the BYU Museum of Art, the Department of Visual Arts, and Dr. Heather Belnap Jensen for the opportunity to research and gain new perspectives in the area of art history and education. And lastly, I want to extend sincere thanks to Joshua Vert—himself an artist and a (dental) sculptor with the utmost passion for his profession, for life, the Gospel, and creative endeavor—for his constant encouragement, and for being such a wonderful partner in life and love.
“Critical questions lurk in the minimal space between space and clothing. Do we clothe our naked bodies in order to disguise ourselves? When are we ourselves, and who are we? Will we be recognized by others as the persons we are, or as the ones we want to be?” – Annalie Lütgens, *Art & Fashion: Between Skin and Clothing* (2011)¹

“We find beauty not in the thing itself, but in the patterns of shadows, the light and the darkness, that one thing against another creates.” – Juni’chiro Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows* (1933)²

---

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TITLE PAGE</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mori’s Early Works: Self-Portraits (1994) and <em>The New Collection</em> (1993)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese Fashion and Identity in the Art of Mori</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Late 1990s: <em>Pureland</em> (1996), <em>Dream Temple</em> (1997) and Other Installations</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Wave UFO</em> as Culminating Expression</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURES</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Japanese contemporary artist Mariko Mori is often identified by her earliest work. The self-portraits released in the early 1990s that gained Mori international notoriety and critical acclaim represent a snapshot of the period. These artworks are fraught with sensibilities of diversity and multiculturalism. This body of self-portraiture, completed when Mori was in her mid-20s, captures the zeitgeist of emerging global perspectives in art of the 1990s, and has earned Mori a space in texts on contemporary art and in feminist art history.3 The self-portraits balance Mori’s Japanese-American identity by placing the artist in an urban Tokyo setting, shown in colloquial regional dress of Japanese youth culture or women in the workplace, while being exhibited almost exclusively in the United States.4

The 1990s witnessed a critical transition in Mori’s work from a Cindy Sherman-esque self-portraiture in photographs to large-scale, interactive installations. Her Wave UFO (Figure 1) is the culmination of this decade of artistic production. The Cindy Sherman-esque feminist critique in Mori’s 1994 self-portraits present the artist’s sexualized body as the subject of the viewer’s gaze. By her 1999 Dream Temple (Figure 2), this sexualized body appears to evaporate in favor of subject-less, immersive environments steeped in the religious iconography of pre-modern Japan. In Mori’s 2001 Wave UFO, the patron reappears as decided subject, and here, the presence of Mori’s body has seemingly shifted from presence as an amorphous Japanese

4 Mori’s residency at the Whitney Museum of American Art, which was the culmination of Mori’s Western education begun at Chelsea College of Art and Design in London a few years earlier, perhaps accounts for this exhibitionary practice.
reference to one that is completely absent. In this work, there is an emphasis on presence and collectivity, with groups of patrons sitting together in the womb-like interior of Wave UFO, and having their brainwaves projected on a shared screen above. In summary, from 1994 to 2001, the focus of Mori’s artwork changes the artist’s body to the body of the patron within an immersive environment.

The bulk of the scholarship on Mariko Mori deals with the early photographs. Her later works, and especially, the artist’s relationship with her body over time, have received less critical attention. Considering the bulk of the critique of Mori’s "early" work delves into her own self-representation in the very fashion (and fashions) that she sought to criticize, Dream Temple and ultimately Wave UFO succeed in marking a growing self-awareness of the artist. These works provide insight into Mori’s artmaking as being driven by her relationship with the female body in

---

Japan and beyond. *Dream Temple* and its many references to Shinto Buddhist worship and the Japanese landscape sum up her oeuvre up until 2001 as a dialogue of larger self-examination. Each work symbolizes the ephemeral position of the artist between Eastern and Western cultural dictates, as she perceives them. This ephemerality of self occurs in the artist’s play with the body as subject in her artwork over time, whether in self-portraits or installations of large groups of people flattened by technology. Constant references to Japanese-ness in this early work create the unease of a wandering sense of self, made better only by an eventual removal of the artist’s body from plain sight. Mori’s body exists as a liminal entity in her work preceding the 2001 *Wave UFO*, failing to achieve a decided concept prior to *Wave UFO*’s cohesive narrative of a mechanized body in modern space achieving transcendence through minimalist denial and technology.

The project to be examined by extended analysis in this thesis is Mori’s *Wave UFO*, which provides a point of consolidation for Mori’s dialogues with Japanese culture through her own body and technology to achieve an abstracted or essentialized concept of self and other. The body in its various places, spaces, and so on, as seen in patrons or swarm of attendants costumed in white, are the most salient features of Mori’s second large-scale installation. This marriage of fashion and the imaged body in Mori’s piece further substantiates her interest in using the body as a vehicle for conveying the lessening of corporeal-relational interactions in a global space. It accomplishes this in part by exploring the Japanese concept of *ma*, which is defined as “a rich space that possesses incalculable energy”\(^6\) to express a body charged with reverence. In *Wave UFO*, Mori continues a conceptual art practice by collaborating with production teams with respect to the technology, imaging, fabrication, funding, and most notably, the costumes that

adorned the attendants who assisted patrons into the Wave UFO pod. These attendant costumes are the aspect of this installation that will be most closely considered in this thesis.

Because these costumes have yet to be discussed in an academic setting, and away from the Wave UFO spectacle, the methodology of this paper will center on providing an introduction to the sartorial aspect of this work, considering the formal aspects as well as the Japanese heritage of these costumes, as well as Mori's own relationship with fashion in her oeuvre and the larger issue of the female body (Japanese or otherwise) within the clothes. Articles and press releases covering the artist and her earliest works generally center on overt symbols she employs during this time, which often restate the artist's statements. In the case of Wallis’s dissertation, historical matter is culled to demonstrate how Mori’s pastiche of images is appropriated from pre-modern to postmodern times and cultures. The Wave UFO costumes are the first time Mori separates fashion from an overt connection to her own body, while venturing into minimalist form.

This paper moves to trace Mori’s staging of the liminal body in her work in the 1990s, to demonstrate the ultimate achievement of these costumes to re-present a female, Japanese, collective body, and to show how Wave UFO culminates various dialogues begun in the earlier works. The body in Wave UFO is presented as pure, minimal and newly transcendent by means of collective healing. Additionally, Mori explores high-end technology as humanistic referent to different degrees through her sartorial inclusions. By looking to the heritage of Japanese fashion design in the Western market since the 1980s, Mori can be identified as in dialogue with the end of the millennium, as well as in the relational concerns of postmodern art. Mori’s choice to combine the conversations and practices of art and fashion fits into the trend of the time.

---

7 Wallis, "Mariko Mori: Art in Search of an Enlightened Future."
In essence, the gestures of Japanese influence within modernity itself, and within the Western art scene and fashion market, encouraged the process of “cultural penetration” that would provide the larger setting to situate and make sense of Mori’s work. Laura Miller has addressed the notions of self and other in a way that captures Mori’s play with forms of identity, and shape shifting between “stable” readings. Outside of creolization or the homogenization of forms, there exists a “Japan-created other and a reinvented notion of the traditional,” an identity not vacillating between self and other, but having created a third distinction, a new “modern.”

Rather than decisively settling on self or other in Mori’s work, one must eschew previous ethnocentric tendencies and see Mori’s West as being mediated through a Japanese lens. One must see her identity existing as a kind of liminality.

