AMBIENT MEDIA

/ JAPANESE ATMOSPHERES OF SELF /

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SUBTRACTIVISM

LOW-AFFECT LIVING WITH AMBIENT CINEMA

While both music and video provide powerful aesthetic affordances for ambient subjectivation on the somatic level, they also come up against the more intractable domains of intersubjective life: personal attachments, familial ties, and the realm of stronger emotions not so easily swayed. The final two chapters expand this book's focus to consider not only how media can serve as technologies of ambient self-care but also what this means for the ethics of care, interpersonal relationships, and social life more broadly. To accomplish this, I look at how ambience functions in feature films and novels, media able to both cultivate powerful ambient moods of their own and narratively reflect back on the social implications of ambient media use.

Unlike ambient music and video, narrative film and fiction do not slip so easily into the background. Effectively attuning to them demands fairly continuous focused attention. For this reason, in narrative media ambience tends to be situated not just in the background of the audience's everyday life but also in the background to the environments within the story, surrounding audiences indirectly by surrounding the characters set before them. In practice this distinction between the moods a narrative work attributes to its characters and setting and the moods it produces in its audience is often blurred. As Sianne Ngai writes, the "tone" of a fictional work is "reducible neither to the emotional response a text solicits from its reader nor to representations of feelings within the world of a story."[1] When audiences attune to characters, they also get into their moods.

Of course, this back-and-forth between mood and story can be found within almost any narrative work. Background music in narrative film is perhaps the most familiar example of the importance of mood in even the most plot-driven stories. Or consider the descriptive passages in many novels that set the tone but do little to advance the mechanics of the story. For example, as Hans Gumbrecht notes, references to weather in novels are almost always there in the service of atmosphere.[2]

In some narrative styles, however, tone plays a more pronounced role, and the aesthetic emphasis skews decisively toward mood and away from plot and characterization. In film, atmospheric styles have gone by various names, from *contemplative cinema* to the *mood film* to the *cinema of slowness*.[3] Internationally, critics have often associated Japanese cinema with this kind of moodiness, particularly in the wake of influential Mizoguchi Kenji films like *Ugetsu* (1953). In their seminal 1959 study of Japanese cinema, Joseph L. Anderson and Donald Richie repeatedly make the claim that "to the Japanese director, atmosphere is often more important than plot."[4] But this was hardly unique to Japan: a similar assertion could be made for the works of postwar European auteurs like Theodoros Angelopoulos, Michelangelo Antonioni, Alain Resnais, and Andrei Tarkovsky. Beginning in the 1980s, atmosphere again became associated with Asian art cinema, with directors like Hou Hsiao-hsien, Tsai Ming-Liang, and, later, Jia Zhangke and Apichatpong Weerasethakul often noted for their emphasis on tone. In Japan a younger wave of post-1970s directors including Sōmai Shinji, Ichikawa Jun, Kurosawa Kiyoshi, Aoyama Shinji, Kitano Takeshi, Koreeda Hirokazu, Kawase Naomi, Oshii Mamoru, and Oguri Kōhei have explored atmospheric styles, often leavening them with tropes from other genres.[5]

What I refer to here as *ambient cinema* is part of this larger tradition of mood films, but with one more specific criterion. Ambient films not only serve audiences as a resource for ambient subjectivation via atmospheric affordances, but also use narrative to reflect on the role of mood-regulating media in the lives of their characters. In this way, ambient cinema works both sides of the atmosphere/story divide, providing not just a mood that dominates a narrative but also a narrative about mood.

The key example of ambient cinema I turn to here is the 2004 film *Tony Takitani,* directed by Ichikawa Jun (1948–2008). The film cultivates a somber and reflective mood through its sets, cinematography, costumes, sound design, and, above all, soundtrack, by composer and former Yellow Magic Orchestra member Sakamoto Ryūichi (1952–). The narrative, based on a Murakami Haruki short story set in the 1980s, depicts an attempt by three solitary souls to cover their inner pain and loneliness with the ambient resources of music, illustration, and designer fashion. The atmospheric affordances of these aesthetic materials help obscure the more troubling and intransigent parts of the characters' emotional lives. At the same time, the atmosphere of the film as a whole mimics its characters' approach to personal mood

regulation, providing soothing surface consolations for audiences as they quietly witness the tragedies and healing depicted on-screen. As this chapter explores, this cinematic approach to ambient subjectivation operates on a principle of *subtractivism,* a smoothing of the self by designing out the need for strong emotional attachments, whether to other people or to the past itself.

SOLITARY STYLE

Tony Takitani was highly anticipated as the first feature-length adaptation of a story by Murakami Haruki (1949–), who at the time was near the height of his international popularity.[6] Aware of these heightened expectations, Ichikawa went out of his way to capture Murakami's atmospheric brand of introspective solitude, even as he made some significant changes to the original story.[7]

The most immediately striking aspect of the film's ambience is its deliberately restrained aesthetic palette. Nearly every sequence was shot on a small, specially fabricated outdoor set built on an empty lot in Yokohama, with the minimal interior furnishings of Tony's office and apartment shifted around for each scene.[8] The concrete of the city, the gray sky, and the local power lines provide the urban backdrop for the film's small and contained world (Figure 20). Nearly every object in the film is gray, black, white, indigo, or some shade in between. The cinematography returns over and over to a slow low-angle left-to-right tracking shot as a way to transition between scenes. As the view shifts from one space to the next, out-of-focus walls slide by close to the camera, bracketing each scene while avoiding hard cuts in favor of a steady forward progression of time. Nishijima Hidetoshi's narration—with lines often taken directly from Murakami's story—is delivered in muted monotones, with characters on-screen sometimes finishing his lines for him. The sound design features a number of repeated motifs echoing through the film: ticking clocks, construction whistles, wind in the trees. The casting is also minimal, with the two lead actors, Issey Ogata and Miyazawa Rie, each playing double roles.

This repetition of a small number of images, sounds, objects, and actors allows the film to develop a strong and cohesive mood, and this repetition of mood cues itself becomes the central affective logic of the film, above and beyond the story or its characters. These slow and quiet repetitions continually bring the film back to an impersonal stillness, a solitary rhythm allowing the stronger emotions pulled up by the narrative (grief, loneliness, desire) to evaporate into a low-affect

FIGURE 20. Tony (Issey Ogata) alone in his studio, set against the gray horizon of the city. Still from *Tony Takitani*.

mood before the film once again begins sliding forward at a slow pace. As encapsulated in the steady left-to-right tracking shot, time and space in the film is governed by an aesthetic impartial to narrative events or dramatic propulsion. The film's slide forward feels as inevitable as the secondhand moving around a clock, pushing the human drama to the periphery and allowing viewers to let go and submit to the ongoing flow.

At the same time, the film's narrative provides a succinct distillation of painful histories covered over in the turn toward impersonal drift in the late 1970s and 1980s. The opening montage sequence begins by introducing Tony's father, Takitani Shōzaburō, a simple man who spends World War II playing trombone in Shanghai and sleeping with lots of women. After pure luck keeps him from being assassinated as a POW, he returns to Japan to discover his immediate family was killed in the Tokyo air raids. He marries a distant cousin, but she dies soon after giving birth to a baby boy. On the advice of a U.S. Army jazz friend and expecting American culture to be popular for some time to come, Shōzaburō decides to name the boy Tony. Ostracized as a result of his unusual name, Tony learns to keep to himself while quietly developing his skills as a technical illustrator. His eye for mechanical detail makes him a popular commercial artist amid the emerging materialism of the 1970s and 1980s, and his career flourishes even as his solitude intensifies.

Tony's quiet but secure life is isolated but peaceful until one day a

younger woman arrives at his office wearing her clothes with a lightness he has never seen before. At age thirty-seven Tony is suddenly in love and, for the first time in his life, finds he cannot live without someone else. He persuades this woman, Eiko, to marry him, and for a time they live a life of what appears on the surface to be domestic bliss. Tony suddenly becomes aware of how lonely he was before and, as the narrator notes, for a brief period becomes deathly afraid of being alone again. This feeling soon fades, however, as he settles into his new life with Eiko.

