

Make Yourself at Home: dreams and realities in a Japanese sharehouse



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Despite the historical associations of shared living with economically and socially marginalised populations, contemporary sharehouses in Japan are seen and marketed as a new foreign lifestyle import that offers an alternative to living alone or in the family home. Based primarily on nine months of intensive fieldwork during residence in a sharehouse, interviews with sharehouse professionals, and discourse analysis of marketing materials, the present work discusses the gaps and consonances amongst the promises set forth in sharehouse marketing, my housemates' desires and expectations, and the realities of living with strangers for the first time and in the absence of a template for social etiquette. The thesis considers the contemporary 'sharehouse boom' in the context of social and economic change. It considers what the desire for an experimental lifestyle indicates about young people's beliefs about their personal futures and the future of Japanese society, and considers the extent to which their desires and expectations are fulfilled.

Statement of Authorship

This thesis is submitted to the Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. This thesis is entirely my own work, and except where otherwise stated, describes my own research.

Caitlin Meagher, New College

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Housemate Profiles

Kobayashi (45 years old, Japan) A successful real estate entrepreneur and owner of Cheznew (and later several other sharehouses). After college, Kobayashi spent six months backpacking in Southeast Asia, where he met and stayed with travelers from around the world, his *kikake* (inspiration) to open a sharehouse. Instead of hiring a House Manager immediately on opening Cheznew, he gave a room to Yamada, his friend from high school, to visit twice to several times a week. Kobayashi rarely visited the property himself, but delegated the operations and oversight of the property to Umeda and Yamada until hiring Matsuhiko as House Manager, on Yamada's recommendation, in early September. Kobayashi now owns five sharehouses in greater Osaka.

Umeda (29 years old, Japan) Ms. Umeda managed contracts and leasing for some of Kobayashi's rental properties, including Cheznew. Kobayashi had entrusted college-educated Umeda with considerable responsibility and flexible working conditions, and she repaid him with great loyalty and unflinching severity in enforcing his changing policies. This made her unpopular in the house, and so her unannounced visits to the house usually resulted in housemates retreating to their rooms while she gave a tour to a potential tenant, surveyed the state of the property, or relaxed on the sofa, watching television. Umeda continues to work for Kobayashi.

Yamada (45 years old, Japan) Yamada shared an apartment in Osaka with his fiancée, but kept a room at Cheznew where he would spend one or two nights a week. This arrangement with his high school friend Kobayashi was symbiotic, although the balance of benefits may have been in Yamada's favour: Yamada's occasional presence in the evenings gave Kobayashi the advantage of monitoring the housemates' activities after Umeda's work hours and spared him the expense of hiring a House Manager. Having access to a *pied-a-terre* away from his fiancée and his professional circles allowed Yamada the ability to indulge his baser needs in relative privacy, especially once he found a carousing partner in Alan. Yamada and Kobayashi fell out over a business arrangement in 2013 and Yamada left Cheznew; shortly thereafter, he married for a second time, though not to his fiancée during his tenure at Cheznew.

Jenny (24 years old, Hong Kong) Like all the Hong Kongese residents, Jenny was in Japan on a one-year working visa. She moved to Cheznew several days after I arrived, but had been living in Naniwa for a month by this time and was instrumental in orienting me to life in the city. Jenny moved out one month after I moved in, and we saw her only rarely after that. She left Cheznew for a dormitory closer to the factory where she was working, saving money by sharing a room with several other unskilled workers, many of them also on work visas. Jenny's one-year work visa expired in 2013, and she returned to Hong Kong.

Matsuhiko (35 years old, Japan) Possibly the best-liked of the housemates, Matsuhiko was a slightly paternal figure at age 35, but also a free spirit whom the

younger housemates looked up to for his ‘cool aspect’: his ability to make Italian food, his drum circle, and his photos from his travels in Italy. When there were uncomfortable situations between housemates, Matsuhiko was invariably the one to mediate. Unlike the other male housemates, most of whom worked full-time professional jobs, Matsuhiko was a professional photographer at a swim school for children. He worked unusual hours and was often the only man present in the house during the day, making him popular with the female housemates and an obvious choice for House Manager. Matsuhiko left Cheznew in 2014 and now lives in Europe.

Kenichi (30 years old, Japan) Kenichi’s background was more privileged than most housemates’ at Cheznew, having graduated with a four-year degree. In addition, he had had the opportunity to participate in a brief intensive English language programme in the UK, which was a source of considerable pride for him. As a technical engineer, he was one of the first *seishain* (full professionals) to move into the house. Kenichi moved into an apartment with his pregnant girlfriend, whom he later married, in November 2013.

Haruko (25 years old, Japan) Haruko came from a middle-class family in nearby Nara Prefecture. She had been living in Osaka for three years and working as retail staff for a fashion boutique in the hopes of finding a career in fashion design, but she had not been promoted and continued to work as a shop assistant when she moved into the house. Haruko left that job, disillusioned, in late summer to work as an OL (‘office lady’) for Yamada’s new business interest, but was fired when Yamada found her sending out her resume from his fax machine. Haruko left Cheznew and into a flat with her boyfriend, Sotarō, in 2014.

Yume (28 years old, Japan) Yume was the most professionally successful female housemate. Originally from Miyazaki, by the time she moved to Cheznew, she had been living with a friend in Nipponbashi for several years. Yume came to Cheznew in search of a ‘new experience’ but became increasingly isolated during her tenure, due in part to her long work hours and in part because of an incident with Yamada, prompting his vendetta against her. Yume moved out of Cheznew and into an apartment with a friend in 2014.

Alan (30 years old, America) Alan had lived in Osaka, where he met his wife, years before his arrival at Cheznew. He moved into Cheznew from the United States to be closer to his estranged wife, who had moved in with her parents in a nearby prefecture and whom he hoped to win back. Finding her unwilling to see him, Alan began dating multiple women. His savings worn thin, he accepted a job with Yamada’s new import venture in late summer, and the two began carousing together in the evenings. Alan left under unpleasant circumstances in the early autumn. He now lives in the United States but takes frequent holidays in Japan and the Philippines.

Sachiko (24 years old, Japan) Sachiko moved from her parents’ house in Saitama due to a forced relocation by her employer, Loft, where she had been promoted to the manager of the art supplies department. There she met and began dating

Kiyoshi, who later moved into the house. Sachiko moved back to Saitama due to a second relocation in October of 2012.

Kiyoshi (24 years old, Japan) Kiyoshi was Sachiko's inferior at Loft; though extremely likeable, he was not deemed management material. Charged with orienting Sachiko on her arrival in the Osaka store, the two soon began dating. When Sachiko returned to Saitama, Kiyoshi moved out of the house a month later.

Hina (19 years old, Japan) Despite coming from a working-class household and speaking only Japanese, Hina was a world traveler at age 20. She dreamed of working as a journalist, but at her young age and given her lack of education, she worked at a convenience store. Like Yume, Hina was extremely independent and spent little time with the other housemates; unlike Yume, Hina was well-liked by the others. Hina moved into her own apartment in 2015.

Sotarō (29 years old, Japan) Sotarō moved into Cheznew in September. Like Kenichi, he was a professional: he worked in civil engineering for the city of Naniwa. Also like Kenichi, he claimed to have chosen Cheznew to save money. At 29 years old, he was already a salaryman, working long hours and existing on prepared foods from the convenience store. He was popular with the female housemates for his perceived 'seriousness' and stability, and he and Haruko eventually began dating, moving out of the house in 2014 and into their own flat.

Honda (60 years old, Japan) The oldest of the housemates, Honda moved to Cheznew when her parents died and she sold the family home, not wanting to live alone. Honda had worked for decades as a bookkeeper for a small family business in the area, but did not have friends or family. She moved into Cheznew to avoid living alone.

Fumiko (45 years old, Japan) Fumiko was the single mother of a daughter, whom she had raised in her parents' house outside of Tokyo. Fumiko came to Cheznew once her daughter left for college, seeking a new life in a new area of the country. She was unable to support herself working dispatch (*hakken*) and returned to her parents' home in October 2012.

In addition, the house was home at any moment to other Japanese housemates, including 25-year-old Chie, who worked at a call centre; 25-year-old Akari, who worked as a programme director for the YMCA; 25-year-old Hiromi, who worked for an automobile manufacturer; and 27-year-old Ueno, an interior designer whom the other housemates referred to by his surname in recognition of his high professional status. There was one Okinawan housemate, who had been transferred to Osaka but disliked the Japanese and avoided interaction with the other residents; four Taiwanese housemates on work visas, who worked, cooked, and ate together; and a series of Korean housemates who moved in and out within a month.

入門

Chapter One: Introduction

'Let's live life like an international café – together, but alone'.

– Cheznew¹ sharehouse manual, page 1.

I. Into the Field

I arrived in Naniwa² on the first of March 2012. I was unfamiliar with this region, where I was to conduct very short-term research (originally only three months). I had hastily committed to, and paid for, a room in a sharehouse there. I arrived, jetlagged and overwhelmed, at a business hotel near Itami Regional Airport and spoke with Ms. Umeda, the sharehouse management company representative. I followed Ms. Umeda's directions faithfully the next morning and found myself standing on the platform of Minami Station on the branch line that led from Osaka City, blinking against the harsh daylight. In the distance, I could glimpse the mountains through the smog of the sprawling industrial district that surrounded my new neighbourhood. I recalled vocabulary words from my Japanese classes years earlier: *iwakan* (a feeling of being out of place) and *isekai* (parallel universe).

Naniwa has a long history and is beloved among those who call it home, despite its having fallen on difficult times in the 20th century shift from an industrial to a

¹ 'Cheznew' is a pseudonym. I have also used pseudonyms for my housemates and management company employees, but not industry professionals I interviewed.

² 'Naniwa' is a pseudonym for the city, and 'Minami' for the neighbourhood of 'Naniwa', where my research was conducted.

service economy. The built environment is disarmingly anachronistic, dominated by decrepit structures pockmarked by age and overuse.