Through a removal of the artist Mori's body from posed in front of the camera, the performative body persists in *Wave UFO* in the form of the costumed attendants, who act as agents of Mori’s intended message of social connectivity through technology. Mori’s references to self pervade, but without the heavy hand of the critical self-portrait. The once aggressive confrontation of the artist’s body as fetish shifts to become a subdued costumed series of attendants with Mori's *Wave UFO*. These assistants serve as accessories to a large installation that itself calls upon the bodies of patrons to participate in creating conceptual content. The once idolatrous body of Mori becomes displaced into a multitude of simulacra all existing to the same conceptual end as the early works. I will argue that this narrative can be traced through a thorough examination of Mori’s earlier sartorial endeavors. When understood as extensions of self (and not merely as markers of Mori's own training in the area of fashion design) and as a kind of residual occurrence of identity-driven narrative, the *Wave UFO* costumes highlight

---

Mori’s own traumatic vision of self, in retreat and covered up. The unique medium of fashion enables the representation of these themes as a product of the larger issues of modernity, namely cultural alienation, postmodern fracturing, and so forth. This paper looks to these costumes specifically as a means of gaining insight into Mori’s relationship with fashion. Through an examination of the material objects themselves, as well as the grounding cultural contexts of her Japanese heritage, this relationship comes to be defined as fashion achieving healing for the artist. Mori’s diminishing presence—both culturally and physically—in her oeuvre spanning 1993–2010 finds a liminal transcendence and permanent presence through the fashioned object. In *Wave UFO*, her summative work, costume is posited as a kind of performative sculpture that lands at a notion of the body in postmodern times as one of psychic loss and spiritual transcendence.

The *Wave UFO* project overall, including the attendant costumes, dialogues about the performative body and its relationship to identity through outward appearance. This body-centric way of looking at clothes, an inward turn through verbiage more apt for consideration of fashion as sculpture (as opposed to a kind of media studies’ examination of outward spectacle and social relationships), operates within an art system towards the notion that the clothed body performs first. In comparison to Mori’s early self-portraits, the narrative of the performative body that persists in *Wave UFO* takes the decisive form of a minimalist body displaced among many vestiges of the multiple attendants. Additionally, the Japanese infiltration of the Western fashion market that began in the 1980s by a few key designers created a taste for espousing concepts like *ma*, which, more than simply a void, charged the empty space between the clothes and the body. The attendant costumes thus represent the performative body, the search for the new, and the

---

modern practice of transcending corporeal codes and signs. These costumes exist liminally between the boundaries of art/life, performance/object, emotion/intellect, and all moving towards a new body representative of Mori in a modern, enlightened state.

The grounding works that contain Mori’s earliest dialogues of self-identity are comprised of a body of self-portraits completed in 1994. This series launched Mori’s international presence, and includes *Play With Me* (Figure 3), *Subway* (Figure 4), *Love Hotel* (Figure 5), *Warrior* (Figure 6), *Red Light* (Figure 7) and *Tea Ceremony* (Figure 8) and *Tea Ceremony I-II* (Figure 9 and Figure 10), with the accompanying gallery performances of the traditional Japanese tea ceremony referenced in several of the images. These early works all feature Mori in cheeky poses, situated in uniquely Japanese settings that reference various cultural constructs. Prior to this series Mori had exhibited a self-portrait piece in the 1993 exhibition *Fall From Fashion* at the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art entitled *New Collection* (Figure 11), which varies slightly in content but also features the artist posing in front of the camera. The use of the body was popular in art of the 1990s, and in Mori’s 1993-1996 work takes the form of the artist’s costumed body. Gendered interactions persist in the relationships between Mori as the female main character and the surrounding settings and extras. In these relationships she creates play with self and other, through a distancing medium of costume. The playful getups represent tropes of Japanese fetishes of femininity. Finally, the works consistently approach themes of urban connectedness in Tokyo, and generally the urban condition—all themes that find reconciliation in the later *Wave UFO* installation and costumes.

The self-portrait works from 1994 demonstrate a use of Japanese costume, generating a

---

Morimoto created a work in 1991 entitled *The Emperor’s New Clothes* which also dealt with fashion. The work featured four clear vinyl coats each printed with the name of a prominent 20th century artist in black, hanging from a garment rack with security locks. This work lacks the inclusion of personal connection and identity that defines Mori’s later sartorial references, and warrants little place in this thesis. This piece is notable in that it precedes *New Collection* by two years and begins Mori’s critical attitude towards tropes of fashion.
connection back to Mori’s native Japan that Mori would sustain in subsequent works; the 1993 *New Collection* is notable for its lack of this Japanese costume referent. The subject of the accompanying text (both overlaid on the image and as an aside to the encyclopedic catalog entry) broaches on the topic of art and fashion, a trend in the 1990s and first decade of the 2000s that would characterize many important performance art pieces by prominent female artists such as Vanessa Beecroft and designers such as Marc Jacobs for Louis Vuitton. Additionally, after *New Collection*, Mori abandons this explicit criticism of the fashion market in favor of a feminist take on women's role in traditional Japanese practice, especially its iterations in contemporary culture. The fashion in the adjacent works of years 1993 and 1994 shifts to niche, colloquial expressions of clothing as they were to be found in the fashion districts of Tokyo in the early 1990s youth culture. By 1994, the sartorial reference elevates to become a more conceptual understanding of fashion as it alters the body that wears it. The expression is made on Mori’s back in the Japanese costumes versus the applied artifice of a mere market follower in the *New Collection* caricature.

Mori's costumes in her *Subway* and *Warrior* (1994) pieces create interplay between masculine and feminine, engaging the female body of the artist through costume and expanded environments. *Subway* and *Warrior* show Mori in utilitarian, aggressively masculinized clothing that reads more like a uniform than self-expression, to the effect that Mori’s outward persona turns cold and hardened. Mori’s gaze furthers this dialogue, showing a supposed unfamiliarity and discomfort with her surrounding world. The masculine costumes among these works seek to fit into their surroundings through forceful assimilation, especially contrasted against the

---

11 Loïc Prigent, Marc Jacobs, and Louis Vuitton, *Marc Jacobs & Louis Vuitton* (United States: Arte Video, 2007). This documentary contains several instances where contemporary artists are highlighted, including showing a collaboration with Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama, and interactions with American painter Elizabeth Peyton. Contemporary performance artist Vanessa Beecroft also often makes reference to the world of fashion through her live stagings of models as installations, and the inclusion of high-end labels in her self-portrait work.
feminized sexualized portrayals in the works that show Mori in high-heels and mini skirts with skintight leggings.

Continuing this comparison, Mori’s *Play With Me* presents the artist as a hyper-sexualized cyborg Mori whose costumes similarly read as futuristic, suggesting otherworldliness. This sexualized dress conveys a tension that Mori considers herself a kind of foreign object who finds solace as a coquettish sexual object, serving up her body as if on her *Tea Ceremony* tray to meet conventional notions of beauty. The suggestion of female sexuality as a form of self-appointed power not only reinforces Mori’s postmodern idea that codes are negotiable at will, but reinforces ideas of third wave feminism. The futuristic qualities are in line with trends in Japanese fashion at the time, particularly as it is used in the costumes of *Love Hotel*, *Red Light* and *Tea Ceremony*. Rather than being a woman in a male-centered arcade, Mori becomes the cartoonish figure from the video game screens and sacrifices her body in settings appropriate for a female body to be denigrated. In this series, the sexualized costumes take several forms, beginning Mori’s sartorial experimentation with changing the shape of the recognizably female body.

In the 1993-94 self-portraits, Mori vacillates between an overly youthful determination of female self, the mundane corporate uniform, and an otherworldly idea of self through her futuristic-plastic instances costume. Particularly crucial to contemporary criticism is Mori’s *Love Hotel*, which combines the school uniform of a young girl with a silver covering of skin,

---

ears, and scalp for a futuristic look. Recalling a sailor-style schoolgirl’s uniform, or robotic plasticized body complete with high-heels and alien-like ear covers, all aspects of the robotic costumes seek to augment the female body. Mori poses in the plush fabric of the hotel’s bed as if to contrast the stark coldness of her skin. Framed by phallic columns, the coldness of a gray, fluorescent interior and the hint of the male gaze coming from the television create an uneasy tension. Mori’s gaze confronts the camera—not aggressively, but in order to invite the viewer in. Because Mori’s body is encased in silver, the comfort or softness of the bed combines to fetishize Mori’s body in the shroud of youth and technological cyborg otherness.