Tony's main attraction to his wife is her taste in clothes—the way she seems to almost meld with them into a lighter-than-air vision of physical transcendence. It gradually becomes apparent that for Eiko, however, purchasing high-end fashion is a compulsion she is powerless to resist. She buys far more outfits than she can ever hope to wear, eventually filling up an entire room of their Setagaya, Tokyo, apartment. She claims the clothes cover an emptiness inside. Eventually, Tony confronts her about her habit, and she promises to try to cut back, only to quickly become despondent (Figure 21). A short time later, her mind drifting while driving home after returning a recent purchase at an Aoyama boutique, Eiko dies in an off-screen car crash.

As Tony begins to cope with the sudden loss of his wife, the most difficult question is what to do with her enormous wardrobe. The luxury clothes soon begin to haunt him, shadows of the woman who left them behind. Tony eventually asks a dealer to take the clothes away.

FIGURE 21. Eiko (Miyazawa Rie) struggling not to buy more clothes. Still from *Tony Takitani.*

Soon after, his father dies of liver cancer, leaving behind a large collection of jazz LPs. Tony places this pile of records in the now-empty wardrobe and once again confronts the mute shadows left by a person who once lived through them (Figure 22). While these emotionally charged objects remain in his apartment, Tony has difficulty mourning the loss of his wife and his father. Only after selling the records and emptying the wardrobe one last time does he begin to find peace in solitude once more. As the narrator states near the end of the film, only then is Tony, at last, "completely alone."

EMOTIONAL CAPITALISM AND LOW-AFFECT LIFESTYLES

At first glance, this seems to be a tale of misfortune and tragedy: Tony has a difficult childhood, finds happiness briefly as an adult, and then must work through grief when this happiness comes to a sudden end. But the ambience of the film tells a different story, orienting audiences toward the calm of Tony's baseline solitude more than his ill-fated brush with intimacy. Tony is as alone at the end of the film as he is at the beginning. But the film's mood presents this not as the result of accumulated tragedy or the whims of fate but as simply the way things have to be. Time passes; emotions come and go; and the people and objects provoking them fade away. Tuning in to this wistful passage of time ultimately serves as the film's strategic response to the drama and trauma of postwar Japan: keep calm and carry on. This might at first seem like a Buddhist image of impermanence (*mujō*), as famously put forth in classic Japanese texts like the *Hōjōki* (An account of my hut, 1212) and *Heike monogatari* (The tale of the Heike, circa 1371). I want to suggest, however, it has a lot more to do with the contemporary strategy of subtractivism: a kind of strategic impermanence streamlining the self in order to stay mobile and unattached.

Before I look more closely at what *Tony Takitani* reveals about subtractivism, it will be useful to provide some historical context for this low-affect approach to the self. The emphasis on keeping calm as a practical means of self-care has roots in modern regimes of emotion management and in many ways parallels the history of background music outlined in chapter 1. With the emergence of psychoanalysis and psychological consulting in the late nineteenth century, capitalist societies first became cognizant of the value of mood regulation as a means to increase efficiency and productivity. This happened earliest in the United States and the United Kingdom. Eva Illouz has traced the importation of Freudian ideas into American business practices early

FIGURE 22. Shōzaburō's records as shadows of the man left behind. Still from *Tony Takitani.*

in the twentieth century. This is the origin of what she calls *emotional capitalism,* or the business of "harnessing the emotional self more closely to instrumental action."[9] Under the influence of new efficiency studies pioneered by Frederick Taylor and others around the time of World War I, career success began to be understood less as the result of a person's capacity for hard work and more as the product of a complex assembly of traits and skills any given person might possess or make their own. It no longer mattered if these habits were innate or acquired, and in most cases, the management literature argued, they could be taught.[10] The criterion for success was no longer personal determination but the careful fine-tuning of individual and group psychology.

While earlier disciplinary principles favored blunt demonstrations of authority to keep underlings in their place, these new practices of "management psychology" equated power and influence with self-mastery and emotional control. A new "expert" squadron of psychological consultants advised against the expression of strong or divisive emotions in the workplace, with the aim of ensuring the smooth and efficient flow of interpersonal communication. A positive morale was to be preserved at all costs. To achieve this, therapeutic techniques of emotional control were increasingly called upon to try and guarantee everyday equanimity. As Illouz writes, while the new therapeutic worker "dwells excessively on his or her emotions, he or she is simultaneously required not to be moved by them."[11]

Unlike the United States, in Japan emotional capitalism as a managerial style made little headway until after the end of the Pacific War in 1945. It could build, however, on a longer tradition of self-help aimed at personal advancement. This tradition had its origins in the shifting employment patterns and various self-improvement programs appearing in Japan around the turn of the twentieth century. The 1870 Japanese translation of *Self-Help* by Scottish author Samuel Smiles during the rapid industrialization of the Meiji period (1868–1912) became the era's best-selling book, and with the help of the rapidly expanding mass media, this set off a popular boom in personal advancement (*risshin shusse*) literature. Smiles's success was replicated in 1911 with the Nitobe Inazō best seller *Shūyō* (Self-cultivation).[12] These books promised limitless advancement for the persevering and enterprising (male) worker. Until 1900 or so, the rapidly expanding Japanese job market and an upwardly mobile class of newly educated laborers made such aspirations plausible. Around the turn of the century, however, the number of educated young men entering the workforce began to outpace the production of new jobs. Advancement was no longer secured, and an atmosphere of conformity took hold as the only way to slowly work one's way up the corporate ladder.[13] Nevertheless, the discourse of self-improvement persisted even as the career benefits it promised became increasingly hard to attain. Literary critic Maeda Ai has argued that in response to the shrinking economic possibilities for rapid upward mobility, the self-improvement disciplines promoted by self-help transformed into "valid personal goals in themselves," exceeding their original aim of success in the workplace.[14]

Yet it was not until over a half century later, during the postwar reconstruction and the gradual transition to a service-oriented economy in the 1970s and 1980s, that Japanese corporate discourse shifted to prioritize employee moods along the lines of American management psychology. Rose notes that what UK management psychologists of the time found laudible about this new Japanese management style was companies' "consideration for the self-esteem of employees" and a corporate culture where "all employees can identify with the aims and objectives of the company and which encourages and recognizes the individual contribution of all." In Japan as elsewhere, a new neoliberal approach to personel management was emerging, stressing autonomy and self-regulation rather than top-down control. This new approach imagined workers as invested in both their own well-being and the "collective entrepreneurialism" of the corporation as a whole. Work no longer was just about doing the job or advancement in a particular ca-

reer but was a technique for the overall production of the self.[15] Just as in the Meiji period, however, it was easy to promise self-actualization at work but much harder to deliver, particularly after the bursting of Japan's economic bubble. A new therapy culture quickly bloomed in other areas to take up the slack, offering to help "develop" the self outside the context of work.[16]

Tony can be understood as an early exemplar of this new approach to work and self, organized around emotional control and low-affect living. In college in the late 1960s, he witnesses the ideological debates and political passions driving the work of his fellow art students but responds with the cool judgment of one who simply cannot understand the need for such emotional turbulence. As the narrator states, "Tony couldn't fathom the value of the kinds of paintings his classmates argued over—paintings imbued with artistry or ideology. To him, such paintings were just immature, and ugly, and inaccurate." In the context of the new push for self-regulated affective autonomy, the messy emotionality of the 1960s student movements could be recast as simply juvenile.[17] The emerging emphasis on personal mood regulation promoted a more rational and efficient self that didn't let unruly emotions get in the way.