Figure 1: View from Minami Station

Minami Station lies one station north of the Izumi Industrial District, a colossus of factories where a majority of my new neighbours were employed in various types of manufacturing. In early mornings, beginning with this one, I could see throngs of men and a few women in *monpei* rushing from the sprawling *danchi* to the station. The Station sits amidst two-and three-storey shops, cheap hotels, *izakaya*, and aging residential buildings. It is bordered on the west by a *pachinko* parlour and a series of snack bars; to the east is a miniscule park with two

benches and a single spindly sapling, marked by an incongruously ostentatious bronze plaque.



Figure 2: Minami Station eastern exit: my first view of Naniwa

I met Ms. Umeda at this eastern exit, and she guided me through the alleyways, past the facades of tiny karaoke bars and coffee shops that would become familiar as I passed them each day over the subsequent 19 months (Figure 2). I fumbled through introductions as we struggled with my two large suitcases packed with business cards, English-language novels, and little souvenirs from Oxford intended for my potential informants, to the large-scale sharehouse where I would live.

The structure is a converted workers' dormitory, three storeys containing 28 private rooms, with a rooftop offering a view of the neighbourhood (Figure 3). The exterior had been painted a pinkish orange, with shared areas inside painted a pale green. Each bedroom was identical except for the colour of the walls. I was told that the company had contracted a designer to 'freshen up' the property with a bold, contemporary colour scheme, so bedrooms were available in bright orange, dark blue, or magenta.



Figure 3: Cheznew exterior

Once we had signed the contracts, Ms. Umeda showed me the facilities. On the ground floor was the sprawling *genkan* (entryway) where we removed our shoes

and slipped into one of several identical pairs of guest slippers provided by the management company. From here we entered the expansive living room that was divided into a 'café area' with café tables and chairs, as well as a large family-style dining table with bench seats; and a recreation area with several mismatched sofas around a large television, the focal point of the room.



Figure 4: View of Cheznew living room from the bathrooms

To the left was the shared industrial kitchen outfitted with stainless steel sinks and a large worktop; the house had been outfitted with an electrical oven as well as three electrical cooktops with two gas hobs each. Three stainless steel refrigerators were provided, with one shelf assigned to each resident; large plastic bins were stored in an adjacent room for dry storage, one bin per room. The management company had provided crockery, cutlery, pots and pans for common use, in addition to three electric rice cookers and an electric kettle.

Passing back through the living room, Ms. Umeda led me to the bathrooms. There was one standing shower room and four shower-in-baths, which she made sure I understood were to be used in the Japanese fashion of showering for hygiene and bathing for relaxation. There was a separate 'powder room' exclusively for female residents. It had been outfitted with a chaise longue, a complicated shower I soon concluded was not worth the trouble, and a vanity area with hair dryers, mirrors, and shelves for our makeup. She led me to the 'fitness room', which despite the management company's representations was a small room adjacent to the supply closet with two very basic stationary cycles and a tiny television.



Figure 5: Cheznew cooking facilities

Finally, I was led to my room, which was larger than I had dared hope. To my delight, it was one of the cheery yellow-orange ones. It been outfitted with a new grey-blue carpet, curtains, fresh linens still in their packaging, and a small white table and bed from Ikea. And there I was left on my own.

Over the next week, I slept irregular hours, consumed all the novels I'd brought, and slowly began to encounter my handful of housemates in the otherwise eerily empty house. The management company had given me the choice of only two rooms during our preliminary negotiations, presumably to generate the impression of great demand. I was surprised, then, to find the house nearly silent in my tentative and oddly-timed appearances in the kitchen and living room as I slowly crept out of my jetlag. I met a very handsome young businessman early on the first or second morning, who patiently explained to me how to work the rice cooker. I met Mr. Yamada, a middle-aged Japanese businessman, who welcomed me enthusiastically as we passed each other on my third or fourth day. He kept his room, next to the living room on the ground floor, as a *pied-a-terre* to which he would escape his business and personal responsibilities in the city several times a week as it suited him. He was, I later learned, the unofficial House Manager and childhood friend of the management company president, Kobayashi. An employee of the Hong Kong government in Japan on a working holiday appeared within several days, and finally a female friend of his, Jenny, joined him at the end of my first week.

The vastness of this nearly vacant, garishly decorated space, added to my sense of having been transplanted into another world. The housemates ate separately but occasionally drank together, especially when Yamada was present. Jenny (who had been living in another sharehouse in the area) showed me around the neighbourhood and, most helpfully, accompanied me to the municipal offices to register as a foreign resident. For the most part, however, we lived separate lives, rarely finding ourselves in the common areas at the same hours due to our varying schedules. This was all to change in the end of March when the house was suddenly inundated with ten new housemates, and over the following months I would observe the emergence of social *cliques* that contradicted the rhetoric of 'sharing'.

For the first two months, I kept notes as I spent increasing time in the house, especially as I observed friendships and animosities emerging. By the time we celebrated a second influx of housemates in the beginning of May, I had determined to make the sharehouse the focus of my research pending the approval of my host researcher and, of course, my housemates. I introduced the idea at a house meeting on the 4th of May, explaining the scope of my proposed research and their right to be excluded. I obtained consent from 18 of the 20 housemates present and confirmed their consent at the beginning of each subsequent interview, but not, for obvious reasons, each time we gathered casually. The present thesis consists mainly of my observations during my nine-month tenure, 1st March to 1st December, and partially from interviews conducted subsequently. I moved out of the sharehouse for reasons that become

clear in the chapters to follow, but remained in the neighbourhood where I was in regular contact with my former housemates.

Fieldwork considerations

My positionality as a participant observer was of course affected by the same ambiguities and tensions that accompany the both-inside-and-outside identity of every ethnographer. These issues were amplified by the specific circumstances of my research, and the irresolvable ambiguity of my position as housemate, researcher, and friend.

In some other respects, however, my research was less difficult than expected. I had expected the Japanese to be especially resistant to being observed in the home, a space culturally marked as radically interior and private. This was not the case, for a number of reasons: first, as I demonstrate in the second section of the thesis, the areas of the house and the activities to which I had access were defined by my housemates as semi-public, in contrast with the inviolability of their private bedrooms (where I was not permitted, and I did not attempt, to enter). Further, my status as an unusual foreigner (I was neither very young nor teaching English), and moreover a foreign woman whose purpose for being in Japan my housemate/informants struggled in the beginning to understand, meant that most housemates saw my presence as an exciting novelty rather than a threat to their privacy.

That I was an educated American had further implications for the degree and type of access I was afforded. As I describe in Chapter 3, I was presumed as a foreigner to require initiation into even the most basic elements of Japanese culture, but by virtue of my affiliation with Osaka University my housemates expressed a degree of admiration intermingled with perplexity. At age 34, I was at the upper end of the residents' modal age range, which proved ideal. I was just young enough for the younger residents to treat me as an older sister, but old enough for the three older residents to treat me as a young peer. Being a woman researcher gave rise to certain personal and professional challenges, but also allowed me greater access to the experiences of female housemates through informal avenues like gossip and 'girl talk'.

Most important in terms of access was that I did not go to Japan, nor did I enter the sharehouse, with the intention of studying our home. The methodological impossibility of my initial project on commuting behaviour slowly became clear at the same time as I became more involved in the daily life in the sharehouse. I was fortunate to have kept detailed notes of my experiences, for my own reflection rather than as data, from the beginning. Like many of my housemates (especially the other foreigners), I had chosen to stay in a sharehouse because it was a flexible short-term option rather than as a long-term lifestyle. Over time, my Japanese improved; I developed friendships and hostilities with my housemates as they did, quite naturally, amongst themselves; and I puzzled over the ways they interacted with each other in a space that did not correspond to any existing socio-spatial templates. I realised I had quite fortuitously found an opportunity for ethnographic research into Japanese domestic norms under

changing social conditions. As a final advantage, I had unwittingly chosen a sharehouse that had just opened its doors. I was able to observe negotiations amongst housemates and management with regard to the type of house this was to be as they unfolded.

Thus, even after I formally shifted the focus of my research to our house, in the context of daily interactions I was not primarily a researcher from a foreign university but Cait-san, their occasionally obstreperous foreign housemate. In my initial relationship with the other members of the house, I was less observer than participant, and this balance persisted due to my deep and inevitable immersion in sharehouse life. I dutifully kept field notes and photos, but I postponed any concentrated analysis while I was in the house.

Conducting research in a sharehouse in Naniwa, as opposed to Tokyo (where they began and are both more common and more fashionable) or in either Osaka or Kyoto (to which they have subsequently spread) might have proved more representative of the contemporary state of the sharehouse market nationwide. Indeed, the president of Hitsuji insisted this was the case, that Cheznew's inadequacies were the responsibility of its rookie management and its location in an undesirable area, and were not representative of more upscale, urban properties. But had I lived in a sharehouse with a conscientious design scheme and corresponding rent, it would have deprived me of some of the insights about the relationship between the sharehouse and the local community. As sharehouses continue to increase, expanding into less urban areas, the present

work provides insight into the experiences of the predominantly young, predominantly female, Japanese who try this 'new lifestyle', if only for a short time.

The present work is based mainly on the ethnographic data I recorded at Cheznew, but I was keenly aware of the specificity of my experiences there. I also undertook a field survey of six additional companies in the region that offered similarly priced accommodation. I travelled between Osaka and Tokyo for events, interviews, and site visits in both cities that have comparatively high numbers of shared properties. Due to the rapid proliferation and diversification of sharehouses in Japan, I was careful to select properties that were representative of one segment of the sharehouse market. I contacted the owners of these companies and met for interviews. I was granted varying degrees of access to the properties and residents, in some cases participating in ritualised social events like welcome parties and dinners, and in others touring the properties when the residents were away at school or work. Each company owned between six and twelve properties, and the size of properties varied from five residents to nearly 50, giving me a broad sense of the variety of sharehouses on the market.³ Some properties, like Kyoto's Expo House, cater to younger residents, while other owners observe strict limits on the age of housemates (see Chapter 7). The properties owned by Watanabe Daisuke's cocoon are female-only, while the other companies and properties I surveyed were mixed-sex. J&F (Japanese and Foreigner) House was designed to promote interaction between

³ The largest sharehouse in Japan is the 259-room Oakhouse in Tokyo, whose owners declined to be interviewed for this project.