Mori’s performances, from her early Tea Ceremony series on, contain a bit of this “dark attitude” and saw the artist working to criticize through mimesis of a cultural type. Norman Bryson refers to the subversive edge to Mori’s presentational and subservient smile, which is ever-present in the 1993-1995 self-portrait work. Play With Me, especially, with its aggressively inviting title and outlandish cyborg costume, presents the artist in a rather vulnerable position, alone and desperately seeking attention. Bryson comments that, by means of

---

14 Miller, Beauty Up, 7. The fascination with morphing the body to look youthful in beauty culture was seen as early as the 1970s as a kind of “Lolita” complex, of course recalling Nabokov’s Western novel about the ethereality of the youthful girl and this forbidden attraction. Mori’s early works demonstrate the penchant towards girlish appearance found in late twentieth-century Japan—with the heavily-costumed body and exaggeration of breasts and feminine features. Mori’s Love Hotel features the artist in a sailor-style school uniform. Additionally, Play With Me demonstrates the popular fascination with dolls and things doll-like. The 2010 Japan Fashion Now exhibition at the Museum of the Fashion Institute of Technology, which features several iterations of the “Gothic Lolita” ensemble, playfully demonstrates the niche manifestations of this trend. The childlike state can also be understood as a prepubescent state of androgyny. For more on Mori’s women, see Wallis, “Office Ladies, School Girls, and Video Vixens.”


mimesis, this presentation borders on mockery. It shows Mori as a “critical symptom,” because she presents more of that which she seeks to criticize, in an almost naïve way. This cynicism explains Mori’s move away from imaging her own body in her work over time. The vulnerability of the body doesn’t end with Mori’s self-portraits. Vulnerability becomes a dialogue concerning the modern condition in *Wave UFO*. With the development of time, she seeks to affect the public, manipulating the threatening interactions created in the self-portraits slicing of the artist and her various surroundings to those directly in contact with her large immersive works. The shift from the streets of Tokyo to Western settings further adds to the idea of a vacillating definition of self as Mori attempted it.

Mori’s *New Collection* is a work that distances itself from the better-known self-portrait series by presenting a similar critical edge of fashion practices but through verbiage of a Western fashion market. *New Collection* shows Mori stylishly modeling a blue skirt suit. Her hair is gathered to the back of her head, and the side tilt of her head mirrors a playful jutting out of her hip, setting her body at dynamic angles with further exaggeration of bent arms. Mori gracefully wields a paintbrush (held up to her mouth like a cigarette), a wooden artist’s palette, and an easy-going smile. White text overlaid like an advertisement reads “Art as Fashion! Sheer fantasy and extravagance come together with brilliant blue in this season’s debut collection from Mariko Mori.” The design of Mori’s single-breasted blue jacket features four grey circle details where button enclosures would be. The blue and grey of the jacket matches the painting with a similar circle motif that acts as a backdrop, suggesting that fashion’s literal referent is in this case “art,” with fashion being more in line with “extravagance.”

In *New Collection*, the artist’s body carries a message of fashion and its tension as a

---

17 Ibid.
commercial art, suggesting a hierarchy that would influence the artist’s professional choice to pursue art making over designing fashion. This early work implicates the body of the artist as a means for reconciling personal beliefs as they concern art making, but falls short of lending true insight into a more personalized narrative that comes about in her self-portrait works of the following year, 1994, when the artist explores similar topics within a Japanese setting. Vulnerability as it relates to a bodily existence is a major theme that brings life to Mori’s works. Whether it functions as a body on display through self-portraiture or literally through the patron bodies of the larger Wave UFO installation, bodies in modern space inevitably experience this vulnerability.

The change in environment following New Collection functions to shift the body of the artist to new conceptual ends, as one influenced by shared space. Mori’s costumed body in her 1994 self-portraits becomes vulnerable to the urban setting surrounding it. The quiet studio setting of New Collection with its controlled lighting and flat backdrop is replaced by mostly male-dominated sites of entertainment – a video arcade, a business office and district, an electronics store. Alternately, there may be a suggestion of gendered male-dominant, female-subservient power as in the Love Hotel, Red Light, and Tea Ceremony pieces. Significantly, in New Collection, Mori’s model-esque frame is shown in Western costume, which references the Western fashion market specifically. This generalization of Mori’s non-Eastern styling features

---

18 Mori’s costumed body finds contrast in often male-dominated cultural settings in these self-portraits. While the interplay of the subject-ed Mori and her surroundings remains pretty consistent from each iteration to the next within this series, issues of gender ebb and flow. The artist’s gaze towards camera, and, most relevantly to this project, the outward effect of the chosen costumes Mori wears vary from aggressively masculine and utilitarian in psychological affect in Warrior (fig. 10) and Subway (fig. 8), to hyper-sexualized, fetishized cyborg looks in the remaining Love Hotel, Red Light and Tea Ceremony and Tea Ceremony I-III. Play With Me (fig. 7) is the most extreme transformation via costume and sartorial accessories.
Mori in a blue silk satin\textsuperscript{19} blazer reminiscent of the popular women's suiting to come out of the post-WWII, masculine-inspired style of womenswear, effectively dressing herself as an “other.”\textsuperscript{20} The tailoring and delicate textile befitting of a high-end garment serve the accompanying narrative that criticizes the cyclical consumer-driven raison d'être of Western fashion. Mori demonstrates the freedom of appropriation of regional costume in a contemporary society.

\textsuperscript{19} Silk and satin denote fiber content and the pattern of the woven structure, known for its finery and relative rarity. The non-cellulose, protein-based fiber makeup is often imitated in synthetic textiles, and in fact, many of her Japanese costumes are made from these shiny synthetic reproductions.

\textsuperscript{20} Largely utilitarianism came to womenswear during the fabric restrictions of wartime, resulting in the utilization of menswear tailoring. For a greater sense of 20\textsuperscript{th} century American fashion narratives during and following WWII, look to Linda Welters and Patricia A. Cunningham, \textit{Twentieth-Century American Fashion} (Oxford: Berg, 2005).
Japanese Fashion and Identity in the Art of Mori

Japanese conceptual art roots Mori’s approaches to her later 1990s decade work, providing a basis for the use of fashion as a conceptual vehicle. Although Japanese fashion designers existed in the West prior to the 1980s, such as couturier Rei Kawakubo of Commes des Garçons who came to NYC in 1969, strong parallels between Japanese designers working in a Japanese style emerged in the early 1980s. This was an opportunity for the advent of an Eastern style in a Western market, without a loss of vision or cohesion in its new setting. Eighties Japanese fashion found inspiration in the modernist art movement in 1950s and ‘60s Japan. This featured the use of conceptual fashion. A remarkable example of this proto-minimalism, proto-performance concept is the work of Atsuko Tanaka (1932-2005). Examples of her work include Stage Clothes piece from 1956 (Figure 12) and her better-known Electric Dress from 1957 (Figure 13).21 One of the goals of the Japanese Gutai movement was to go beyond abstraction, to “depart from naturalistic and illusionistic art and create a new autonomous space . . . by merging human qualities and material properties, [to grasp] abstract space in concrete terms.”22 Like her contemporaries involved in the Gutai movement in Japan – what scholars have seen as parallel to the minimalist movement in the West – one of the markers of Tanaka’s approach was her interest in creating the “new” and her use of technology as a conduit. Like Mori, the artist interjected herself into the work. For example, she incorporated the large red paper dress from Stage Clothes

21 Arguably Tanaka’s contribution is more in line with a kind of technology-driven version of Post-minimalism, because of her visible hand in conglomerating ready-made materials. Though there is not space here to explore this further, Tanaka is undeniably ahead of her time through her use of the performative, gendered body and visible sculptural, sartorial hand. What disqualifies her from a straightforward Post-minimalist distinction, besides the obvious anachronism, is her use of technology, versus the tactile, homespun fibers of Post-minimalism.

into a performance in which the dress would be peeled back until the artist’s body was uncovered to show how she was wearing a leotard infused with blinking lights.\textsuperscript{23} The shape is reminiscent of a marriage kimono and spectators would see the artist ceremoniously robe herself in performances incorporating the piece.\textsuperscript{24} The lines and bulbs refer to a physiological wiring of the human body, thus referencing neurological and circulatory pathways. Like Mori’s cyborg costume, Tanaka creates here a simulacrum of the human existence through technological means. Here, the insides of the human body are replicated, the body mechanized, and its essential parts reshaped. Traces of Gutai ideology, and certainly a continuation of the dialogues created by Tanaka exist in Mori’s \textit{Wave UFO} and contribute to the idea of body displacement, introduced in her early self-portrait series and then further developed in \textit{Wave UFO}.