COSUBJECTIVITY

This emphasis on low-affect living also served as a pragmatic response to the subjective challenges of urban life. As Robert Fink argues, the insistent repetitions of popular media might be understood to refer not just to a particular psychological state but to a wider *culture of repetition* invested in finding pleasure in the highly organized patterns of consumer society. Fink focuses on the role of television advertising in developing an audience sensitive to the aesthetics of repetition in everyday life.[18] The fashion industry and the omnipresent rhythms of the city (as described in chapter 3) also no doubt played a role in developing a taste for pattern recognition as a way to lend a flexible structure to the emotional ups and downs of everyday life. This act of giving oneself over to repetition and drift is a familiar strategy for those, like Tony, seeking to blend in with the anonymous city. Georg Simmel, in his seminal 1903 essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life," points out that unlike less densely populated communities, where only a small number of familiar faces are encountered over the course of any given day, life in a metropolis is characterized by countless daily interactions with strangers, most of which are brief and based on the exchange of

goods and services. There is little time or incentive for getting to know all but a few selected people beyond the level demanded by utilitarian exchange. What this means, among other things, is that the more textured emotional engagements characterizing human interaction in more intimate settings are in large part replaced by an ongoing series of brief and trivial interactions. In the metropolis other people are often simply fellow travelers in peripheral vision.[19]

By the end of the century, this urban demand for a shallower sociality had developed into new forms of being together in shared space, often relying on atmospheric subjectivation to provide an implicit set of guidelines for communal behavior. In her sociological study of music use in everyday life, Tia DeNora introduces a distinction between *cosubjectivity* and *intersubjectivity*. Cosubjectivity is a form of social relation

> where two or more individuals may come to exhibit similar modes of feeling and acting, constituted in relation to extrapersonal parameters, such as those provided by musical materials. Such co-subjectivity differs in important ways from the . . . notion of "inter-subjectivity," which presumes interpersonal dialogue and the collaborative production of meaning and cognition. Inter-subjectivity . . . involves a collaborative version of reflexivity. . . . By contrast, co-subjectivity is the result of isolated individually reflexive alignments to an environment and its materials.[20]

Cosubjective modes are most prevalent in crowded urban spaces designed around flexibility and mobility—in other words, the neoliberal city. In these contexts the strategic use of media allows other people to contribute to a shared energy and collective orientation without ever demanding foreground attention themselves.

Cosubjectivity allows for a semblance of individuality without getting in anyone else's way. In a highly differentiated consumer society, high-density diversification paradoxically creates the need for a highly regulated public anonymity in order to keep all these "individuals" from imposing on one another. In the metropolis it is easier for people to coexist with others who share their ideal of comfortable invisibility and low-affect sociality. The urban self comes to be defined less through interpersonal relationships and more, to return to DeNora, through "isolated individually reflexive alignments to an environment and its materials."

The Tokyo metropolitan area might be understood as one of the world's great experiments in cosubjectivity, bringing tens of millions of people right next to one another while for the most part relieving them of any need to actually speak to one another.[21] Cosubjective environments like cafés and public transportation networks are remarkable for being able to accommodate many and alienate few. Of course, these places too have their own particular rules and regulations, and it is certainly possible to feel unwelcome and out of place. Every overcrowded rush-hour train is a reminder of how fraught and fragile the orchestration of cosubjectivity actually is. There are reminders in the film, too, like the scene where a pile of oranges for sale in a grocery store suddenly rolls to the floor and the woman closest to the display immediately declares (ostensibly to Tony, who is standing nearby), "It wasn't my fault, right?" When operating smoothly, cosubjectivity allows for personal differences to be maintained while living, working, and traveling peacefully in close proximity to one another. As easy as it is to be skeptical about what this means for social life, there is also something immensely practical going on here. For effective navigation through the city, cosubjectivity may be just as important, if not more important, than the molding of a more distinctly bounded and reflective interpersonal self.[22]

As with emotional capitalism, cosubjective environments favor a mobile, dispersed, and anonymous self. To assert a more specific, bounded identity would serve only to restrict personal mobility. Cosubjective sensory dispersal offers the tantalizing promise of being able to render the self invisible, avoiding the potential discomforts of a more solid and stable identity. Over time this approach to shared urban space became internalized, combining with workplace mood regulation to serve as an effective way of dealing not only with other people but also with the emotional ups and downs of the self.

Starting in the 1970s, Japanese social critics have often portrayed this desire for impersonality as a form of social apathy, describing it as the result of a loss of the "grand narratives" and cohesive ideologies to which prior generations supposedly subscribed. Popular 1970s terms like *sanmushugi* (triple nothingism) described a sense the generation coming of age at the time did not care about much of anything, with no spirit (*mukiryoku*), no interest (*mukanshin*), and no responsibility (*musekinin*).[23] This supposedly apathetic generation was followed by the *shinjinrui* (new-type human), a name the media invented for a 1980s generation who could (it was hoped) more effectively tap into the libidinal logic and impersonal effervescence of the new "postmodern"

age.[24] After Japan's entry into a full-blown economic recession in the 1990s, the short-lived enthusiasm for the *shinjinrui* gave way to worries over yet another apathetic generation, this one coming of age around the turn of the century. Saitō Tamaki, the Lacanian psychoanalyst and social critic famous for his work describing the social recluse (*hikikomori*) phenomenon, goes so far as to diagnose the impersonal styles prominent in the art of these younger Japanese as a form of "depersonalization disorder," referring to someone unable to express strong opinions and more comfortable floating in indeterminate space.[25]

Generational narratives are a perennial favorite of the Japanese media, and it is important to question whether these descriptions are actually representative of the majority of Japanese coming of age during these periods. In any case, rather than explaining the desire for anonymity as a symptom of generational apathy, I suggest this seeming depersonalization has a lot more to do with the practical utility of cosubjectivity for contemporary Japanese life, particularly in a neoliberal context intent on preserving personal liberties while ensuring the smooth and efficient movement of people.

THE AGE OF SUBTRACTION

A more affirmative take on the low-affect lifestyle comes from Arai Man, the Dentsū ambient video producer introduced in chapter 3. Arai cheerfully tags the new era starting in the late 1970s as "the Age of Subtraction" (*hikizan no jidai*). He proposes a general fatigue in Japan from too much stuff and too many people, leading to a desire for emptied-out environments with no one around. In the turn to subtractivism, Arai sees the younger generations of Japanese rejecting both the hubristic self-assertion of earlier ideologies and the "greediness and materialism" of the high-growth years. He sees younger Japanese embracing impotency (*funō*), showing little interest in either physical or cultural reproduction. Their only desire is to empty out their lives in the hopes of achieving some kind of "balance."[26]

As evidence Arai notes the popularity of Erik Satie's music; the focus on the minor and inconsequential in novelists like Murakami Haruki, Ikezawa Natsuki, and Yoshimoto Banana; and the "subtractive merchandise" made popular by brands like Mujirushi ryōhin (literally "no-label quality goods," commonly abbreviated as Muji). Arai proposes the rejection of attention-grabbing aesthetics, and the shift to more diminutive styles in many fields was the result of a shared cultural "overripeness." With too many people and too much to focus on, having less to attend to became appealing in itself. [27]

As with his own ambient video practice, what Arai calls the "subtractive arts" (*hikizan geijutsu*) are based on a minimalist strategy of stripping away everything extra until only the most basic and essential components remain. Arai argues this subtractive impulse seeks to balance decades of overproduction, hyperstimulation, consumer overindulgence, and overblown egos. Subtraction becomes a form of "ventilation," emptying the surrounding environment and letting in some fresh air.[28]

As noted in the previous chapter, the urban sensorium in itself places increased strain on the human capacity for directed attention, a faculty that can fatigue through overuse. As proponents of "attentional economics" argue, within the information-dense environments of contemporary cities, attention itself has become an object of scarcity.[29] Aesthetics has responded to this situation in a number of ways. Two of the most prominent strategies for commanding attention are novelty and scale: make your object something nobody has ever experienced before, or at least make it bigger and louder.[30] In stark contrast with these pushes for new kinds of "hard fascination," a subtractive aesthetics places no additional demands on human attention. Purposefully diminutive, subtractivism provides something nearly as scarce as attention itself: ignorability. Rather than competing for the increasingly scarce commodity of focused attention, the aesthetics of subtraction responds by staying out of the way.