Japanese and foreign residents, while Anteroom Osaka does not accommodate foreign guests at all. I do not pretend, however, that the present research is exhaustive of the varied sharehouse market in Kansai, much less in all of Japan. The present work is preliminary and suggests several important themes that might be taken up for future research, as I discuss below.

One important component of my research was content analysis of the burgeoning literature on sharehouses which, like much of the material published in Japan, blurs the boundaries between information and marketing. The literature, most of which claimed to offer instruction on how to select and live in a sharehouse, proved formulaic and consistent with the language and ideas expressed by the sharehouse owners, marketers, and residents I interviewed. The striking frequency of tropes like ‘living together alone’, ‘living abroad in Japan’, and ‘the new village society’ demonstrates some of the ambivalence of young people, especially women, with regard to the Japanese domestic norm of living with one’s family until marriage and the desire to locate the sharehouse within existing socio-spatial templates. This fundamental tension, between a desire for experimentation and anxiety at the lack of established domestic protocols, is a central theme of the present work. This negotiation between cultural continuity and social change is an important feature of contemporary life in Japan as it approaches faces intractable challenges that require innovative solutions.

Sharehouse demographics

For the majority of my stay, Cheznew was near capacity with at least 20 of its 28 available rooms occupied. Although there was considerable turnover, especially amongst foreign residents, approximately half of the occupants were present throughout my stay. The majority of these housemates were young Japanese in their late 20s and early to mid-30s, and their stories form the core of the present work. There also was a single American man for several months during my stay, three older Japanese, and a shifting number of non-Western foreigners from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea. Demographic data about my housemates are provided in Appendix A. The relative flexibility of sharehouse contracts means that sharehouses may be used as a starting point for foreigners looking for a place to stay as they make longer-term arrangements. Korean housemates were extremely few in number and their tenure extremely short, typically one month or less. Often these were workers in Japanese firms who were brought over by their companies on short-term consulting jobs and housed at the companies' expense (indeed, the company had selected the sharehouse as a more economical alternative to long-stay hotels for these workers, who apparently had little choice in the matter). The average length of tenure was also extremely short for Hong Kongese residents, while Taiwanese typically lived out their one-year 'working holiday' visas – to the extent that the management worried that the house was becoming 'too Taiwanese' (see Chapter 3).

Women outnumbered men at Cheznew, but by a smaller margin than in the national average (including mixed-sex and a growing number of female-only sharehouses). According to statistics collected by Hitsuji Real Estate, women represented 78 per cent of the total sharehouse residents as of April 2013, and this figure is down from a peak of more than 80 per cent in 2010 (Hitsuji 2013). Female housemates at Cheznew were mostly aged between 24 and 35, with one 19-year-old, Hina, and two female residents middle-aged or older, Fumiko and Honda. Most of those in their 20s and 30s reported they were unruffled by cultural pressures to marry; and the majority had purposefully deferred marriage, which they associated with relinquishing their personal and professional aspirations in the service of their responsibilities to others as a 'professional housewife' (*senmon shufu*).

Nonetheless, there was a distinct discrepancy in education and employment between the male and female housemates, with male housemates generally having acquired a higher level of education and more likely to be in stable professional employment as 'regular workers' (*seishain*). Female housemates' modal educational acquisition was vocational school. Most worked in non-professional or non-standard employment, including *hakken* (temporary 'dispatch') work. Only one of them, Yume, who, as I describe below, was subtly but unmistakably ostracised by the others, had attained a level of professional accomplishment. The others represented themselves as budding career women in the springtime of their professional lives, temporarily waylaid by circumstance.

Japanese employment statistics are slightly slippery, as the category '*seishain*' may be manipulated to include, for example, temporary and dispatch workers (*hakken*). The owner of 'cocoon' women-only sharehouses maintained to me in an interview that the 'majority' of his tenants, 'about 80 per cent' were *seishain*, but admitted to having included *hakken* when I asked him to elaborate on the types of work they did (the majority of his *seishain*, as it turned out, worked *hakken*). Hitsuji's statistics suggest that the number of *seishain* in sharehouses nationwide has increased 16 per cent in the last three years. During this same period, the number of students has decreased by 7 per cent, on the basis of which they maintain that sharehouses are gradually gaining mainstream acceptance as a housing option for working adults. Indeed, according to a 2013 Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport survey, 47 per cent of sharehouse resident respondents identified as *seishain* (versus 39.7 per cent two years previously). The fact that non-standard employment options were included separately lends credence to these figures (MLIT 2013).

Hitsuji puts the current average age of sharehouse residents at 28.9 years old. This, too, has seen a dramatic increase since its early survey in 2010. Cheznew's residents included at various times three residents over the age of 40 and three under the age of 20, but the majority were in their late 20s or early 30s, the period of extended young adulthood when individuals are working to formulate personal and professional narratives for themselves. In addition, according to MLIT, more than half of sharehouse managers enforce an age limit on residents

(MLIT 2013). There was no age limit at Cheznew, but many sharehouse owners expressed that age was one of the factors they considered in vetting potential housemates. A few, like cocoon's Daisuke Watanabe, admitted to enforcing a strict 'under 40' policy, and professed he was willing to evict an otherwise suitable housemate when she reached that advanced age.

As a result, while I would not claim that my ethnographic material from Cheznew is representative of sharehouses nationally, its demographic makeup was roughly in line with Hitsuji Real Estate's national statistical averages for the period the research was being conducted. It is not unreasonable to extrapolate that the interpersonal issues arising at Cheznew were taking place in other sharehouses of similar size elsewhere, but I have taken into consideration the special attributes that distinguish it from other properties.

II. Background and context

Origins of the sharehouse

A 'sharehouse' is a property where all facilities are shared, except for bedrooms, which are private (except in the case of a couple sharing a room, which is extremely rare). In fact, there is no structural difference between a sharehouse and any other type of shared housing, except that it is marketed as a 'lifestyle alternative' for young people, outside the family or marital home, and which offers the opportunity to feel social connections without them impinging on one's privacy and independence. According to the website for Hitsuji Real Estate,

the largest sharehouse marketing company in Japan, a sharehouse is a 'lifestyle where all tenants can enjoy casual communication' (Hitsuji, 'Basic Introduction'). The present work considers its recent success as a response to broader social and economic changes in Japan: what is driving young people to attempt, many for the first time, living with strangers, and to what extent its promises are fulfilled.

Hitsuji Real Estate marks the beginning of the sharehouse 'boom' around 2007, when the number of sharehouse properties increased from fewer than 50 nationwide to several thousand. By April of 2013, the company counted 1,378 properties with a total of 19,208 rooms; by the end of 2014 they predicted these figures to increase to 1,700 and 21,000 respectively. These are included in the company's report entitled 'Hitsuji Real Estate Thanks Report' (Hitsuji 2013). Figure 6 is taken from that report and shows the rapid increase in the number of sharehouses beginning in the mid-2000s through 2013. Both the 2008 and 2013 reports reflect the total responses to surveys of sharehouse owners and managers registered with Hitsuji Media and those operating independently but advertised on the internet.

Political economics of the sharehouse

According to a 2010 report published by Recruit Corporation, the sharehouse 'boom' is a response not only to changing economic circumstances, but changing values held by those affected. The initial boom was a response to the high cost of

rental properties relative to decreasing average wages and took place in Tokyo and environs, where the majority of sharehouses are still located today. As of 2002, average monthly rent in Tokyo was 116,300 yen (774 GBP), more than 50% of the average monthly salary of 200,000 yen (1,330 GBP). Moreover, this expense only bought a scant 20 square meters of space, and ‘for the increasing numbers of young people who had experienced life overseas [where the average living space is much bigger than in Japan], it is not difficult to imagine that this was unsatisfactory’ (Recruit 2010: 121).

Recruit’s report emphasizes that the spread of sharehouse popularity is related to changes in young people’s values, especially their attitudes to consumption. According to Recruit, young people of the so-called ‘enlightenment generation’ (*satori sedai*), born too late to enjoy the effervescent materialism of the Bubble economy, have re-prioritised ‘value’ over conspicuous consumption. One consequence of this shift has been a rise in the sharing economy. ‘The diminished sense of personal ownership... is their defining characteristic, and the weakness in the boundaries of personal ownership is expressed in shared housing and other [modes] like car shares...’ (Recruit 2010: 122).