Flatness, asymmetry, and a penchant for using black indicated a pioneering Japanese sensibility still found in approaches in the current fashion industry. Like Mori, these Japanese designers were working within the framework of Japan’s ancient lineage, which coincided with the height of its economic boom. The designers seemingly worked from a singular rulebook, one that would present a cohesiveness to characterize this modern face of Japan.\textsuperscript{25} The collections were characterized by a lot of draped sculptural fabric, as opposed to the volume-creating tailoring of the 1980s “power” silhouettes. They were marked as minimalist, monochrome,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{24}] By contrast, Yoko Ono’s \textit{Cut Piece} (1964) involved the artist’s disrobing at the hands of an audience, who would one by one cut a piece of the artist’s clothing while she sat on a stage. The work, an early usage of conceptual fashion relevant to this discussion, implies vulnerability through nudity that technology prevents Tanaka or Mori from ever experiencing, thereby negating this work from being considered here.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
deconstructed . . . and black. This sensibility would carry into the minimalism trends of the following decade.\textsuperscript{26} Kawakubo, Yamamoto, and Miyake, among others, “[led] what amounted to an assault on both fashion convention and Western norms of beauty” or “clothes for the end of the world that [looked] as if they [had] been bombed to shreds.” While Western fashion structured the female body as spectacle, the Japanese designers created as a performative celebration in line with the theory of \textit{wabi-sabi}. This meant celebrating impermanence, the incomplete, modesty and simplicity, and the passage of time in material form.\textsuperscript{27} The lack of structured patterning reinforces the gestural nature of draped clothing, sometimes presenting a sense of desperation, created in a moment’s time as quick shelter. Reading the stark white panels of Mori’s 2001 \textit{Wave UFO} attendant costumes amidst a portentous vision of the futuristic world, one recalls the same public reception of the influx of Japanese fashion designers in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{28} Janie Samet’s suggestion that the Japanese look recalled something of war torn times reinforces the postwar trend of contemporary Japanese artists to utilize art-making—in this case, clothing design—as a kind of ritualistic healing. Mori’s own healing (of Japanese identity, of the body in modern space, of the body relationship with technology) begins to find legs in her early costumes, and takes a decided turn for psychological peace in the bright white \textit{Wave UFO} attendant costumes.

\textsuperscript{26} This concept certainly impacted the 1990s minimalist movement, a decade where the silhouette of the little black dress reinstated itself as a wardrobe staple and counter culture groups found metaphysical solace in black as subversive and expressive of angst. The streamlined, sculptural silhouette would come to characterize such established brands as Dior, Balenciaga, Lanvin, and Calvin Klein, among others in this era.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.

Japanese identity is one Mori appropriates at will and to new postmodern ends. Postmodernism, as it is considered to be “a preoccupation with a refashioning of personal identities out of cultural materials,” allows for its user to appropriate at will existing symbols to new conceptual ends. Postmodern fashion, in the age of Baudrillard’s simulation, divorces itself from the lineage of historical oppression or dictates at a time when fashion once existed to create social distinction. In postmodernity, and in Mori’s sartorial work, signs transcend once-given meaning to reveal new bodily forms. The crux of postmodernism is such that an understanding of history does not necessarily lend insight into any given piece. Signs and symbols are negotiable and playful, even.

In much of the artwork with a “postmodern” distinction made since the 1980s, these signs and symbols serve as greater distractions from the true psychological affect or situation of the work. Historically, Mariko Mori's artwork is accompanied by significant explanation at the artist's hand. One image received a page-long manifesto in New Collection, or in the case of her Dream Temple and Wave UFO pieces and Oneness or Rebirth exhibitions, entire books full of supportive text and images. The works themselves often contain references to Mori's native

---

30 Jean Baudrillard. Simulations (New York City, N.Y., U.S.A.: Semiotext(e), Inc, 1983), as cited in Tseëlon, The Masque of Femininity, 128. Baudrillard dictates three Orders of Simulacra: imitation, production, and simulation. Whereas the first two dictate to the wearer a reality, the third order represents appearances that invent reality. In this third order of simulation, the wearer is no longer concerned with the real, but reproduces images and appropriations from a model, sometimes one that is historical.
31 Ibid, 128.
32 As seen in the exhibition catalog previously mentioned.
33 Respectively, Mariko Mori, Mariko Mori: Dream Temple (Milano: Fondazione Prada, 1999); Mariko Mori, Eckhard Schneider, and Christiane Blass, Wave UFO (Köln: W. König, 2003); Mariko Mori, Mariko Mori: Oneness (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2007); Mariko Mori,
Japan – where the artist received her education and upbringing until moving to London in 1989 – through costume, architecture, and religious and philosophical symbols. Signifiers are ambivalent in these works and suggest that those elements that receive less explanation are the things that perhaps lend the most insight into Mori’s work, her practice and forms. This postmodernist tendency and its effect promote the thesis that minimalism (in this case, in a performative sense) brings back an artistic narrative more authentic to an artist’s relationship with her body. Removed from mere outward expression with little internal referent, this “ambivalence, fragmentation and freedom”\(^\text{34}\) that Mori has accompanied with expansive explanation requires new ways of seeing, and through fashion – itself a hybrid performative-sculptural form – new ways of reading the artist’s intent emerge.

\(^{34}\) Tseëlon, *The Masque of Femininity*, 124.
The Late 1990s: *Pureland* (1996), *Dream Temple* (1997) and Other Installations

For the next few years following the early urban portraits, Mori maintained the self-portrait format for her work, and began to transition into different ideas of Japanese identity while exploring other ancient cultures. *Birth of a Star* (1995) (Figure 14) follows in the precedent set forth by the 1994 photographs most closely, while addressing the hyper-digitization that Mori would adopt in the coming pieces. In these, Mori circumvents reality entirely by dropping herself into an artificial space, adding anti-gravity orb-like elements, and suggesting weightlessness through floating hair. Artificiality is emphasized through a vinyl tartan plaid print miniskirt and white eye contacts. Themes of the artificial body, combined with a Japanese body, find beginning here, and will shift to absolute disembodied form in the *Wave UFO* costumes.

Mori transitions to combine artificiality through costume and environment to achieve a meditative transcendence of the artist’s body from a clear sense of region or identity a few years later. The ultimate combination of digitization and references to pre-modern Japanese costume in Mori’s work comes in her *Pureland*. The work centers Mori in an elaborate pastel kimono, floating above a lotus, and flute-playing pastel aliens streaming bubbles. The setting is non-referential, otherworldly and certainly digitally created or manipulated to represent a consciousness that has transcended reality and achieved nirvana. References to Buddhism and Eastern philosophy abound. The crux of the element of otherworldliness transporting Mori beyond everyday existence is marked outwardly through Mori’s costume, arguably one of the more realistic elements to this scene. It is during this time that Mori begins to cite technology as

---

35 In 1998 Mori merchandized the *Star Doll*, which features Mori’s *Birth of a Star* persona.  
36 The accompanying video *Nirvana* (1996) featured this same scene in video motion.
a conduit to higher existence, perhaps in its ability to allow the user to exist removed from the body. This technological space is shown reverence in Mori’s larger immersive installations.