In the world of computers, for example, Lev Manovich notes how with the emergence of the graphical user interface (such as the first commercially available Macintosh operating system in 1984) the self-contained image lost its privileged position at the center of attention: "No longer completely filling the screen, it is now just one window among many." With this proliferation of windows, a new aesthetic imperative arose: "the peaceful coexistence of multiple information objects on the computer screen, exemplified by a number of simultaneously opened windows."[31] Too many competing windows gave rise to the need for a style that didn't focus on one at the expense of the others but strove instead to blend in and remain in the background of attention.

In a prescient aside in *The Language of New Media,* Manovich describes a "no-style style" popular with global new media artists in the 1990s: "no labels, no distinct design, no bright colors or extravagant shapes." Manovich points to designer fashion labels like Hugo Boss and Prada as forerunners of this style, later taken up by designers in other fields. He could have just as easily pointed to prominent Japanese fashion designers of the 1980s like Kawakubo Rei (of Comme des Garçons)

and Yamamoto Yohji or, on a more everyday level, subtractivist lifestyle brands like Muji. Like Arai, Manovich describes the no-style style as a response to an overabundance of choice and a subsequent reluctance to side too much with any one choice among others:

> In a society saturated with brands and labels, people respond by adopting a minimalist aesthetic and a hard-to-identify clothing style. Writing about an empty loft as an expression of a minimalist ideal, architecture critic Herbert Muschamp points out that people "reject exposing the subjectivity when one piece of stuff is preferred to another." The opposition between an individualized inner world and an objective, shared, neutral world outside becomes reversed.[32]

Following Muschamp, Manovich reads the no-style style as a refusal to choose one identity over another, an internalization of aesthetic and affective neutrality as a way to always be ready to engage with whatever and whomever comes along next. Subtractivism attempts a return to the zero point of style as a practical way to "fit in" to a complex world of proliferating choices. By the 1980s subtractivism would fully emerge as a lifestyle of its own, an atmospheric camouflage for a newly anonymous urban subject. With its sleek lines, muted colors, and refusal to make any deliberate statements, subtractivism provided a style embodying the neoliberal ideals of flexibility, mobility, lightness, and efficiency.[33]

I suggest understanding subtractivism as one of the basic aesthetic strategies underlying the soft fascinations of ambient media, as well as a much broader range of contemporary fashion, architecture, and lifestyle design. If cosubjectivity is about the blending of diverse people in a shared space of anonymous moods, subtractivism aims for something similar in the design of aesthetic objects—a stylistic orientation toward what we might call *coobjectivity,* or the ability of objects to blend seamlessly and anonymously into their surrounding environment.

DRESSING FOR A BURNT-OUT FUTURE

Subtractivist styles are evident in Japanese consumer trends starting in the early 1980s—right around the time Tony begins finding a ready market for his "emotionless" illustrations in the film. Yoshimi Shunya reads the transformation from the consumer fantasies of the 1970s to the no-style style of the 1980s through two of the premier retailers of the period, Parco and Muji—at the time both owned by the larger Seibu

conglomerate. In the 1970s the Shibuya, Tokyo, branch of the Parco department store was the epicenter of consumer culture for young women. As Yoshimi notes, Parco sought to transform the central area west of Shibuya station into an "integrated advertising environment," a set of staged fantasy spaces based on the premise of allowing consumers to escape the mundane pressures of their everyday lives.[34] In the 1970s the premier retail atmospheres on offer were largely of the exotic variety, with an emphasis on stepping outside everyday life (not unlike Hosono's "sightseeing music" described in chapter 2). In this early stage of the emerging Japanese consumer culture, Parco's advertising campaigns pushed women to assert their freedom and break away from traditional domestic spaces, if only to shop. In contrast, Yoshimi describes Muji's strategy in the 1980s as

> the absolute opposite of Parco's distancing from the everyday. . . . It was based on comprehensively supplying the materials that would allow customers to live with a reasonable degree of aesthetic satisfaction. These materials were things that could be found anywhere, that were absolutely ordinary, and made no attempt to lecture to the customers. . . . What we find here is a burnt-out future that affirms only what is private and commonplace.[35]

Yoshimi associates Muji's designs with the increasing mediatization and fluidity of urban Japanese environments in the 1980s, part of a global transformation toward what at the time was coming to be called the "information society."[36] While the 1980s are often imagined as the height of consumerism in bubble-era Japan, in actuality consumption was already in decline following its heyday in the 1970s (well before the larger bursting of the economic bubble and Japan's entry into a full recession in the early 1990s). By the early 1980s personal consumption had entered a steep decline, and marketers publicly worried young people were "no longer buying things." While private investment was still on the increase, the role of personal consumption in Japan's GNP was actually shrinking.[37] As Arai notes, increasingly what consumers wanted to buy was not more but *less.* The subtractivist style became a way to sell it to them.

While Yoshimi describes this as the arrival of a "burnt-out" future, his analysis misses the subtractivist principles governing the soft tones and anonymous ambitions of Muji products. Muji began in December 1980 as a product line of Seibu supermarket chain Seiyū and opened

its first dedicated Muji store in Aoyama (Tokyo) in 1983. In 1989 it left Seibu to become independent and, as of February 2015, has almost three hundred stores across Japan and over three hundred overseas on four continents, including 128 in China. The company's stripped-down, muted designs are emblematic of the emphasis on coobjectivity in Japanese consumer design from the 1980s onward. One of the original developers of the Muji style, designer Tanaka Ikko, describes the idea behind the brand's emphasis on "everyday" and "basic" products as follows:

> You may feel embarrassed if the person sitting next to you on the train is wearing the same clothes as you. If they are jeans, however, you wouldn't be worried, because jeans are what we could describe as "basic" clothing. All Muji products are such "basic" products.[38]

Putting modernist principles to minimalist ends and echoing the purposeful ignorability of BGM, Muji goods are styled through the "careful elimination and subtraction of gratuitous features." Geared toward the anonymous city, Muji fashions allow their wearers to blend in and, perhaps, to dissapear. As Julian Holloway and Sheila Hones point out in an essay on the brand's "mundane geographies":

> Muji objects are designed to blend into non-Muji surroundings. This aspect to the Muji design aesthetic is emphasized in the company's catalogues with repeated assurances that the objects are anonymous, adaptable, and useful . . . "guaranteed to blend and never dominate." Thus, throughout its catalogues, Muji commodities are presented as "discreet," "muted," "never visibly branded," "transparent," "understated," "unobtrusive," and "unostentatious."[39]

With Muji, subtractivist style went mainstream. Just as Satie's furniture music was designed to blend with the sound of knives and forks, Muji's knives and forks were designed to blend with everything else you might have lying around. These subtractivist goods were designed to fade into the background, allowing the person who uses them to blend in, too.

In the film Eiko favors more upscale designer clothing (mainly Parisian boutique brands), but the apartment she shares with Tony looks like it could have been ordered straight out of a Muji catalog. In

rendering Tony and Eiko's low-affect lifestyle, the film explores the impact of a subtractivist approach to interpersonal life, exploring how cosubjectivity and coobjectivity might function in the context of close personal relationships. Ichikawa cuts away the interpersonal and dialectical aspects of classical film style (over-the-shoulder dialogue shots, hard cuts, montage in the service of storytelling) in favor of soft surfaces, delicate melodies, and drifting camerawork. With its emphasis on impersonal atmospheres, muted tones, and smooth, understated objects, the film embraces subtractivism as an aesthetic approach. At the same time, it hints at the ethical and intersubjective problems possibly following from such an attempt at self-erasure.