Japanese government reports rely on census and survey data to present a picture of the sharehouse that is less a lifestyle ‘choice’ than a final resort for the economically marginalised. However, the government’s definition of the *sheahausu* differs in important ways from what Hitsuji describes, and which my

field site of Cheznew most closely resembled. In a 2015 report for the Statistics Research Centre of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, a

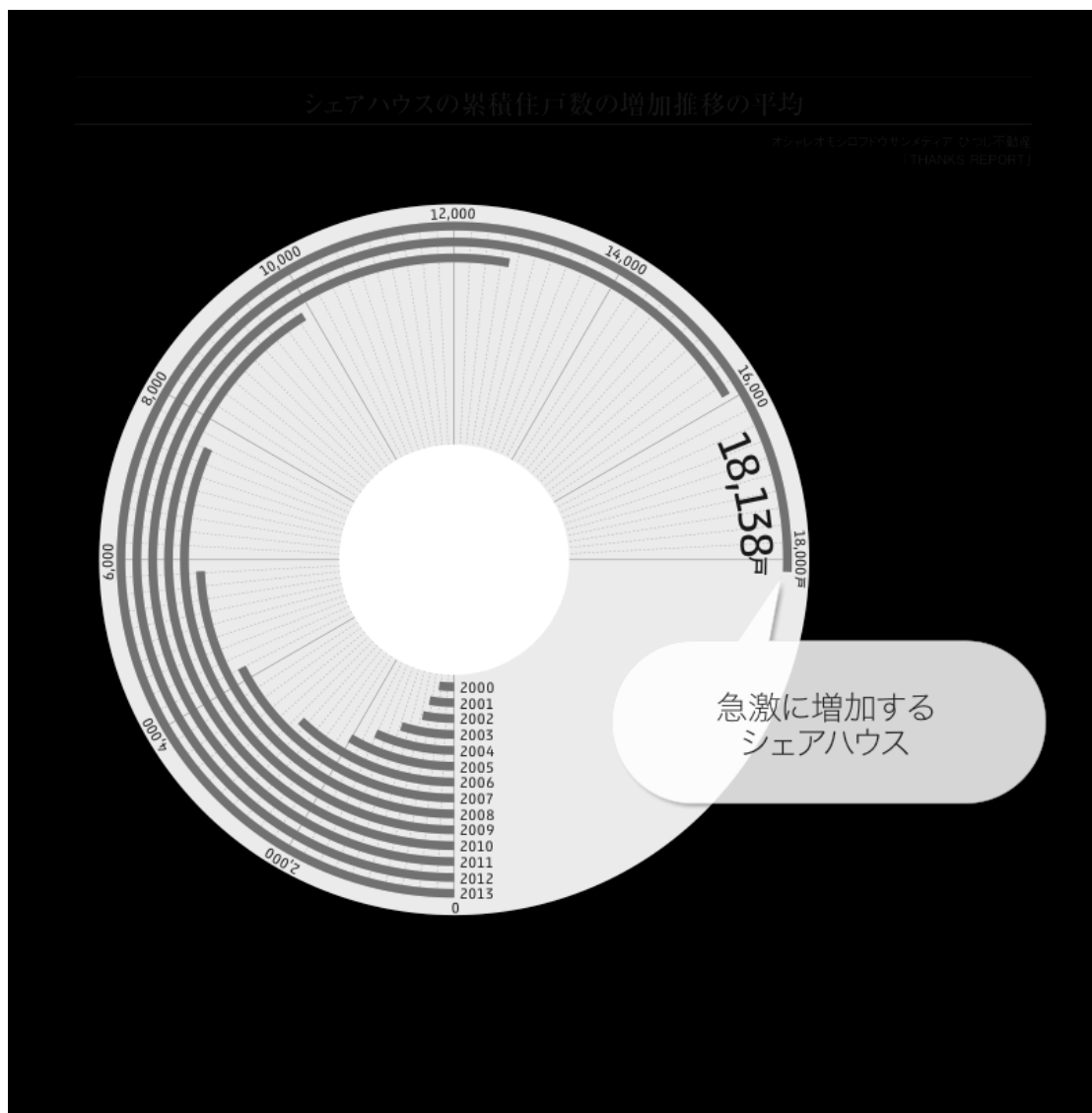


Figure 6: Average Change in Aggregate Sharehouse Units: Dramatic Increase in Sharehouses (*Sheahausu no ruiseki jūkosū no zōka suii no heikin: shigeki ni zōkasuru sheahausu*), Hitsuji 2013 (reprinted in *Toto* 2014).

sharehouse is minimally defined as ‘a situation in which three or more households share a single residence, or in the case of two households cohabiting, the principal household is combined with a single person or people’ (Nishi 2015:1), and excludes households composed of unrelated single persons (Nishi

2015: 7). As a result, government statistics report the number of sharehouses rapidly decreasing, rather than increasing: an 8.9% decrease from 209,000 to 191,000 over the five-year period 2008-2013 (Nishi 2015: 2). The author concludes that the dwindling numbers of sharehouses are due to a decrease in the cost of renting a home or apartment, on the basis that the typical sharehouse resident is someone 'who occupies a vulnerable position in society, such as single mothers' (Nishi 2015:1).

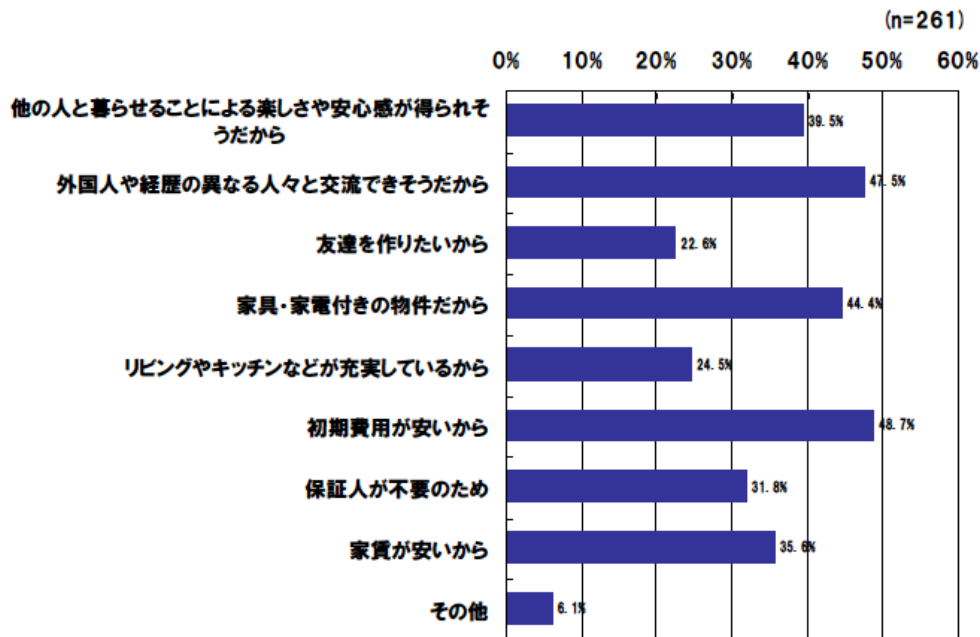
In a 2013 survey by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transportation and Tourism (MLIT) survey of 931 sharehouse managers, current residents, and recent sharehouse alumni, 64.3 per cent responded that the first incentive to live in a sharehouse 'because the rent is cheap'. In fact, this was the most frequent response, followed by 'because the location is good' (62.8 per cent) and 'because it is close to work' (33.3 per cent). 'Non-economic charms' received very few affirmative responses (MLIT 2013: 12).

In this survey, MLIT uses a definition of a sharehouse more in line with what the sharehouse industry, and the public, recognises: 'a single property where people unrelated or married to each other cohabit, where space is provided for the purpose of resident interaction' (MLIT 2013: 2). However, 75.3 per cent of respondents occupied what the MLIT defined as 'cramped and windowless' rooms of less than five square meters (3 *cho*). By contrast, each of the private rooms at Cheznew was 11.2 meters squared, and amongst the nearly thirty

properties I viewed, the average room size was approximately 10 meters squared. I did not observe any windowless rooms.

《入居理由》

図表 15 シェアハウスに入居しようと考えた理由（複数選択可）



注) 日本シェアハウス・ゲストハウス連盟会員が運営するシェアハウスに概ね1ヶ月以上入居している入居者に対するアンケート調査結果

Figure 7 'Reasons for Moving In: Reasons Cited by Residents for Entering a Sharehouse (multiple responses allowed) (*Nyūtaku no riyū - sheahausu ni nyūtaku shiyō to kangaeta riyū [fukusū sentakuka]*'. 'Because I can have a sense of security and the fun of living with others', 39.5 per cent; 'Because I can interact with foreigners and those with different experiences', 47.5 per cent; 'Because I want to make friends', 22.6 per cent; 'Because furniture and household electronics are provided', 44.4 per cent; 'Because it comes with a fully furnished kitchen and living room', 24.5 per cent; 'Because it's a cheap short-term option', 48.7 per cent; 'Because there is no need for a guarantor', 31.8 per cent; 'Because rent is cheap', 35.6 per cent; 'Other', 6.1 per cent (Japan Sharehouse and Guesthouse Federation (JGHO), Share-Share, and Mitsubishi UFJ Research and Consulting 2014: 12).

Two thirds of the respondents to the MLIT survey lived in metropolitan Tokyo⁴, where the so-called 'sharehouse boom' began before spreading outward, initially to other cities like Osaka and eventually to commuter towns like Naniwa. Due to

⁴ Tokyo real estate has been better insulated than outlying areas (even cities like Osaka) from the effects of the recession, and even less desirable apartments

Naniwa's compromised real estate market, the price of the one-room flat where I moved following the sharehouse was comparable to my rent at Cheznew, and I was not required to pay any of the fees, like 'key money', usually required at the initiation of a lease. In areas outside of Tokyo (even including other metropolitan areas like Osaka), high vacancy rates have made renting an apartment cheaper and easier than in previous decades. Thus, sharehouses do not always represent a significant savings over a private lease.

As a result, there is a discrepancy between government-generated materials on shared housing, which tend to emphasise economic necessity, and those published from within the sharehouse industry, which emphasise individual lifestyle choice as a primary motivator. According to the results of a nationwide survey jointly by the Japan Sharehouse and Guesthouse Federation (JGHO), sharehouse marketing website Share-Share, and Mitsubishi UJF Research and Consulting (Figure 7), sharehouse residents' reasons for living in a sharehouse include both its material advantages, like the low cost of rent and the provision of furnishings, as well as 'non-economic' enticements like the ability to make friends or interact with foreigners.

continue command high rental prices. However, high-end sharehouses in Tokyo compete with the private rental market: at Ryozan Park in the Sugamo neighbourhood, rents vary between 72,000 and 108,000 yen per month, plus 15,000 yen management fee (85 GBP); at The Share in Shibuya, rooms cost between 80,000 and 115,000, plus 15,000 yen management fee (Discover Japan 2013: 55 and 59).