Just prior to and concurrent with this, Mori created *Dream Capsule* (1998) (Figure 15) and *Dream Temple* (1999), which began to incorporate the elements of spatial experience and references to generalized ancient cultures and religious transcendence. *Temple* supercedes the literal human-scale corporeality present in the womblike glass *Capsule* in its attempts at fashioning a religious space. This creates for the viewer a place for self-reflection, with notes of the physical, compulsory connectedness of the viewer in *Wave UFO*. The notion of space, or *ma*, is essential to understanding the attendant costumes and can be seen here in these earlier works that incorporate negative space as a conceptual consideration. These space-based works led into the open-air minimalist sculptures and meditation spaces that interested Mori at the end of the century. This includes the *Garden of Purification* (1999) (Figure 16) that uses different colored stones for each step to represent the human mind’s transcendence. A comparison of these works displays a theme of meditative space with and without the body. *Wave UFO* provides a point of liminality between the use of the body and the negation of it entirely through space (or, in other words, the transformational possibilities of mediated space). With the suggestion of healing seen in the attendant costumes, it appears that Mori graduates to human-less space after having achieved her goal of human collectivity.

These later works utilize some of the same elements of plasticization and *Japonisme* since the outset of Mori’s exhibited work.37 In addition to the digital splicing of the artist’s body into the scene, the inclusion of references to the Japanese Edo Period (1600-1868) in *Pureland* (1996) (Figure 17), with its historical costume, and in *Dream Temple*, with its architectural

---

37 Laura Miller discusses a contemporary practice of assigning a Japanese-style as dictated by a Western “self” generally in Laura Miller, *Beauty Up*. 
structure, are noteworthy. This inclusion of an early Japanese referent feels unnatural, as the Japanese identity to which Mori can lay claim is removed by time and only vaguely substantiated through textual explication.\textsuperscript{38}

Mori’s identity becomes increasingly sparse from the themes presented in her work following *Dream Capsule* and *Dream Temple*. These installations mark the end of the era of Mori’s ubiquitous references and incorporations of Japanese identity and history. The dynamics of the female body shift from playful negotiation through costume and setting to the artist’s complete negation of her own literal presence (digitally, or otherwise) as subject in *Wave UFO*. This same mind for the metaphysical, which takes an almost spiritual approach to mediating the art installation experience, takes hold in the *Wave UFO* sculptural installation to several degrees. The minimalist attendant costumes address themes of universality of form, allowing for a new perception of the body in this context.

Whether it be the fetishized high heels that both create the appearance of an elongated female leg and render the wearer in a position of limited mobility, or to plasticize the skin to appear machinelike and mechanized, what *New Collection*, the 1994 photographs, and later works have in common is the use of costume to a conceptual end that moves beyond the mere covering of a body or functional garb.\textsuperscript{39} This thesis argues that costume has a transforming effect for its wearer, one likened to healing that allows for physical transcendence to something of an alternative outer skin (physical location changed) or meaning (metaphysical location changed). Mori would continue to release works following these projects in prolific number over the next few years. What has gone unmentioned in regards to her oeuvre of the late 1990s, most notably

\textsuperscript{38} The Edo period is considered the earliest vestige of the Japanese modern age.

\textsuperscript{39} The term “costume” is emphasized in this thesis to emphasize the performative nature of these garments, versus the more wearable “fashion,” “clothing,” or “fashion design.”
Wave UFO which will receive extended analysis from this point forward, is the continuation of Mori’s dialogue of costume that began in these works.
Wave UFO as Culminating Expression

Wave UFO began as collaboration between Mariko Mori Studios and a team of underwriters—including the Public Art Fund, Deitch Projects, Fundación Prada, and Kunsthaus Bregenz. Planning for the multifaceted project began in 1999 and took two years to execute. Logistically, the project can be divided into two subcategories of organization: architecture and technology. Wave UFO combines the idea of an interactive installation that is self-contained while being transportable and object-like. The large-scale fiberglass shell, shaped like a droplet inverted onto its side, suggests motion, and finds rest on a small cylindrical base of the same material from which it appears detachable. The UFO designation further suggests an ability to take flight, although it is fully incapable of doing so. Italian architect Marco Della Torre, who oversaw fabrication by high-end Italian studio Modelleria Angelino, designed the architecture of the outer shell and structural interior. The structure could accommodate three individuals at a time. Prior to entering the pod, each individual was assisted by attendants into node headwear (Figure 18). Once inside visitors would be hooked into the Wave UFO. Inside, the individuals would be directed by the attendants towards a Technogel© lined built-in recliner, where the individual would lie supine, able would be able to view the projector screen above him/her (Figure 19).

Mori plays with different modes of representation for the body inside and outside of the Wave UFO shell. Outside of the structural considerations was a bevy of technological items to animate the interior of the Wave UFO capsule, with the aim to provide a video-display for the intended patrons who would visit and interact with the small space. In their cushioned seats, the three individuals would lie back and could witness their brainwaves projected above them on the shared screen. Tokyo-based Masahiro Kahata and Silicon Studio designed the interface that
would stylize biofeedback of brainwaves into swirls and pockets of pastel colors (Figure 20).
The designers provided a simple breakdown of the bio-data, where the left and right brain would be separated and appear as two elements in motion. The color, size and motion of the forms would be determined by Alpha, Beta, and Theta wavelengths, respectively (Figure 21). As entities morphed and became “synchronized,” they would combine, signaling interconnection between the participants. The interplay of real-time internal data in collapsed modes of representation support Mori’s exhibition text and assertion that “all beings in this world may appear to exist independently, but are in reality all connected.”

In a way, the body is transformed into these shapes, transcending corporeal reality. In Wave UFO, the insistence on the body as conceptual form in Mori’s early work becomes one that denies it. The body of the patron undergoes a weightless experience, adding a measure of self-denial perpetuated in the shapeless attendant frocks that deny the wearer much sense of body.

The theme of servitude that Mori took upon herself and began in her self-portraits and tea ceremony performances continues through the bodies of the Wave UFO attendants. This implied selflessness is further substantiated by the chosen costumes to clothe the attendants. The costumes provided by Public Art Fund were unisex one-piece garments that recalled a flat-panel kimono design, flattening male or female body into one bio-essentialized form. Additionally, the shapelessness negates organic form, further collapsing the personal narrative of the attendants into one of a generalized servant without distinction. In this way, the servant type adorned in kimono from Mori’s earlier in-gallery tea ceremonies becomes a type displaced among a group. The similarities take place when considering the formal makeup of the white kimonos. The

40 Taken from a page of preliminary exhibition catalog text by Mori, courtesy the Public Art Fund Archive, Fales Library, New York University.
otherwise simplistic design when traced to Mori’s chosen ritual performances references Japanese identity in a new way outside of the explicit Japanese settings.

Minimalism, conceptualism, and an avant-garde penchant for achieving newness through technology find expression in Mori’s Wave UFO installation. Like Gutai’s incorporation of technology to provide patrons with new world experiences of their bodies, the smooth white shell of the stiff synthetic Wave UFO attendant costumes function to plasticize the body of the interns wearing them. As Mariko Mori’s art worked towards complete dematerialization and beyond mere representational abstraction, a new relationship to the sculptural space developed. This interest in that “transcendental power” of unmediated existence, where space and material become the only artistic elements functioning in their work, found expression in the current l’art informel movement. This pared-down artistic space leaves room for exploring the elevated notions of the artistic gesture, where these artists saw their work as creating “intersections of the physical and supernatural worlds.” This mysticism contains a kind of trauma, where the narrative takes on an anti-humanism bent. In this way, the space becomes a place where performance fabricated the real, and challenged and self-actualized it.

While Japanese heritage informs much of Mori’s own interests and ideas of self, the Western sphere of art is where Mori would show almost exclusively and receive much of her education. Therefore, an understanding of Western art at the time of the Eastern movements heretofore discussed situate where Mori’s work would find solace and context. The decision to showcase Wave UFO as a departure from the literal Japanese landscape, versus the earlier works,

---

41 Hariu Ichiro, “Material and Humans,” (1957), as cited in Chong, From Postwar to Postmodern, 102-105.
42 Ibid.
moves away from a direct criticism of modern Japan and into a global space, thus offering the potential for a more universal message.