Tony Takitani is full of characters using material objects and the soothing influence of others to maintain calm and cover over more painful emotions. Tony's father keeps to his jazz trombone as a way to avoid confronting the larger implications of the war, his brush with death as a prisoner of war, the loss of his family, and the death of his wife. Similarly, Tony uses his technical illustration practice to cordon himself off from his own feelings of loneliness. Rather than dwell on the loss of his mother, the meaning of his unusual name, his social isolation, and the emotional pain of those around him (including his new wife), Tony seeks to make peace with solitude, keeping his life and surroundings purposefully plain and simple as if to design out more volatile feelings.

This is paralleled by Eiko's admission the reason she spends most of her salary on expensive clothing is to "cover over the emptiness inside" (Figure 23). The comforting surfaces of her clothing become a way to smooth over her own moods, and in turn this helps comfort Tony as well. When Shōzaburō asks Tony what it is he likes about Eiko, he simply states, "It's like she was born to wear clothes." Reflecting a gender dynamic common to emotional labor more broadly, the ability of Tony's wife to be a soothing presence for him forms the basis of his attraction and their subsequent partnership.[40] While Tony and Eiko never appear to discuss it explicitly, they make an implicit pact to avoid confronting their respective sadnesses and stay together in the shallows and soft surfaces of their quiet domestic life. The one exception to this is when Tony dares confront Eiko about her clothes-buying compulsion, a breach of protocol leading immediately to tragedy.

THE SOUNDTRACK TO *TONY TAKITANI*

The film's soundtrack allows audiences, too, to indulge in the delicate atmospheres of Tony and Eiko's subtractivist solitudes. The composer,

FIGURE 23. Clothing the emptiness inside: Eiko walking away against a backdrop of power lines. Still from *Tony Takitani.*

Sakamoto Ryūichi, has long fashioned himself as a Satie-esque ambient celebrity for the new century, a master of soothing melancholy. A former member of Yellow Magic Orchestra along with Hosono Haruomi and Takahashi Yukihiro, he went on to write pop songs and operas, appear in whisky advertisements, win a Grammy and an Academy Award for his film scores, curate art exhibitions, act in films, lead a publishing house, pursue environmental and antinuclear causes, and even interview the Dalai Llama—each activity now folded into his persona as the elder statesman of highbrow Japanese pop. In press photos he is usually seen wearing minimalist black and gray Yamamoto Yohji–style designer clothing, not too far from the upscale monochrome fashions worn by the characters in the film. Sakamoto composed a minimalist piano soundtrack for one of Yamamoto Yohji's fashion shows in 1995, and he brings a similar aesthetic to his work for the *Tony Takitani* score. [41]

Sakamoto's music has played an important role in lending mainstream respectability to the ambient style. A case in point is his surprise 1999 hit "Energy Flow," the first instrumental ever to reach the number-one spot on the Oricon charts (the Japanese equivalent of the Billboard rankings). The music was produced for a TV spot for the vitamin energy drink Regain EB. The commercial shows Sakamoto playing his grand piano in the center of a busy intersection, soothing the tired office workers hurrying around him. Industry media at the time

attributed the single's unexpected success to how the ad had "apparently struck a chord with middle-aged people coping with Japan's lingering recession and the end of the country's work-obsessed, high-growth era."[42] What was being sold in the case of "Energy Flow" was primarily an atmosphere of affective solace rather than a drink or a CD single. There is more than a little Satie in the melody and in the way the track can offer both the detached refinement of the classical piano and the rational utility of the energy drink, without either seeming to compromise the integrity of the other.

Sakamoto's piano score plays through the first twelve minutes of *Tony Takitani,* setting the mood for everything to follow. After wrapping up the location shoot, Ichikawa sent a rough cut of the film to Sakamoto in New York and asked him to create music that "might as well not have been there" (*nakutemo yokatta yō na*).[43] Sakamoto responded with three quiet themes for solo piano, each presented in several versions. The somber and sparsely textured "DNA" matches the film's methodical and unhurried journey through Tony's family background at the start of the film. "Solitude," the quietly propulsive main theme, is carried by minor-chord arpeggios and features a wistful melody shifting between different octaves as the film progresses. Last is "Fotografia," an Antonio Carlos Jobim–style piece matching Tony's brief period of marital bliss with a playful melody in a somewhat brighter key.

Almost 60 percent of the film's seventy-seven minutes is underscored with piano music, and the first half hour of the film features almost constant piano—only two and a half minutes are without the backing of Sakamoto's score. Along with the horizontal camera movement and the sparse but repetitive sound design, the steady minimalist pulse of these cues gives a strong sensation of the slow but inevitable passage of time. At the same time, the music infuses the whole film with a nostalgic and sentimental light, as if everything happening on-screen was already drifting off into the past. Operating much like Eiko's designer clothing, the music blankets the pain inside the story with a shimmering coat of beautiful solitude. The soundtrack functions as an ambient medium coming between audiences and the world of the story, allowing for a more detached appreciation of Tony's minimalist life as a fashionable object in its own right.

The exceptions that prove the rule are the few moments when the music stops, momentarily interrupting the sentimental drift. In the first two-thirds of the film, this happens only briefly and always during

moments of heightened emotional tension: after Tony is first visited by Eiko and finds himself in love, while he is nervously waiting for her response to his marriage proposal, and when he finally confronts his wife about her uncontrollable spending. When after each of these pauses the piano returns and the camera begins to track right again, it brings with it a palpable sense of relief. Structured this way, the film's soundtrack encourages audiences to join Tony in taking refuge in the soft surfaces and ambient moods.

MELANCHOLY AND MOURNING

It is difficult to avoid getting wrapped up in the mood while spending time with the film. But step back, and it becomes clear this kind of subjective drift is exactly what is allowing Tony and Eiko to avoid confronting their own pain and the pain of others. Tony dwells neither on his absent mother and nearly absent father nor on how his father might be haunted by a war about which he himself has largely avoided thinking. He lives with his American name without ever reflecting on what exactly it means and why it causes others to treat him differently. Meanwhile, Eiko—who left another man to marry Tony, possibly as a way to fund her shopping compulsion—relies on clothing to cover over her own emotional struggle.[44]

As with many Murakami stories, it is tempting to try and understand the characters' motivations in psychoanalytical terms, even as missing details continually frustrate the attempt. This is true of minimalist music as well. Musicologists attempting to understand the pleasures of minimalist repetition have often turned back to Freud's analysis of melancholia and its strong association with the compulsion to repeat.[45] In contrast to mourning, which acknowledges the reality of loss, Freud saw in melancholia an attempt to repeat an imaginary past in order to avoid confronting the reality of the present. In this context, taking refuge in wistful moods and soft surfaces seems to mark a preference for aestheticizing a melancholic past rather than confronting a mournful present. This easily blends with the wider "culture of repetition" Fink notes as characteristic of consumer societies.

The culture of repetition and its techniques of emotional self-care are everywhere in the film, from Eiko's insatiable need to purchase new clothes to the repetitive structure of the cinematography and music. Japanese psychologists began to recognize compulsive shopping for high-end brands (*burando izonshō*) as a social problem beginning in the late 1990s, part of the fallout of the shift from the consumerism of

the early 1980s to the recessionary years that followed. But the film never presents Eiko's attempt to cover her pain with aesthetic objects as a psychological strategy unique to her alone. Rather, by drawing parallels between Eiko's wardrobe and Shōzaburō's record collection, *Tony Takitani* begins tracing a more widespread practice of care for the self through consumer goods, even implicating the film itself in the process. The records reflect back directly on the role of the soundtrack, and the focus on fashion points to the many ways soft designer surfaces work to cover over more painful social realities. In the same way as the records and the clothing soothe Shōzaburō and Eiko, the ambient moods of *Tony Takitani* lend a comforting emotional sheen to the potentially disturbing histories the film evokes, feeding the repetition compulsion by allowing audiences to enjoy Tony's loneliness through a wistful backward gaze.