In contrast to the government reporting, authors of sharehouse discourses emphasise individual choice over economic need. Sharehouse advocate and Osaka University professor Kubota Hiroyuki spends several pages of his book *Young People Who Live with Others* (*Tanin to sumu wakamonotachi*) considering the 'economic benefits' of the sharehouse, arguing that the money saved by sharing bills among a number of wage earners (as opposed to the family, with its single wage earner) can be reinvested in more luxurious household goods and furnishings (Kubota 2009: 59-63). He suggests that sharehouse residents are savvy and informed consumers, maximising their buying power rather than minimising expenditure. This analysis is echoed by Abe Sue and Mohara Naomi, authors of *Sheahausu: Reasons We Live with Others*, who explain that:

When those living in Japanese sharehouses speak of 'economic' reasons, what they mean is fundamentally at odds with severe economic need. Having graduated university and wanting to remain in the city where they work full-time, most are able to afford a one-room apartment on their own. In the Japanese sharehouse, the term 'economical' is more 'cost performance, and living a better life' than 'escaping poverty' (Abe and Mohara 2012: 98).

Perhaps more to the point, cultural theorist Miura Atsuro writes: 'It's not that they don't have the money':

When you say 'sharehouse' the reader will probably imagine ...that young people whose income has decreased due to the recession choose sharehouses because they can't afford to pay rent on their own apartments. Of course, there are those who choose sharehouses for economic reasons, but there are more important reasons too. ... It's people who have grown bored with 'typical living alone', people with regular salaries, regular full-time workers, people who have lived alone for years, who seek not cheapness but a valuable experience, people who seek inspiration in the design and quality [of the sharehouse] (Miura 2011: 78).

Kubota devotes significant time and space to the ‘non-economic charms’ of the sharehouse, which include ‘sharing as an extension of/alternative to family’; ‘the shared perspective of a generation’; ‘separating yourself from your “role” in the family’; ‘getting to know yourself through cultural exchange with others’; and ‘sharing as a “third space”’ (Kubota 2009: 64-75), themes I explore in the following chapters.

It is clear that economic considerations loomed large in my housemates’ decision-making, particularly the majority in precarious and non-standard employment. Of greater significance than the cost of a room, which was comparable to a small apartment in the area, was the flexibility of the arrangement, with no commitment or upfront fees. Nonetheless, few housemates (ironically, the most gainfully and securely employed) were prepared to cite economic motives as their primary reasons for choosing the house. Thus, the present work considers sharehouses as a response to contemporary structural conditions, including the widespread flexibilisation of labour and barriers to home ownership; but it also considers the way housemates narrativised this decision in a way to emphasise their agency and As I discuss in Chapters 2 and 7, the sharehouse ‘boom’ is not only a response to the economic conditions of late capitalism, but – through its promotion of individual mobility – shrouds this economic element in the neoliberal ideology of freedom and choice.

The home and family in transition

The rise of the sharehouse would not be of particular interest, were it not marketed as a radical deviation from Japanese domestic norms – specifically, the isometry of home and family that sees living with non-kin as aberrant or subversive. As I describe at length in the chapters to follow, one of the appeals of sharehouse living for young people, and particularly my young female housemates, is the idea of transgressing traditional values and the social status quo. Marketing materials and sharehouse ‘guides’ encourage this oppositional association with frequent evocations of the sharehouse as a ‘third space’ between work and [family] home, where interactions are predetermined by ascribed roles and relationships. In reality, living alone is also an option available to young men and women who are not prepared to marry but do not wish to remain in the parental home, but sharehouse enthusiasts – amongst them Kubota (2009) and Miura (2011), whom I cited above - suggest that the sharehouse offers spontaneous communication amongst equals in direct contrast to the conventionalised role fulfilment that characterises the family home.

However, the ‘traditional Japanese home’ against which the sharehouse is set as a contrast is, on closer examination, of rather recent vintage. While essentialist imaginings applaud the resiliency of the Confucian family system (*ie seido*) ideology as evidence of Japan’s cultural stability, in reality the ideal Japanese home of the 20th century was redrawn in response to changing economic circumstances in partial replication of Western models. In the post-war period,

the multi-generational *ie* model that emphasised descent was superseded by the *katei* (household) model that privileged the isolated intimacy of the two-generation family (Ueno 2009: 68-79; Ochiai 1994; Morioka 1990: 511-522). This 'nuclearisation' of the family entailed the re-definition of the family as the conjugal couple and their children, as opposed to the more flexible and multi-generational family of centuries past.

Japan's involvement in the Second World War resulted in a loss of 2.3 million properties, leading to an acute housing shortage. As Japan struggled to cope with this deficit, progressive intellectuals were seeking solutions in the structure of the Japanese household. Tokyo University architect and urban planner Nishiyama Uzō promulgated a 'new household form, opposed to the "feudal household", based on the modern nuclear family composed of a married couple and their children', a 'way of living fundamentally more suitable to the Japanese people' (Kitagawa, in Chintai 2010:116). Not only did Nishiyama reconstruct the 'Japanese family' as limited to those related through immediate conjugal or blood ties, he also advocated changes to the physical structure of the average Japanese home by separating sleeping and eating spaces to rationalise domestic life. These ideas eventually led to the permanent installation of Western-style furniture as described in detail by Waswo (2002: 62-85) and Sand (2005: 119-130), giving material form to this new understanding of the family and home.

According to Urban Studies scholar Yosuke Hirayama, the Japanese government heeded Nishiyama's call for this 'new way of life' during the 1950s and 60s, by

establishing the JHC (Japan Housing Corporation) and the Government Housing Loan Corporation as part of the Public Housing Act (Hirayama 2006: 15-46). As Waswo (2002: 86-107) demonstrates, in the favourable climate of the 'period of rapid economic growth' between 1954 and 1973 public and private investment fostered an aggressive and widespread proliferation in construction of housing that afforded extra space for families, including private bedrooms for children (Waswo 2002: 129-130; Sand 2005: 171). It was increasingly thought that children required their own quiet space for study in order to succeed, so a home with segregated spaces for children and parents became emblematic of middle-class aspirations and social progress. Thus, the customisable *nDK* model became popular and highly accessible during the 1960s and 1970s under the auspices of government development and the provision of subsidised mortgages. As rooms in family homes increasingly became partitioned from each other, within the home there was a corresponding segregation of family members from each other and to their private rooms (*koshitsu*). A second consequence of this spatial segregation was a more absolute distinction between the family, with whom it is appropriate to share domestic space, and 'others' (*tanin*).

Despite its ideological force, the single-family home was not available to everyone. Since the Edo period, the tenement house (*nagaya*) was a last resort for those structurally without access to private housing, including the unemployed and those whose employment did not entitle them to dormitory housing. In addition to economically marginalised Japanese, the residents of

nagaya included large numbers of minorities and *burakumin*⁵. According to

Historian Michael Weiner, the *nagaya* of the 1930s were

low-cost wooden structures, usually covered in corrugated iron or, in some cases, straw, which provided the principal type of rented accommodation available to Koreans. Normally constructed around a communal toilet and well, [they] typically consisted of two or more long, narrow buildings separated by a sewage ditch which ran the length of the property. Because water supplies and sewage facilities were often adjacent to each other, tenants were particularly vulnerable to a host of infectious diseases, including dysentery and typhoid (Weiner 2004: 342).

During the period of rapid economic growth, marginalised populations without access to government-subsidised housing or loans – foreigners, the poor and itinerant – continued to live in structurally sub-par housing that featured shared cooking and often bathing facilities. These included the workers dormitories, some of which have recently been converted into sharehouses like *Cheznew*, and *gesshuku*, boarding houses with attached dining halls where meals can be purchased. Like *nagaya*, *gesshuku* originated in the Meiji era and have continuously served as housing for poor, transient, and immigrant populations, especially resident Koreans.⁶

⁵ Now *hisabetsu burakumin* or ‘special status people,’ *burakumin* are a minority group traditionally discriminated against for their participation in taboo industries, like those dealing with dead bodies of humans and animals. Relegated in medieval Japanese hierarchy to the status of ‘non-people,’ they have suffered institutionalised discrimination for centuries which contemporary policies attempt to counteract (Neary 2003: 269-294).

⁶ The contemporary *gesshuku* is advertised to university and in some cases high school students. In terms of structure and amenities, the *gesshuku* is almost identical to the sharehouse, except that boarders in *gesshuku* are not expected to use the cooking facilities). They differ mainly in that sharehouse are intended for (increasingly) older professionals, whose tenure is theoretically long-term, while the tenancy of a student in *gesshuku* is not expected to outlast his career as a student (though it is likely that many poor graduates and non-students make use of *gesshuku*).

Until recently, shared housing was strongly associated with marginalism, if not deviancy. However, in recent years, the numbers of Japanese living in 'non-standard' households (not in nuclear family co-residence) are growing and are predicted to continue growing for the foreseeable future. By 2010, the percentage of single-person households had risen to 32.4 per cent; the National Institute of Population and Social Science Research expects this figure to climb to 37.2 per cent by 2035 (Miichi 2013). Meanwhile, the number of households composed of a nuclear family is down to 27.9 per cent, from 42.1 per cent in 1980.

Since the bursting of the so-called 'bubble economy' that had been fuelled in large part by unsustainable land speculation, the housing market has changed quite drastically and Japan's current property vacancy rate currently exceeds 13 per cent (Yoneyama 2012; MLIT 2013 [Figure 8]). Meanwhile, the dissolution of government programs to subsidise home ownership and structural changes in the labour market have concurrently increased the percentage of individuals in rented accommodation, while the numbers of marriages and births continue to decline (Forrest and Hirayama 2009: 998-1013). According to Ronald and Hirayama,

The housing system in Japan was essentially workable under unparalleled conditions of economic growth and social stability. Over the past decades, however, the housing context has been transformed by a more volatile, uncertain economy and increasing social fragmentation... Since the middle of the 1990s, the system of housing production and consumption has been increasingly deregulated, moving clearly towards a greater emphasis on market mechanisms (Ronald and Hirayama 2006: 3-4).