The influence of mid-century conceptual fashion influenced Japanese fashion designers in the 1980s, as previously discussed, and set a foundation for Mori’s work. Unlike Western mid-century artworks concerned with the female performative body, which were often centered on nudity and entered dialogues of eroticism or exhibitionism (for example Yves Klein’s female nudes in his 1962 *Anthropometries*, Carolee Schneemann’s 1963 *Eye Body*, or Eleanor Antin’s 1972 *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture*), mid-century Japanese performative art included wearable forms that covered the body.44 This modern Japanese sensibility, previously discussed in terms of the *Gutai* and *l’art informel* movements (and in the work of Tanaka), took strong hold in the 1980s designs pioneered by designers Watanabe, Kawakubo, and Yamamoto. This hit the Western fashion market as a stand-alone phenomenon seemingly unaware of the trends and thrusts of ‘80s Western fashion of the time. Scholar and curator Kate Bush, among others, suggests that the strength and simultaneous otherness of the message was widely felt by the press in Paris.45 Bush suggests that there was a clear Japanese thread within a Western system, a clear sense of identity that stood on its own merit.

In addition to this conceptual bent, the context for establishing a Japanese edge as a facet of Western culture (versus an outsider’s meriting infiltration) has perhaps been understated. Japanese art following World War II often cites the destruction of an ancient nation, and the

---

44 Perhaps the best reference to an anthropomorphic gesture likened to Japanese philosophy would be Eleanor Antin’s early 1971 piece *100 Boots*. The boots, arranged in line, and often placed in scenes of nature to recall a flock of birds or small animals, suggest a similar kind of loss with a performative edge that Mori’s shell-like attendant costumes recall forth. The body is absent but merely suggested in outline, mentionable only due to the molded boot form in the shape of a foot, ankle and lower leg. The same effect of multiples carries the eye from form to form, always in pairs, creating a dynamism that engages the eye and creates movement.

ushering in of a modern face to the nation. Akiko Fukai cites the Spring/Summer 1983 *Le Figaro* article reviewing Kawakubo’s collection, which characterized it as “apocalyptic clothing . . . pierced with holes, tattered and torn, almost like clothing worn by nuclear holocaust survivors.” In contradistinction to the sense of fashion in the Western market that denounced wartime by celebrating new forms and materials, Fukai and others have identified a remembrance in Japanese fashion that doesn’t necessarily exist in the modern Western vernacular. This is an important notion when considering Mori’s relationship with fashion that is in line with this notion. This Eastern perspective aware of European fashion standards though, by contrast, intent on presenting collections still understandable to the West, accomplished a redefinition of Japanese away from “Oriental,” or seeing Japanese art as Orientalism. This was a new recognition for the Eastern eye and culture, as it could exist unpenetrated within the Western construct of fashion and its market. Additionally, what this new perspective allowed was an appreciation for street culture, something the fashion industry of the late twentieth century embraced. Mori examines these dialogues in her plays with Eastern and Western perspectives. Elements of street costume – the *kawaii*, or cute, youthfulness, simplicity, artificiality, ornament and exaggeration, etc. – were included in this initial introduction to modern Japanese identity. Street costume represents the democracy of 20th century fashion to be able to dictate trend from the bottom, up. This same freedom characterizes the lessening of Mori’s identity, once regional

---

46 Ibid.
48 The FIT Museum under Valerie Steele presented the exhibition *Japan Fashion Now* and featured several “Gothic Lolita” ensembles in 2010, perhaps one of the more fitting (and enjoyable) monographs of two niche cultural references in clothes as they were seen merging on the streets of Tokyo and beyond.
dress could be appropriated by a global audience at will. Likening this to Mori’s experience, her otherness would become compromised as the increasingly global world became smaller and as the vocabularies of both cultures became shared. In this way Mori embraces the new trait set forth by the fashion designers to just precede her, and approaches an identity defined more by her presence in modernity than a specific geography.\(^{50}\) This sense of global connectedness achieved by technological progress is essential to understanding Mori’s *Wave UFO* and the task of the costumes to capture this zeitgeist.

Mori’s cynicism as it relates to place and sense of self finds play in her narratives related to regional fashion. Mori’s Westernized body in her *New Collection* seems to recall a sense of inclusion perhaps born from Mori’s own experience in the fashion market as a model during her college years in Tokyo. Her striking suggestion of fashion as the cheapened facet of fine arts that espouse consumerist market values suggests a cynicism towards Western facets of fashion. The dramatic shift, then, that Mori takes into strictly “Eastern” iterations of costume would suggest that she views these costumes as a conceptual vehicle in art. Mori’s costumes in her 1990s art is decidedly non-Western. Eventually escaping geography, what began as a sexualized, mechanized woman in *Play With Me* becomes an androgynous version of this same mechanized image in the 2001 *Wave UFO* attendant costumes. This signifies a criticality removed from the initial direct imaging of the female body in various states of hyper-sexuality or threat towards more collective notions of universality and interconnectedness. The notion that one cannot escape the dark paradigm of modernity and its technology-driven vices is a key element of Mori’s turn of the century work. The body is essential to this understanding of modernity, and the *Wave UFO* costumes particularly insightful in Mori’s oeuvre. Moreover, the itinerant nature of the *Wave*  

\(^{50}\) Ibid, 15.
UFO pod is critical. With a small circular base suggesting that at any point it could lift off and propel into new territories, this piece underscores the notion of contingency.

Formally, the costumes in Wave UFO are flat-panel designs that contain a kind of potential energy that is realized only when donned by the wearer. Akiko Fukai, chief curator and director of the Kyoto Costume Institute says of the traditional flat-panel approach in Japanese design: “only when they are worn do they take their final form, and movement causes them to acquire further unexpected shapes.” Like the interior of Wave UFO, which contains great potential for meaning even when unoccupied these costumes are animated by human presence. As designer Yamamoto notes, his clothes are “made half by him, and half by the wearer.” Both Mori and Yamamoto suggest that the human component is essential to the message these works aim to convey. Without the body, fashion is dead the moment it has been released, or shown. In Mori’s Wave UFO, these costumes are truly just an empty shell. In this way the fashion marks liminality, a step in the process of achieving a final state.

Beyond mere chronology, what separates Mori from a post-minimal distinction is the fact that Mori explores high-end technology as humanistic referent. In the Wave UFO, Technogel© seat inserts cradle the bodies in the artificial gel-like substance as they lay down in the seats. Mori’s experiments with Technogel© recall Eva Hesse’s pioneering efforts to incorporate latex into her works, using it as a skin like element more relational to the human experience than paint or plaster (Figure 22). This all-too-interconnecting experience of a claustrophobic interior space shared with two others is compounded by the vulnerability of

---

51 Ibid, 16.
52 Ibid, 16.
having one’s vital signs projected above and combined with those of the other two patrons. The fact that the patron is connected to the pod at the temples adds to this sense of overwhelming connectivity. In effect, the bodies of these individuals are in a precarious existence, their inner-workings being revealed and then re-mystified in pastel colors of the swirling biostatistics. The experience either recalls a dreamlike state, or another one similar where the body and the mind are separate, disembodied and free, and then made aware of this separation through image and space.

The minimalism of the Wave UFO costumes mirror the narrative of the void. The 1933 Jun’ichirō Tanizaki novel *Praise of Shadows* speaks to the beauty of this void, in this case, the void between the body and the experienced body.⁵⁴ What this publication sees in terms of darkness, Mori presents a void that is all-too-illuminated. From the urban fluorescent haze in *Play With Me* to the indirect mirrored reflection of natural light in *Tea Ceremony*, the experiential space is eerily visible, and suspended in artificiality. What immersive space accomplishes in these earlier works, fashion realizes to a greater effect as it possesses the ability to directly interact with the body. The power of fashion to “[reassure] the [notion of the] uncertain self”⁵⁵ fails to really do so through the attendants’ costumes. The unique universality of Japanese design,⁵⁶ the sterility of all white against other plastic surfaces, and the sense of counter-culture charm of someone who “is unwilling to dress him/herself up so that other people have something pleasing to look at”⁵⁷ leaves the viewer ill at ease.