Yet even as the film flirts with the enticing repetition of consumerism, it never completely allows audiences to sink into a complacent drift. Following Eiko's death, Tony gradually begins to shift from melancholy to mourning, pulling himself out of the minimalist haze and learning to see others not as mere affective mood resources but as independent people with needs of their own. The mood of the film shifts too, as Sakamoto's score completely disappears from the soundtrack. Eiko's car accident is followed by what, in the context of what we have heard so far, is an extraordinarily long time without music: a full seventeen minutes. It is in this time Tony finally begins to confront the realities he so far has kept covered by the minor repetitions of his daily routine.

At first Tony is in shock after his wife's sudden death. He posts an ad in the newspaper for a woman of Eiko's measurements to come to his office wearing the outfits his wife left behind. But the substitute breaks down sobbing on coming into contact with Eiko's clothes. The only explanation she can offer—in a line straight out of Murakami favorite *The Great Gatsby*—is she has "never seen so many beautiful clothes all at once." Echoing Fitzgerald, here Murakami marks the affective power of objects above and beyond human comprehension.

Tony's *Vertigo*-style attempt to replace his wife with a look-alike at first seems absurd, but as Yamane Yumie notes, by seeing another woman in Eiko's clothing, Tony is finally able to begin distinguishing his wife from her many outfits, perhaps for the first time.[46] In doing so, he comes to understand her as a unique, irreplaceable human, beyond the surface of her clothing and its soothing affordances. Only then can he begin coming to terms with his wife's death. With this recognition

of otherness—of Eiko as more than just a comforting surface—both Tony and *Tony Takitani* begin to shift from the repetition compulsion of melancholia to a process of mourning and gradual recovery.

The relative lack of music in the last half of the film marks this transition, dropping the ambient overlay of Sakamoto's score to present the lighter air of a life lived with less mediation. Music returns briefly at the one-hour mark, with the "DNA" theme again marking Tony's relationship with his past (this time as it is being reconfigured). The final six minutes of the film are again without music. Unlike the awkward silences of the first half of the film, however, these final unscored minutes are rich with the bustle of the outside world, textured with the sounds of the lives of others. Tony is still quiet and alone, but his melancholic mood begins to give way to an improvisational curiosity more willing to engage his surroundings.

This is a different type of quiet than what we experienced earlier. As the final voiceover implies, Tony becomes truly alone not when the people in his life disappear but when he finally empties his house of Eiko's and Shōzaburō's belongings. By letting go of his wife's clothing and his father's records, Tony distances himself from the use of mood-regulating objects as melancholy technologies of self. This in turn triggers a reconfiguration of the film's own approach to atmosphere. Sakamoto's score drops away once Tony lets go of the clothing and records, and the film begins tuning in to a more open form of ambience.

Seo Inwoo argues Tony's rejection of melancholic loneliness marks possibly the first moment in Murakami's writing where he begins to critique his generation's tendencies toward historical apathy and social isolation, qualities often embodied by his early narrators. This newfound respect for the social self would spur on Murakami to a series of more historically informed works later in the 1990s.[47]

In the case of Ichikawa's adaptation, however, it is difficult to know if the turn away from melancholic repetition really registers with audiences during the final seventeen minutes of the film, particularly when Sakamoto's wistful "Solitude" theme returns to accompany the ending credits. Sakamoto's score is almost overpowering in its articulation of Tony's wistful solitude, dominating the mood of the film as a whole and making it difficult for audiences to follow Tony's break with melancholy in the final minutes of the film.[48] Structurally, the film simply doesn't give enough time for a new mood to form.

However, the lighter mood at the film's end might also be understood as the culmination rather than the rejection of Tony's approach

to low-affect living. Tony's move to eliminate all material connections with the past and be reborn afresh—as he lies in a fetal position in the now-empty wardrobe—is in itself a characteristically subtractivist response to the problem of historical memory (Figure 24). As Ahmed describes in her analysis of the 2002 British film *Bend It Like Beckham,* the melancholic is often figured as one who cannot "let go" of painful memories in order to move toward a happier future. But what if this past is something worth remembering? In the case of an assimilationist film like *Bend It Like Beckham,* Ahmed argues, the painful history of racism is precisely what the immigrant family learns to "let go" of in order to join the dominant white culture and its promise of happiness. The film visualizes this past through shots of the immigrant home's "dark and cramped" domestic interiors, contrasting this with the promise of freedom and mobility the main character finds when she leaves it behind to join a "multicultural" Britain on the outdoor soccer field.[49] In a similar way, the fashion and records cluttering Tony's apartment and weighing down his mood can be understood as more than consumer mood aids: they also serve the film as displaced markers of historical pain, from Shōzaburō's colonial exploits in Shanghai to Eiko's attempts to mask her own unspoken grief. From this perspective, when Tony sells these painful memories and finds peace in his now-empty home, he is letting go of not just melancholy but the past as well.

As Renu Bora has argued, the smooth, pristine surfaces often featured in "postmodern" design are not simply neutral and transparent:

FIGURE 24. Tony lying in the now-empty wardrobe. Still from *Tony Takitani.*

by refusing to register any trace of prior tactile contact, they come to signify the "willed erasure" of their own history.[50] What makes an ambient film like *Tony Takitani* so resonant, I suggest, is how it positions viewers *both* to feel the immediate pleasure of this practice of self-erasure, of rubbing subjectivity smooth, and to feel the melancholic absence this subtractivism leaves behind. In this sense, it is important the film doesn't let viewers completely follow Tony into his blissful state of forgetfulness at the film's close but turns back to the wistfulness of Sakamoto's "Solitude" theme. As noted with the turn to isolationism in chapter 2, ambient media both aestheticize the peaceful dissolution of identity and mark the loss of what had to be subtracted to get there.

By implicating viewers' own desire for the beautiful solitudes it presents, the film makes Tony's attempts to break free from this lifestyle all the more emotionally resonant. It is this double-sidedness that makes *Tony Takitani,* in Manohla Dargis's succinct formulation, "a delicate wisp of a film with a surprisingly sharp sting."[51] In other words, the film expertly attunes audiences to the lush atmospheres of the subtractivist style but leaves an uneasy feeling that despite the calm drift of the film all is not quite right with the relationships it describes. While amply demonstrating the power of atmospheric design, the film pushes viewers to reflect on their own relationships with personal mood regulation, the way they too might use beautiful surfaces to cover over the emptiness inside.

As Washida Kiyokazu remarks at the beginning of his classic study of the phenomenology of clothing, when it comes to fashion it is often surprisingly difficult to distinguish pleasure from numbness.[52] Everyone and everything in Tony's life disappears over time, literally fading from the screen. This might at first sound traumatic, but within the ambient logic of the film, this exercise of subtraction comes across as a relief more than anything else, even as it remains tinged with a wistful melancholy. In a crowded and complex world, subjective ventilation becomes desirable in and of itself, even as it problematically renders other people mere obstacles (or tools) to getting there, and ultimately leaves Tony isolated and alone (Figure 25).

As the narrator describes in the final minutes of the film, Tony is eventually able to forget almost everything about his past, including his father and wife, but the one image he cannot shake is the memory of Eiko's substitute crying in the face of "so many beautiful clothes." Rather than match Eiko's despondency over the "emptiness inside," the film, like subtractivism more generally, follows her lead in covering the self with smooth, clean, and beautiful contours, avoiding pain as

FIGURE 25. Subjective ventilation: Tony set against the open sky. Still from *Tony Takitani*.

much as possible by designing out stronger emotions, hurtful memories, and stubborn attachments. In this world personal autonomy is everything and can be found only through letting go. But as the ambient design of Ichikawa's film insistently reminds us, this world of soft surfaces and low-affect living will always arrive tinted by the sadness of all that was left behind.