In other words, the social protections that made the housing boom of the 1970s and 1980s possible have been dismantled along with and in response to changing economic conditions. The result is a fragmented housing market characterised by scarce home ownership opportunities for those excluded from the middle class and full employment. Alternatives to the two-generation *katei* have proliferated, in part due to a changing social environment: increased female workforce participation has meant that the single-income family predicated on women's uncompensated household labour is increasingly the exception rather than the norm. Demographic shifts (specifically the surfeit of available real estate due to the aging and eventual population loss) have made housing in less central areas more economically accessible as supply exceeds demand.

One consequence of these changes is that landowners and local zoning authorities are now amenable to innovative schemes for the reuse of existing infrastructure, including sharehouses. 'Little by little', sharehouse advocate and Osaka University professor Kubota encourages, 'even management companies are coming to see the merits of shared-use property due to the spread of sharing and the insufficiency of renters,' (Kubota 2009: 93).

According to Kubota, the first generation of sharers experienced difficulties in a country where the public mind-set was ill-suited to shared living. The greatest obstacle to the widespread adoption of shared housing was and remains the 'lack of understanding and prejudice of others' (*shūi no murikai to henken*). However,

divorce has become less uncommon, and with the phenomena of late marriage and non-marriage, in the present day when the number of people not forming families is increasing, it is no longer profitable to over-value just the marital connection to the detriment of other relations like friendship (Kubota 2009: 100-101).

Nonetheless, contemporary sharehouse marketing contends against lingering associations of shared living with poverty and social marginalism due to the ascendancy over the 20th century of an ideological domestic paradigm that

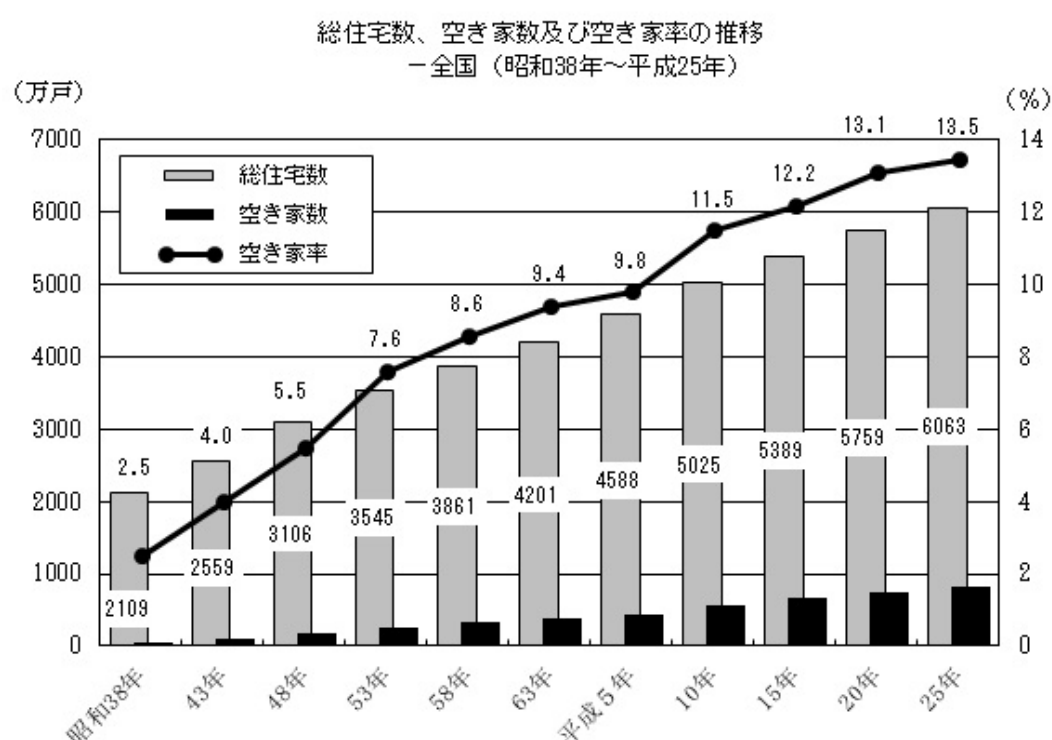


Figure 8. 'Change in Total Number of Residences, Total Residential Vacancies and Vacancy Rate Nationwide, 1953-2013' (*Sou jūtaku sū, akika sū oyobi akika ritsu no suii: zenkoku, Shōwa 38 – Taisho 25*). Grey bar: total number of residential properties (MLIT 2013).

excluded cohabitation with non-kin. In the post-war period, widespread access to home ownership and an increasingly narrow definition of the family led to the ideological equation of family and household. The normative force of the nuclear

family home persists, although, according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, it represented only a minority (27.9 per cent) of households in 2015 (Figure 9). Sharehouses tell us about more than the way young people are reimagining the trajectories of their personal lives; they also demonstrate the changing structure of the Japanese household. The present work focuses on the creativity with which ‘tradition’ is interpreted in contemporary Japan as a response to changing material circumstances, including the restructuring of the home.

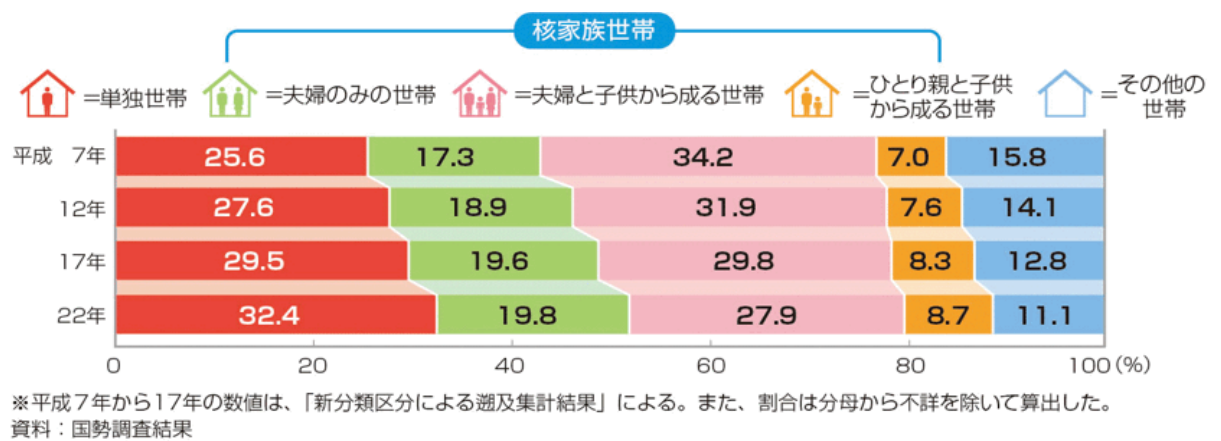


Figure 9. ‘Nuclear Families’ (*Kakukazoku*). Red = Single-person households; green = households composed of a married couple only; pink = households composed of a married couple and child(ren); orange = households composed of a single parent and child; blue = all others), for the years 1995 (upper line); 2000; 2005; and 2007 (bottom line); (MIAC 2015).

Part III: Major themes

Although the number of sharehouses remains small, the gradual adoption of a domestic model so at odds with popular images of the ideal Japanese home invites questions about cultural continuity and social change. The present work responds and contributes to the anthropological literature on the family and

home, cultural understandings of gender and the 'self', cultural continuity and social change, and uncertainty and hope.

Family and Home

In recent years the home has begun to garner attention as a category of anthropological focus, previously having been subsumed under others like kinship or space. Classic anthropological work on the home, most famously Levi-Strauss (1971), emphasised the relationship between the structural features of the house and that of corporate kinship groups rather than observing the ways the home is made and remade in practice. Bourdieu followed in this structuralist tradition in his venerable study of the Kabyle House (1970). Although in subsequent work he famously privileged practice over structure, in this early piece the Kabyle home was the structural expression of categorical oppositions (light/dark; public/private; male/female).

The tendency to privilege structure over practice persists in more recent work on the Japanese home, as I discuss below. In the past two decades, however, anthropologists have begun to investigate the home through the lenses of experience and practice. Janet Carsten and Stephen Hugh-Jones insist that there is

value in seeing houses together with the people who inhabit them as mutually implicated in the process of living. Houses have many aspects. None of these can be understood as static pre-given structures, whether these are of the material kind or mental projections of a structuralist sort (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995: 45).

Heeding this call for a more dynamic approach to the home, Michael Jackson's *At Home in the World* (1995) offers an intimate and empathetic ethnography of the home as experienced by Australia's forcibly itinerant Aboriginal community that remains mindful of the significance of the home's structural attributes. Drawing on Bourdieu's later work, he explains that:

Our habitual patterns of movement in the everyday world are constrained by the parameters of houses, buildings, rooms, and thoroughfares. Ours is a *habitus* of walls and enclosures, of well-marked exits and entrances, paths and roads. This material *habitus* determines a particular sensibility which sees boundaries as a precondition of meaning. The constructed world... predisposes us to make sense of experience by cutting it up and framing it with concepts and categories (Jackson 1995: 85).

The interactions of sharehouse residents within this 'material *habitus*' guide the ethnographic chapters to follow, as the house simultaneously structures residents' activities and is structured by residents' conceptual understandings.

Work on the Japanese home has tended to focus on ideological models of domestic organisation like the *ie* and *katei*, on the one hand; or the structural features of the house on the other (Sugimoto 2010: 156-87; Ozaki 2001: 337-57; Hendry 2013: 23-40). In either case, the Japanese home is depicted as static structure rather than an experiential aspect of human life.⁷ Ozaki's (2001) look at popular house plans from the late nineteenth century, for example, leads her to conclude that the Japanese are more 'family-centred' than the 'home-centred' English because the Japanese conceive of privacy as a division between family

⁷ In the field of conceptual architecture the postwar 'metabolism' and 'post-metabolism' movements were largely theoretical plans for improving human life through the built landscape (see Fawcett 1980).

and non-family and not among family members. However, this already crude distinction (which crystallises categories of inside and outside and does not express the fluidity of lived practices) becomes increasingly problematic in the post-war period, as spaces within the Japanese home became increasingly segregated for individual use.