---

⁵⁶ Ibid, 22.
The power of sartorial postmodernism is that clothing can transcend social matrices, but ultimately frees women from their own bodies.\textsuperscript{58} By the time Mori arrives at \textit{Wave UFO}, the dark criticality accomplished through costume in the \textit{New Collection} and the 1994 self-portraits seemingly turns to a liberation of women’s bodies. This is achieved by hiding behind poetic extensions of self either sartorially through adopting amorphous white fashions, or biologically, by eschewing the outside skin for an interior beauty that could be aesthetic-ized technologically. In clothing the men and women attendants in the same costume (although allowing for the individuation of appearance through added pants or leggings), the female body has seemingly been set free, through androgyny. The shaped frock, kicked out from the body and at the length of a unisex tunic, provides a new, plastic outer skin that denies true corporeal physicality. But embedded in the costumes is a darkness, one created through an autobiographical splicing of self and others into a faceless, over-simplified mass. With the attendant costumes now comfortably situated within a Japanese dialogue of conceptual, futuristic fashion, the use of minimalism and trauma can now be analyzed.

Aside from being a unisex garment, the costume consists of a white flat panel design, which has the functionality of “one size fits all” tailoring and the effect of a nurse uniform. It also has the conceptual flatness of a kimono design, to the effect of universal simplicity. In 1999 the Public Art Fund, as primary project manager and beneficiary of the \textit{Wave UFO} project, commissioned Mona Kowalska to design and fabricate the costumes to be worn by the attendants to the \textit{Wave UFO} installation (Figure 23).\textsuperscript{59} The costumes allowed for the attendants to complete Garçons, that the gesture of the brand is to eschew the gaze, rather than invite it, as the Western market had always encouraged, as traced in historical media studies.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid, 4.
\textsuperscript{59} The attendants themselves were Public Art Fund interns who were allowed to keep the costumes. Former Public Art Fund intern Craig Savitsky in email correspondence recalled
their responsibilities to attach nodes to the foreheads of each patron visitor to the installation and
to guide them through the small opening into the pod. (There the three patrons at a time would be
plugged in and left to lay back and witness the colorful display above.) Kowalska’s design
includes a removable band that fits around the shoulder and under the arm, and hip pockets.\textsuperscript{60}
Additionally, from the proper right side seam extends a wide sash-like element that runs down
the side of the garment, adding an element of slight movement and dynamism to the silhouette.
The sash also recalls the Japanese “datemaki,” a kimono element that would be worn as an
undergarment and wrapped from chest to waist to pad waist and suppress the natural bust shape
(Figure 24).\textsuperscript{61} Although the reference is light, the reminiscence of the kimono shape in the
costume recalls religious practice and charges the role of the attendants with one of reverence.
Alternately, the costumes recall the sterile garment of a nurse or other healer, an elevated societal
position. These inner-wrappings would have the effect of stabilizing the flexibility of the waist,
thus creating robotic movements of constricted mobility. These healing notions compound the
plasticization of aesthetics that mechanize the roles of the attendants. The combination of healing
and technology reads like the future, recalls the Japanese cyborg types Mori once dressed up as,
and explains the line of continuation from the early self-portraits to the attendant costumes.
Perhaps the Japanese postwar sensibility of rebuilding is necessary in the modern world, now

\textsuperscript{60} In the \textit{A Détacher} video, created in the early days of the company and the designer’s sole
official archive of the attendant costume, this robe is worn by Kowalska herself and filmed in a
way to showcase the subtle details and drape of the fabric on the body. The appearance of a hard
outer shell is achieved by manipulating the pattern to lessen the fabric’s ability to gracefully
drape (figure 23). This is the earliest and only existing footage of the garment outside of patron-
generated documentation.
\textsuperscript{61} Miller, \textit{Beauty Up}, 79.
with the availability of new technologies. Mori’s hopeful inclusion of this type secures an altruistic idea of futuristic means to secure a new kind of comfort. The artist’s consent to use an up-and-coming Mott Street boutique, A Détacher, echoes this interest in grounding aspects of this project.

This austere minimalism contrasts with Mori’s playful past, approaching a somber rationality that reads more like a psychological state of loss. As mentioned previously, the stark costumes against the cold glimmer of the inert Wave UFO shell is arguably haunting, like an apocalyptic shelter or settlement found in a Huxley novel, or the somber futurism of the culture surrounding the fear behind the Cold War. The interconnectedness that Mori aims to achieve thus falls short. Any connection between humans is deeply mediated by technology to several degrees, more of a dialogue about the ubiquity of technology in the modern human experience than the ability to connect with one another. The suspended liminality of Mori’s progression between Eastern and Western identities, as she positions them, and between bodily connection and conceptual removal of self defines the development from Mori’s early work to this point of her Wave UFO installation.

The performative body would thus mutate to one unrecognizable, if not altogether absent, in Mori’s work to follow to date. Leaving behind the pop art sensibilities of Mori’s 1990s work as she transitions into the later phase of minimalist work forsakes literal reference to the body. This includes the “fallibility and insufficiency of memory” related to the pre-modern and

62 The artist’s own wardrobe as seen in press following this point is much like these attendant costumes, adding a reassuring nod to the attendants as the ones in control of a larger narrative. Albeit, the artist’s own clothing ranges in fabrication and once included the luxury brand Prada’s version of the same garment. See Charlie Finch, “Art and Fascism,” artnet.com, May 15, 2003, http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/features/finch/finch5-15-03.asp. Accessed December 1, 2013.

postmodern references to Japan, and thereby arguably creates more authenticity when abandoned in favor of a human-centered performative work.\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Wave UFO}, even with its forced connectivity at the hands of a machine – literally, the nodes, and figuratively, the robotic attendants – presents a more experientially honest depiction of an artist’s account of living a technological life.\textsuperscript{65} As articulated by Carolyn Dean, by “moving away from a focus on horror, the uncanny, and the unthinkable to the recognizable,” by toning down the dramatic appropriation of Japanese “otherness” and transitioning to the simple kimono, Mori escapes the heavy-handedness and “distortion of an essential truth” of the present person with the setting and sensibilities s/he was attempting to convey from a removed, disconnected and derived viewpoint. The “anxiety of transmission” created from Mori’s digital wanderings into pre-modern and Japanese-specific settings through her early desperate attempts to utilize her own body in its different “Japanese” iterations of self dissipate when the overt references to Japan (self or other) also dissipates.\textsuperscript{66}

The costume achieves the same streamlined flattening of the body shape, giving the body a “columnar look that deemphasizes the breasts and waist.”\textsuperscript{67} This biological flattening recalls the fascination with youth street culture perpetuated in its fashions, as flatness relates to a prepubescent body.\textsuperscript{68} Rather than “[drawing] attention to the neck, hips and ankles” like the traditional kimono, which would be snugly affixed at the hips and upper arms and extend to the floor and wrists, this silhouette flares out into an a-line shape that tents the body and extends to

\textsuperscript{64} Carolyn J. Dean, \textit{Aversion and Erasure: The Fate of the Victim After the Holocaust} (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2010): 110.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid, 115.
\textsuperscript{66} Dean, \textit{Aversion & Erasure}, 135, 131, 150.
\textsuperscript{67} Miller, \textit{Beauty Up 78}.
\textsuperscript{68} These fashions are largely referred to as the Harajuku style after the Tokyo district from which a lot of these street styles originated. See Valerie Steele, \textit{Japan Fashion No.} (New York: Fashion Institute of Technology, 2010). The accompanying exhibition at the FIT Museum in New York City was on display from September 2010 through April 2011.
the forearm. The same plasticity of the body achieved in Mori’s armored plastic breastplate in *Play With Me*, *Intuition*, *Red Light*, and *Birth of a Star*, and contrasted against Mori’s Western-tailored blazer in *New Collection*, is achieved here. Like the participants in the *Wave UFO* interior, the attendants are biologically simplified, flattened to a singular shape, and they appear robotic. This could be seen as a kind of loss of humanistic quality. What the *Wave UFO* costumes achieve is transcendence into a true androgynous state from Mori’s earlier female state. The same androgyny achieved in the *Wave UFO* costumes furthers Mori’s narrative of interconnectedness.