5. SUBTRACTIVISM

1 Ngai, *Ugly Feelings,* 41.
2 Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung,* 4.
3 For example, see Lim, *Tsai Ming-liang and a Cinema of Slowness.*
4 Anderson and Richie, *The Japanese Film,* 324.
5 Oshii, for example, notes the central importance of the drifting, atmospheric, and plotless montage sequences in his anime features, like the rainy night sequence in *Ghost in the Shell* (*Kōkaku kidōtai,* 1995). For Oshii these scenes are important for depicting "not the drama itself, but the world that the characters inhabit." Quote from Jonathan Ross's interview with Oshii in episode 1 of the BBC documentary *Asian Invasion* (aired January 10, 2006).
6 Murakami's "Tony Takitani" first appeared in 1990 in the literary magazine *Bungei shunjū* and then in a longer version the following year. It was later anthologized in the 1996 Murakami collection *Rekishinton no yūrei* (The ghost of Lexington). The *New Yorker* published an English translation by Jay Rubin in 2002. The film version traveled widely and won a number of awards, including the Fipresci Prize and the Special Jury Prize at the 2005 Locarno International Film Festival, runner-up for Best Soundtrack at the Los Angeles Film Critics Association, and the Grand Prize at the Takasaki Film Festival, as well as a string of nominations, including the Grand Jury prize at Sundance. The film received positive reviews in all the major American papers, with *Variety* posting one of the few skeptical pieces. See Elley, "Review: 'Tony Takitani.' "
7 For a thorough comparison of differences between the short story and the film, see Thornbury, "History, Adaptation, Japan."
8 The 2006 DVD of the film released by Axiom in the United Kingdom includes a making-of documentary focusing on this outdoor shoot.
9 Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul,* 82.
10 Ibid., 65. This in itself was already a step away from the "molar" model of the Cartesian self toward a more "molecular" understanding of the employee as an assemblage of traits and skills. For an insightful parallel history of management psychology in the United Kingdom, see Rose, *Governing the Soul,* 55–119.
11 Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul,* 103.
12 Maeda, *Text and the City,* 203.
13 Kinmonth, *The Self-Made Man in Meiji Japanese Thought,* 46.
14 Maeda traces this shift toward self-improvement as an end in itself by following its emergence in popular fiction, particularly the novels of Kikuchi Kan. He demonstrates how this strand of popular literature gradually abandoned larger social themes and narrowed its focus to documenting upper-class familial concerns. This helped reimagine Meiji social imperatives through a framework of individual success, just as the private sphere was becoming increasingly visible as a topic for public discussion and government regulation. Maeda, *Text and the City,* 203.

15 Rose, *Governing the Soul,* 118.

16 Japan's first "self-development seminar" (*jikokeihatsu seminā*), based on the American self-realization model, was held in 1977. Koike, *Serapii bunka no shakaigaku,* 90. See chapter 6 for more on the emerging "healing boom."

17 This idea of the 1960s student movements being driven by unruly emotion is a common theme in Murakami's work, as in his breakthrough 1987 novel *Norwegian Wood.* The therapeutic orientation toward life is also readily evident in Murakami's own writing practice, in which he emphasizes self-discipline and parallels with his long-distance-running practice. In memoirs like *What I Talk about When I Talk about Running,* Murakami envisions writing as a potentially "toxic" practice that needs to be paired with healthy exercise—implicitly casting earlier Japanese author's tendencies toward alcoholism and suicide as (to paraphrase Tony) "just immature." For more on Murakami's role in the development of ambient literature, see the following chapter.

18 Fink, *Repeating Ourselves,* 6. Ichikawa himself started out as a director of television advertisements in the mid-1980s. An early spot won the Golden Lion at the 1985 Cannes International Advertising Festival, and this led to an invitation to direct his debut feature, *BU-SU* (1987). While their films have little in common, Ōbayashi Nobuhiko's move from television advertising to feature film directing in the late 1970s served as an important precedent for Ichikawa's later career. The slower aesthetic available in film proved appealing to others in the television industry as well, most notably Kitano Takeshi, who from the late 1980s began pairing his persona as an over-the-top television personality with a more contemplative and minimalist approach to filmmaking. Ichikawa's early films were still in a faster style, but with the part-fiction, part-documentary *Dying at a Hospital* (*Byōin de shinu koto,* 1993) and subsequent series of Ozu Yasujirō–inspired works, he began to slow everything down. At the turn of the century, Ichikawa tried, with mixed results, to eschew his restrained style for something more upbeat in films like *Tadon and Chikuwa* (*Tadon to Chikuwa,* 1998), *Tokyo Marigold* (2001), and *Ryoma's Wife, Her Husband and Her Lover* (*Ryoma to tsuma to sono otto to aijin,* 2002). In adapting Murakami's short story, however, he moved back toward the quiet style for which he was known. On Ōbayashi's career, see Roquet, "Obayashi Nobuhiko, Vagabond of Time." Abé Casio's *Beat Takeshi vs. Takeshi Kitano* is a full-length study of the relationship between Kitano's film and television personas. For more on Ichikawa's career, see the posthumous tribute volume edited by Kawade shobō shinsha, *Ichikawa Jun.*

19 Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms,* 336.

20 DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life,* 149–150. McGuinness and Overy gloss cosubjectivity and intersubjectivity as a difference between "communion" and "communication," hinting at the important role religious architectures once played in affording cosubjective experience. McGuiness and Overy, "Music, Consciousness, and the Brain," 245.

21 Edo (as Tokyo was known prior to 1868) was different in this respect. Comparing Edo travel guides and those from the Meiji era (1868–1912), Maeda notes a shift in focus: whereas Edo guides led visitors to places where people gathered to interact with one another in work and play, Meiji guides pointed to where the individual traveler could go on their own and see the sights. If Edo's appeal still focused on intersubjective encounters, then Meiji Tokyo offered cosubjective sights for the solitary tourist. In this Meiji model of sightseeing, however, a visitor was still attending directly to the space itself. A different relationship to the environment emerged moving into the postwar period, when Japanese cities gradually became more rationalized and anonymous through the emergence of spaces designed first around mobility and efficiency and later around the comforts of amenity culture. Maeda, *Text and the City,* 83. See also Yoshimi, "The Market of Ruins."

22 On the *Polis* urban studies website, Peter Sigrist blogs what he calls an "Embarrassing Ode to McDonald's as an Open Public Office Space." He describes spending long hours working at a McDonald's restaurant chain, despite thinking McDonald's is "completely lame." Why? He cites dependable Wi-Fi access, no pressure to buy anything, the energy of having other people around, efficiency, cleanliness, low prices, and a smoke-free environment. As Nick Kaufman points out in the comment section, "Whereas at the indie coffee shop you might feel like you are imposing or that someone is breathing down your neck, at big chains you can find anonymity [and] a lack of guilt." As Kaufman points out, the appeal of the big generic chain café or family restaurant is how it can serve as a mostly anonymous container for private use. The store design and the people who temporarily inhabit it provide a baseline energetic vibe but otherwise remain as ignorable as possible. In turn, customers can expect to be ignored themselves as long as they contribute an unobtrusive but amiable energy to the shared space. Rather than simply write off these generic containers as culturally empty "nonplaces," Sigrist proposes we might acknowledge what these spaces of anonymity afford. Standardized and generic environments allow for a specific form of public engagement—or perhaps more accurately, public disengagement. They provide a space to be with others but not have to attend to them as discreet individuals. Sigrist, "Embarrassing Ode to McDonald's as an Open Public Office Space."