Observing the home through formal representations like house plans gives one the sense of a stable structure rather than the dynamism of daily practice that intimate and protracted ethnography can provide. The present work benefits from more recent and more ethnographically grounded work in everyday life and material culture studies like the contributors to Miller (2001). Of the essays in that volume, Daniels's look at the realities of living in a Japanese home was especially influential on the present project (Daniels 2001).

In a later piece, (Daniels 2010) Daniels explains that the captivating formal elegance of the idealised Japanese home, with its uncompromising minimalism punctuated by painstakingly crafted details, threatens to distract us from its lived realities. The homes of the families she studied over a decade were cluttered, intimate spaces bearing the same traces of use visible in the Western home. Delving beyond the home as abstract structure, contemporary ethnographers like Daniels are beginning to explore the home as an experiential space, one whose boundaries are fluid and manipulable. As I demonstrate in the chapters to follow, the sharehouse offers an opportunity to reconsider the stability of spatial and social categories in an experimental domestic space. It

provides a case study in domesticity as a set of practices, rather than as pure structure expressing a stable set of spatial categories.

Cultural understandings of the self

Many sharehouse marketing materials entice potential residents with promises of self-knowledge and self-cultivation. These ideas also emerged in interviews with my housemate/informants, who emphasised that the sharehouse represented a departure and liberation from other social spaces (notably the workplace and the home) where the ‘genuine self’ (*hontō no jibun*) is subordinated to the performance of ascribed social roles (see chapter 2 below). These discourses reference received ideas about the Japanese primacy of social harmony over individual expression captured in the binarised concepts of *honne* and *tatemae*.

The putative priority of social identity over one’s true self was a central theme in the so-called ‘discourse of Japaneseness’ (*nihonjinron*) that enjoyed theoretical dominance throughout much of the 20th century. This ‘grand narrative’ of Japanese exceptionalism was dismantled during and since the 1990s (Dale 2012; Befu 2001; Ryang 2004) and the existence of the Japanese ‘self’ has since been confirmed, though it remains ‘ambivalent’ (Ohnuki-Tierney 1990). Nonetheless, the axiomatic subject of post-Cartesian Western popular mythology⁸ remains

⁸ Of course, the ‘Western idea of self’ is greater part ideology than faithful reflection of lived reality (Jackson 1983). Goffman (1959) observed the performativity of self among his American peers in the 1950s, and Judith Butler

incommensurable with Japanese understandings of the self as emerging continuously through relations with others (Kondo 1987; Kondo 1990: 26-48; 104 - 118).

Japanese understandings of the self emphasise 1) intensive socialisation that engenders a sense of the self as ontologically dependent on others, and 2) continuing self-definition through involvement in various groups in which the 'self' is expressed through performances appropriate to those contexts. Japanese autonomy from the Western ideology of ontological stability and consistency means that the situational self adjusts to suit the context of the social situation. Alongside a widespread Japanese belief in a fundamental character type (as expressed, for example, in a preoccupation with blood type) is a belief that one's character is malleable. This intrinsic improvability is understood and undertaken as an on-going process.

In contemporary Japan, new contexts for interaction and, thus, understandings of the self, are proliferating. As I demonstrate in chapters 2 and 3, the concern to 'develop' the self is central to the considerations that lead to living in a sharehouse, but the mechanisms through which the self is to be articulated remain rooted in interaction with others and membership in new types of self-selected groups. My housemates, and those like them who take residence in

famously argued that gender is performative, not essential (2006). Marcel Mauss's seminal essay on the 'self' as a 'category of the human mind' describes contemporary understandings of the self (the *moi*) as of recent vintage. It evolved out of earlier, perhaps more natural/intuitive conceptions of the self as 'role' (*personnage*), that retain more relevance to the way the self is understood outside of the Euro-American context (1985).

sharehouses, are not challenging the relational identity of the self (Bachnik 1992), the definition of the self through membership in groups (Lebra 1976; 2004), nor the hierarchical logic of social interaction (Nakane 1971). Rather, they spontaneously negotiate the boundaries between group and self in spatial and material practices. These claims that living in a sharehouse permits its residents to become more authentically themselves combine imported idioms of 'self-discovery' and personal transformation with older Japanese understandings of self-cultivation through interaction and negotiation with others. I discuss these ideas in greater depth in chapter 2.

Gender and culture

Of course, the avenues available for self-cultivation may differ by gender. According to a National Survey on Household Changes in 2004, 90 per cent of respondents reported their reasons for leaving home as related to some life event, but according to Setsuya Fukuda the life events that provoke home leaving differ between men and women. He explains that 'men have a strong tendency to leave home before marriage for reasons of schooling or employment, while women are much more likely to leave at the time of marriage...' (Fukuda 2009: 4).

Yet this is changing quickly, as we have seen reflected in sharehouse residency figures. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications' statistical analysis of non-nuclear households, 'it is thought that, in accordance

with the advancement of women in society, the increase in female labour participation, has particularly brought about a change in [women's] view of marriage, including a desire for greater independence' (Nishi 2012: 2, accessed 15 June 2016). According to the results of the National Research Institute for Social Welfare and Population Issues 14th Survey on Attitudes to Childbirth, the rate of response that 'I won't marry during my lifetime' increased from 5.4 per cent to 9.4 per cent amongst men, and from 5.0 per cent to 6.8 per cent amongst women, between 2002 and 2010 (*Kokuritsu shakai shohō/jinkō mondai kenkyūsho: Dai14kai shūshō dōkōkijon chōsa*, in Nishi 2012: 2). This has led to an increase in what the Ministry terms 'non-relative male/female co-residences' (*hishinzoku no danjo dōkyo*) and includes any lifestyle that does not have the family as its fulcrum.

Despite recent changes, Japan consistently fares poorly in international comparisons of gender equality when based on workplace participation. In 2015, it was ranked 101 out of 145 countries surveyed in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report, lowest amongst the OECD except South Korea (World Economic Forum 2015). Indeed, prohibited access for women to the public world of work has been a feature of mainstream Japanese society until recently, but this is changing: according to the national census, workforce participation amongst women aged 25-39 has increased from 63.2 to 71.5 per cent between 2000 and 2010 (Nishi 2012: 1).

However, the focus on female workforce participation ignores the authority of women in other spheres. In the local community, women's labour is highly visible and totemic of the household; men, who leave early in the morning and return on the last train, are the ones whose movements are circumscribed and unseen. As a result, female workplace participation is an important, but not the only, measure of gender equality. Western media and scholarship often ignores Japanese women's agency within the structures that define their lives. According to Takie Sugiyama Lebra, 'the wife's complete control of the domestic realm apart from structural content might lead one to conclude that women are more powerful than men in Japan, or that Japanese women enjoy more power than American women' (Lebra 1984:302). Indeed, Japan fares better in more holistic comparisons, like the United Nations Development Program's Gender Inequality Index, which considers reproductive rights and 'empowerment' alongside participation in the labour market. The Index ranked Japan 17th out of 51 countries with 'very high human development' in 2016 (United Nations Development Program 2016).

Historically, Japanese women have exercised resistance against cultural structures and ideologies in a variety of ways, amongst them their power as consumers. The majority of housemates at Cheznew were women, mirroring the national sharehouse marketing where, according to Hitsuji Real Estate (Hitsuji 2013), women comprise approximately 70% of sharehouse residents in Japan. Not coincidentally, the women in the house were mostly underemployed and aspiring to careers in the culture industries, the demographic most affected by

changes in the job market. For these women, the sharehouse lifestyle became a commodity, and its consumption a form of resistance – an association encouraged by sharehouse marketing (as I discuss at some length in Chapters 2 and 3). The present work considers the sharehouse as Japanese women resisting and disrupting the status quo at the intersection of two realms where they have historically exerted this discreet power: as consumers and in the home.

Youth and social change

Social change is often driven by those ill-served by the status quo, including young people. This is still the case where there is limited widespread political coordination, or even strong political awareness (Mathews and White 2004a: 1-12; 2004b: 189-200). The present research aims, among other things, to describe one process of social change emerging organically through the adoption of new consumption practices rather than a coordinated and politicised opposition.

The typically unilinear ‘Japanese lifecourse’ explored by social scientists (Plath and Coleman, eds. 1983) was recently described to me as *hōwasuru* (‘saturated’) by a salaryman who resigned from his executive position at a communications giant. This ‘saturation’, he explained, indicates a lack of flexibility and latitude with regard to one’s own lifestyle choices. Sociologists Kariya and Rosenbaum (Kariya and Rosenbaum 2003) characterise the social context in which young people make lifecourse decisions as one of ‘stratified incentives’ that compel

them to embark on and follow more linear educational and professional trajectories, beginning at younger ages, than their Western (American) counterparts. Yet, if individuals like my salaryman friend and my housemates at Cheznew are making unorthodox life decisions, perhaps we should consider the dynamism and adaptability of Japanese culture alongside its 'saturation' and conservatism. To some extent, of course, this openness is motivated by the breakdown of institutions that made more traditional life trajectories possible, including government housing loans and lifetime employment (Hirayama 2006). Absent the incentives of security and stability, young Japanese may be less complacent in their acceptance of a circumscribed realm of choices.

Japanese society is not a unique case; in the context of late capitalism and neoliberalism, young people everywhere share the experience of precarity. Spain and Italy share Japan's fiscal chaos, a rapidly aging society due to a drastically low birth rate, and strong cultural traditions of cohabitation with family. Teresio Poggio (Poggio 2013: 42-62) demonstrates that Italian youth experience almost identical obstacles to home ownership as those I discussed in relation to the dismantling of state institutions like the GHLC in Japan, above. These processes are not limited to societies recognised as suffering economic crisis, however; a contribution in the same volume by Mats Lieberg (2013: 107-121) discusses a similar process of exclusion in Sweden, often held up as a utopia of relative social equality. Young people in these various contexts (to which I would add the United States and Great Britain) share the experiences of uncertainty wrought by rapidly changing socioeconomic conditions, but also the

existential uncertainty of youth itself. Until recently, anthropology has not recognised this liminal period of human development between childhood and full adulthood⁹.