Mori’s subtle references to a Japanese post-war utopian aesthetic, the unbound kimono, and the “invisible, mass-like” body – as seen in the collection of uniformed *Wave UFO* attendants – utilize minimalism with the effect of a victim testimony. This, in its most successful form, can “deflect the anxiety about the abjection of the victims [left behind].”69 Carolyn Dean’s work on the victim testimony within a culture that has experienced massive collective loss characterizes the *erasure* that minimalism in certain capacities represents. In the instance of the *Wave UFO* costume, the absent, victimized form is Mori’s own idea and presentation of self as she has previously attempted it – namely, to assert identity as either self or other. Once lonely inhabitation of created lands or the vacillating question of cultural, gendered identities find solace here. The artist’s presentation of self and unique perspective that has been lacking sincerity thus far becomes in the subtlety of presentation successful. This stance, removed from overt explanation, leaves more space for the audience to experience the piece unmediated and for the narratives of self to be read. This reading reinforces Mori’s seeming transparency of autobiography. The minimalist sense of denial discussed previously (of body, of self, of aesthetic

69 Ibid, 166.
referent) relates to the trauma of a body in modernity, of the inability to define self and other. Mori’s inability to settle on an explicit cultural identity, presenting in *Wave UFO* a fashioned body that reads as a post-traumatic response of denial, “leaves theoretical room for a tendency to treat these experiences as things which are sacred, and defy any sort of human understanding.”

Mori’s own examination of self, through vague, minimalist, sartorial forms, arrives at identifying more decidedly than with the presentation of the artist’s own literal body. This intervention is only possible through an understanding of these early issues. Through the eradication of the artist’s literal body, fashion in the *Wave UFO* attendant costumes is an iteration of self. True connection between patrons is held up by the robotic simulacra of Mori’s residual presence and true connection to Mori is held up by this sartorial coldness.

This presence of artificiality and the “forced” quality of reference takes the form of cramped interior space in the *Wave UFO*. This has the effect more of a quarantine, with all participants subjected to a kind of restraining medical intervention through molded recliners and head nodules. Through a trace of costumes over time in these works prior to and including *Wave UFO*, the location of Mori’s body (female, Japanese, modern) comes at the process of self-examination from various angles. What the artist achieves in the minimalist kimonos of the *Wave UFO* attendants is a stark clarity of vision, for the first time free from the heavy visual language of overt regional costume. The body as servant experiences a vulnerability to outside forces that mirror the body’s position in modernity. These costumes become a place of healing, as the final space for the examination of trauma of the self.

In conclusion, the triumph Mori achieves over the decade of 1990s of Western exhibition and various sponsorships and representation culminating in the decisive *Wave UFO* is a steady

---

70 Ibid, 168.
build of rich, subtle narratives as they relate to the modern world and the clothed body within it. As a young artist Mori sacrifices her body for content, all the while maintaining a safe distance through costume—be it as a misleading indicator of identity or self, artificially and digitally manipulated, or through the eventual removal of her robotic body to a displaced mass of people physically carrying the weight of the narrative. In her work, Mori maintains an antagonistic relationship with the female body over time. What Mori initially seems to assert, a third wave notion of female sexuality as a form of power, she defies. This narrative grows to the point of the eventual negation of the body entirely through minimalism. Unlike contemporary artist Cindy Sherman’s wanderings through potential prototypical assumptions of self, Mori resists the heaviness of the label, opting instead for a disembodied (and fashioned) shape shifting as reality.

Mori presents the idea that minimalist clothing achieves a kind of spirituality that religious practice once occupied.\(^{71}\) This spirituality accomplishes healing in a modern world through technology as a means of transcendence. In the Wave UFO costumes, outwardly the attendants represent mechanized forms of plastic shells that accomplish transcendence from corporeal reality to one of modest denial. In Wave UFO itself, the sculpture to which the attendants tend achieves cosmic healing through technology to achieve a similar metaphysical change in location to one that achieves interconnectivity between self and other. A self-examination that begins in Mori’s early self-portraits (1993-1994) as an attempt at autobiography transitions in the later works to a post-traumatic denial through minimalism that transcends the personal to speak to the universal. Mori’s experimentations with various power constructs

\(^{71}\) Other artists of note working with ideas of power, minimalist fashion and spirituality include Vanessa Beecroft (particularly, White Madonna With Twins, 2006, which features Beecroft in a silk gown by Maison Margiella) and Marina Abramovic (Places of Power, Waterfall, 2013, features Abramovic in a white robe and cruciform pose). Reconciling spirituality in a postmodern age is a theme prevalent in contemporary art of the new millennium.
through fashion – accessing sexuality, subjugation, other-ness, or otherwise – land at a place with a power that denies the body to land at a state of transcendence outside of modern plagues.

Mori’s cynicism with the modern condition finds dialogue in sartorial terms. Doryun Chong speaks to the inherent turnover that underlies fashion. The unique characteristics of the fashion art form include impermanence and lack of stability that arguably illustrate modern life. Mori suggests minimalism through clothing as a respite from fashion itself and the dictates of bodily experience, as seen in the *Wave UFO* attendant costumes. Chong suggests that the death of the fashion garment within the market as soon as it is released, before it is ever worn, charges every object with shadow. Like outward codes of appearance, the intermediacy of the brand in the global world is unable to be transcended or escaped. He states, “for this reason, a new stylistic form in the field of plastic arts encompasses the darkness of a new human attitude toward the world.”72 In other words, the darkness with which modernity considers humanity finds greater ability to come across through costumes, and does so within Mori’s *Wave UFO* spectacle.

---

72 Chong, *From Postwar to Postmodern*, 105.
Figure 1 – *Wave UFO* (installation view), 2003
Figure 3 – *Play With Me*, 1994

Figure 4 – *Subway*, 1994
Figure 5 – Love Hotel, 1994
Figure 6 – *Warrior*, 1994
Figure 7 – Red Light, 1994
Figure 8 – Tea Ceremony, 1994
Figure 9 – *Tea Ceremony I*, 1994

Figure 10 – *Tea Ceremony II*, 1994
Figure 12 – Atsuko Tanaka, *Stage Clothes*, 1956
Figure 13 – Atsuko Tanaka, *Electric Dress*, 1957
Figure 14 – *Birth of a Star*, 1995
Figure 15 – *Dream Capsule* (installation view), 1995

Figure 16 – *Garden of Purification*, 1999
Figure 17 – Pureland, 1996
Figure 18 – An image provided by Silicon Studio demonstrating the headpiece. Courtesy the Public Art Fund Archive, Fales Library, New York University.
Figure 19 – *Wave UFO* renderings from Marco Della Torre. Courtesy Public Art Fund Archive, Fales Library, New York University.
Figure 20 – *Wave UFO* (interior view, with example video projection), 1999-2001
There are a total of 6 large spheres. Each sphere consists of three channels: Alpha, Beta and Theta. The dominate channel determines the color, size and movement of the spheres.

COHERENCE: If the right and left brain are Synchronized the two cell become one

Figure 21 – A diagram breaking down the graphic tenets of the design. Courtesy the Public Art Fund Archive, Fales Library, New York University.
Figure 22 – Eva Hesse, *Repetition Nineteen III*, 1968
Figure 23 – A Détacher video stills. Courtesy A Détacher.
Figure 24 – A demonstration of a *datemaki*, the flattening understructure of the kimono.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


The Fales Library & Special Collections, Public Art Fund Archive 1966-2009, New York University, New York City, NY. Box 51; folders 11, 12, and 14.