23 Fukasawa, *Shisō toshite no "Mujirushi ryōhin,"* 17.

24 On discourse surrounding postmodernism in 1980s Japan, see Ivy, "Critical Texts, Mass Artifacts."

25 Saitō's argument here echoes Christopher Lasch's much earlier analysis of postmodern art and literature in *The Minimal Self* (1984). Unlike Lasch, however, Saitō (rather vaguely) asserts this apparent form of social withdrawal, at least when "used intentionally in an artistic context," also "does reality a service." He doesn't elaborate what this means but gives a clue in his description of the works of sculptor Ōmaki Shinji (1971–), which

"bring discontinuity to the experience of the observer and force a mood change." Saitō, "Floating and Disassociation," 85–87.

26 Arai, *Kankyō bideo no jidai,* 92–94. Ueno describes a similar impulse in *<Watashi> sagashi gēmu,* 86.

27 Arai, *Kankyō bideo no jidai,* 9, 84.

28 Ibid., 19–20, 95.

29 Thomas H. Davenport has pointed to an "attention crisis" emerging as a result of the rapid growth of information exposure in everyday life, particularly with the more recent rise of networked digital media. Davenport argues contemporary information societies are moving toward an "attention economy." His logic runs as follows: it is wrong to speak of an "information economy," since information is overabundant. The main resource information consumes is attention, and thus in an age oriented around information, attention becomes the true commodity. Davenport thus sees the currency of this new economy gradually shifting from money to attention. See Davenport, *The Attention Economy.*

30 Richard Lanham notes how the attention economy puts a greater emphasis on rhetorical style: "The devices that regulate attention are stylistic devices. Attracting attention is what style is all about. If attention is now at the center of the economy rather than stuff, then so is style. It moves from the periphery to the center. Style and substance switch places." Copious examples could be put forth here, but I'll stick with one clearly working with both novelty and scale: the exploding-sound (*bakuon*) film screening. Pioneered by rock critic Higuchi Yasuhito and the Baus Theatre in Kichijōji (Tokyo), the exploding-sound screening brings large rock concert speaker stacks into the movie theater and presents films with the volume turned up to eleven, often accompanied by a remixed soundtrack designed to make the added loudness more effectively visceral and pummeling. As a way to draw film viewers back into the theater, exploding sound brings scale and novelty home viewing cannot hope to compete with (of course, the novelty will eventually wear off, and hearing damage might dull *bakuon*'s volume advantage). Meanwhile, advertisers continually seek to tap preconscious forms of awareness not requiring focused attention but nonetheless influencing behavior. For example, Steve Goodman has written of "earworms," advertising jingles designed to wiggle their way into a person's unconscious without the need for them to consciously attend to the sounds themselves. See Lanham, *The Economics of Attention,* xiii–xii; Higuchi, *Eiga wa bakuon de sasayaku 99–09*; Goodman, *Sonic Warfare,* 141.

31 Manovich, *The Language of New Media,* 157, 143.

32 Ibid., 271, 128–29. The quote is from Muschamp, "Blueprint."

33 While it is beyond the scope of this chapter, the subtractivism I describe here might be productively contrasted with Koichi Iwabuchi's arguments for why Japanese consumer electronics like the Sony Walkman can pass as "culturally odorless" when exported abroad. See Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization,* 27–28.

34 Yoshimi links this directly back to the atmosphere of the late-1960s student protests: "Far from being postmodern, the extremely independent and provocative spirit foregrounded in Parco's advertising was an avant-garde as if it had been directly inherited from the young radicals of the '60s." Yoshimi, "The Market of Ruins," 293.

35 Ibid., 298–99.

36 Yoshimi presents this as the third major overhaul of the Tokyo landscape in the twentieth century. The first followed the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923, which led to an urban structure based on "living in a residential suburb, commuting to a city-centre office on one of the private railway lines spreading out from central termini, and shopping in Ginza at the weekends." The second emerged during the period of rapid economic growth spurred by the massive infrastructure projects accompanying the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, like the bullet train and the Metropolitan Expressway. Unlike these first two historical moments, the 1980s transformation consisted not of large-scale construction projects but of the blending of the various urban districts into a more homogenous transnational information culture built around global capital. Once-distinct neighborhoods like Shibuya were overrun with discount national and transnational chains of the type once found only in the suburbs. Yoshimi, "The Market of Ruins," 297.

37 Tanaka, *Tezawari no media o motomete*. Cited in Yoshimi, "The Market of Ruins," 296–97.

38 Quoted in Holloway and Hones, "Muji, Materiality, and Mundane Geographies," 557.

39 Ibid., 558. As the authors go on to note, there is an inherent paradox in branding the no-style style: Muji's products claim not to attract attention to their presence, and yet this mundaneness itself "becomes the keynote of its recognizable Mujiness." See also Fukasawa, *Shisō toshite no "Mujirushi ryōhin."*

40 See the next chapter for more on the gender politics of the healing style persona.

41 There are other connections to 1980s Japanese fashion among the makers of the film as well. As noted earlier, Ichikawa first gained recognition as an award-winning creator of TV commercials in the 1980s, including many fashion ads. Hirokawa Taishi, the director of photography, first achieved recognition as an art photographer in the mid-1980s for a project in which he took a wagon full of clothing by then-prominent Japanese designers like Yamamoto, Kawakubo Rei, and Miyake Issey to rural parts of the country and asked farmers, fishermen, and other laborers to pose in the outfits while he took their photographs. See Hirokawa, *Sonomama sonomama*. For more on Japanese fashion in the 1980s, see Skov, "Fashion Trends, Japonisme, and Postmodernism."

42 As *Billboard* magazine notes in an article entitled "Sakamoto's 'Energy Flow' Enlivens Japan."

43 See Ichikawa's comments in the liner notes to the soundtrack (Commmons/Avex, 2007).
44 See Yamane for a fuller reading of the position of Tony's wife in Murakami's original story (in which she is nameless). Thornbury notes if Eiko is fifteen years younger than Tony, she was born around the time of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. This means she grew up amid the heights of the high-growth period and, I would add, as part of the first generation to fully embrace personal mood regulation as a way of life. Yamane, "Zettai-teki kodoku no monogatari," 21; Thornbury, "History, Adaptation, Japan," 163.
45 The classic study is Mertens, *American Minimal Music.*
46 Yamane, "Zettai-teki kodoku no monogatari," 23.
47 Seo, "Namae kara no tōhi," 63.
48 It is worth noting the album version of Sakamoto's score does feature moments of hesitation mixed in with the melancholic drift; places where the melody seems to get stuck on a single note, as if the repetition was threatening to break down. Little of this made it into the film itself, however.
49 Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness,* 135–48.
50 Discussed in Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling,* 14–15.
51 Dargis, "He's an Isolated Fellow; She's Addicted to Shopping."
52 Washida, *Mōdo no meikyū,* 8.

6. HEALING STYLE

1 *Iyashi* is a nominalization of the verb *iyasu,* meaning to heal or mend both physically and psychologically. The word in its current usage first appeared in the context of anthropologist Ueda Noriyuki's medical ethnography of a Sri Lankan village entitled "Akumabari: Iyashi no kosumorojii" (Exorcizing devils: The cosmology of healing; later published as Ueda, *Kakusei no nettowāku*). The term was picked up by a *Yomiuri shimbun* journalist covering an Ueda lecture and emerged—seven years later—as a popular expression in advertising and other media.
2 McNicol, "Designs for Life," 35.
3 The Kobe earthquake of January 17, 1995, killed, injured, and displaced thousands. As investigations progressed into the inordinate number of "earthquake-safe" buildings that had collapsed, it became clear widespread government corruption and graft had been the mainstay during the years of high economic growth. Barely two months later, doomsday cult Aum Shinrikyō committed Japan's worst terrorist attack to date, spreading toxic gas through rush-hour Tokyo commuter trains just steps away from the national legislature. Again, details of the attack showed the incident had social implications reaching well beyond the event itself. Many members of Aum were highly educated young men and women from comfortable backgrounds. That such "ordinary" Japanese youth had turned against the nation reinforced the impression Japanese society as a whole was at fault. These incidents came in the wake of intensive media cover-