Some of the most useful recent theoretical work on youth culture emerges out of Africa and the Middle East. Alcinda Honwana's work on African youth elaborates the useful concept of 'waithood' to describe the 'prolonged and uncertain stage between childhood and adulthood that is characterised by [an] inability to enter the labour market and attain the social markers of adulthood' (Honwana 2012: 19). The experiences of my young underemployed housemates, and many young Japanese (40.3 per cent of whom, according to a Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare 'Survey of Employment of Young People', are financially dependent on their parents) clearly fit Honwana's model (MHLW 2013: 15). Indeed, the problems she describes as facing young Africans – inadequate job training and limited opportunities thwarting their professional aspirations – are strikingly similar to those experienced by my informants, as I describe in Chapter 2 below:

Waithood constitutes a twilight zone, or an interstitial space, where boundaries ... are often blurred. It is precisely at this juncture that young people are forced to make choices... Rather than being a short interruption in their transition to adulthood, waithood is gradually replacing adulthood itself (Honwana 2013).

⁹ The culture studies tradition in the 1970s, like Paul Willis's (1977) *Learning to Labour*; Hall and Jefferson's (2006[1976]) *Resistance Through Rituals* and Dick Hebdige's (1979) *Subculture: the Meaning of Style* and (1988) *Hiding In the Light: Images and Things* looked specifically at marginalised working-class youth. This tradition of associating 'youth culture' with 'subculture' continues through to Maira and Soep, and Lipsitz, eds., (2004). Yet this literature, with its politically informed focus on specific cultural subgroups, does not describe the reality of widespread uncertainty and marginalism of youth in ostensibly affluent countries like Japan.

This paradigm for conceptualising the experiences of youth might profitably be expanded to inform our understanding of this important category of human experience, particularly as this period of ‘waiting’ seems, for many, indefinitely prolonged and adult stability deferred. As I describe in the chapters that follow, my informants were mostly in this prolonged stage of ‘youth’; not only in terms of their numerical age but sociologically, as not [yet] settled. My Japanese informants are subject to the same challenges and uncertainties as their distant contemporaries, and the sharehouse represents one regional response to the widespread insecurities of late capitalism.

Hope in uncertainty

Sharehouse marketing rhetoric repeats ideas about hope in a context of widespread uncertainty – hopes for individual emancipation and hopes for the revitalisation of Japanese society. My own housemates’ experiences in the labour market, and the relationship between these frustrations and their decision to leave the family home, are outlined in Chapter 2; Chapter 7 discusses the limitations of the sharehouse to effect the social change it coyly promises through tropes like ‘the new village society’.

In a 2003 article, Vincent Crapanzano draws on the work of philosopher Ernst Bloch to distinguish between active hope, as a call to action, and the more common passive hope that acts as a bromide. ‘Although Bloch and most

theologians who discuss it stress the optimism of hope', he admonishes, 'hope can in fact lead to paralysis. One can be so caught up in one's hope that one does nothing to prepare for its fulfillment" (Crapanzano 2003:18). I suggest in the chapters that follow that moving into a sharehouse is an act of hope available to young people whose access to traditional lifecourse opportunities has been compromised by recent structural changes; or, in the case of young women, for whom those changes have opened up new opportunities. Many of my housemates saw life in the sharehouse as an assertion of agentive hope and anticipated positive change in their circumstances and themselves. For these housemates, the independence offered by the sharehouse would make them more self-sufficient and socially dynamic, leading to their personal and professional success. In many cases, however, this act took the place of more direct forms of self-improvement and career advancement.

In times of uncertainty, hope functions as a way of imagining a more salubrious and stable future. As I discuss in the final chapter, sharehouse discourses appeal to a more communitarian sense of hope by presenting sharehouse living as a response to various types of 'precarity' (Allison 2014) wrought by social and economic forces– the vulnerability of isolated elders; the plight of single mothers; and the trials of the contemporary worker, whose labour conditions are subject to frequent change. However, this rhetoric of hope through the 'restoration of traditional bonds' does not reflect the realities of the sharehouse in practice, which are driven by the neoliberal rhetoric of individual freedom and consumer choice rather than a commitment to the security and survival of others.

IV. The structure of the thesis

The present work investigates the process of defining social and spatial boundaries in an experimental *milieu*. In addition to conflicts between individuals, it explores the discrepancies between discourse and material practices. More specifically, it looks at the way one category of actor, the sharehouse resident, negotiates social change through personal choice and private behaviours. What of the past is retained, and what is lost or purposefully jettisoned? To what extent are the imaginings of independence and self-development realised, and to what extent are existing structural ideologies re-enacted? These are lessons about processes of change and continuity that relate to more universal experiences: the extension of youth into adulthood, economic instability, and the pursuit of new forms of personal emancipation.

The thesis considers the tension between the promises and expectations about the sharehouse, on the one hand; and social and material realities within the sharehouse, on the other. In each chapter, sharehouse marketing rhetoric and are counterpoised against practices I observed in the house. Residents and marketers imagine the sharehouse as a utopian 'third space' set aside for the pursuit of individualistic projects, liberated from cultural expectations associated with the workplace and the family home. In practice, however, cultural norms about the priority of the group and appropriate role performance within it exert a stubborn influence on the way interactions are structured in this

space. In their material practices, housemates reintroduced certain norms - in particular, a hierarchised logic of social interaction and a strict distinction between public and private - but discarded others (importantly, the gendered division of labour within the home).

The following six chapters progress from housemates' desires and expectations, to social relationships within the home (often mediated through material practices) and, finally, to the interaction of the sharehouse with a changing Japan. Chapters 2 and 3 share the theme of 'longing' (*akogare*) – in Chapter 2, for success in one's career, and in Chapter 3, for the experience of an 'international lifestyle' – that sharehouse marketing promises. The theme uniting Chapters 4 and 5 is the question of how to conceptualise the space within the house in relation to existing categories of public (*soto*) and the privacy of the home (*uchi*). Chapters 6 and 7 consider the implications – real or imagined - of the sharehouse for a changing Japan, through the theme of community.

Chapter 2 explores the experiences of my housemates, who included several would-be career women in insecure and often part-time work. Content analysis of the 'advertorial' discourses produced by sharehouse advocates and the sharehouse marketing industry to attract dissatisfied young women exposed a remarkable consistency in the use of this language of self-cultivation through organic daily interaction with others of different backgrounds and values. Often, the sharehouse is opposed to the other areas of daily life – the workplace, school, and home – where their behavioural repertoires are constrained by their

(typically subordinate) position in ascribed hierarchies. I discuss the experiences of two of my female housemates, Haruko and Yume, in the house and in the labour market. Haruko, who foundered at the lower margins of the retail fashion industry, found support and solace in the house; while Yume, the one professionally successful female housemate found herself socially isolated. The chapter concludes by linking the success of the sharehouse to its promise of providing a sense of identity to those, like Haruko, who fail to find themselves elsewhere. In this way, the 'sharehouse boom' is very much a function of economic and sociological factors, including – as I discuss – neoliberal education reforms, flexibilisation of labour, and delayed marriage.

I describe in Chapter 3, the sharehouse retains its associations with foreign people and lifestyles. This is the source of much of its glamour, but also feeds its stigma as being inappropriate for Japan. Sharehouse marketers delicately navigate these waters with depictions of the sharehouse as 'study abroad in Japan', drawing on the success of similar campaigns by English conversation schools and the government policy of internationalisation that effectively commoditised interaction with foreigners through 'international exchange' (*kokusai kōryū*). Marketing materials that emphasise the 'foreignness' of the sharehouse – often through the promise of interacting with foreign housemates – appeal to the desires (of young women in particular) for travel, self-cultivation, and erotic exploration.

Despite the frequent marketing references to the sharehouse as ‘study abroad at home’ (*ienaka ryūgaku*), however, most owners and managers of sharehouses exercise discrimination in some form or another and carefully manage the number and type of foreigners within their properties, with a clear preference for Western men. Chapter 3 traces the trajectory of our single Western male housemate, Alan, and the way the ‘international exchange’ at Cheznew proved thornier than expected in practice.

Public and private (*soto* and *uchi*) are salient cultural categories in Japan. Chapters Four and Five describe different strategies for the negotiation of this important boundary in an experimental space that does not conform to conventional demarcations – in particular, in the fact that it brings unrelated strangers, who should be *soto*, within the literal *uchi* of the home.

Chapter 4 discusses the strategies Cheznew housemates and management used to uphold the distinction between the privateness of the bedroom and what I have called the ‘public-in-private’ of the shared spaces in the house. These included a proliferation of hand-lettered, often illustrated, instructional posters evocative of those that clutter public spaces in Japan (most famously the Tokyo underground). In following the stylistic and linguistic conventions of these recognisably public notices, the residents who created these posters were conveying more than instruction on household hygiene. They also included the proscription against the placement of private possessions in shared spaces and the assiduous refusal of (most) female housemates to appear in front of housemates without makeup or in ‘roomwear’. Through these material

practices, they were also communicating a theory of space in which all but the private bedroom was essentially a public-in-private, contradicting the straightforward conceptual equivalence of privacy and the home. Additionally, they were asserting claims about their social roles within the house, in the absence of the relational roles that would have defined them within the workplace or family home.

Chapter 5 discusses the permissibility of sex and romance in the sharehouse. It discusses two romantic couplings that took place at Cheznew – one, between teenagers Sachiko and Kiyoshi, which was tolerated because they took such care to avoid posing a nuisance (*meiwaku*) to the others – and another, between Haruko and Sotarō – which was tolerated because housemates were involved in the courtship process. It appears the offensiveness of romantic entanglements between residents can be circumvented by making dating into a group project, and provided that the couple marries and ‘graduates’ to a more traditional domestic arrangement. Housemates’ avoidance and conditional acceptance of conjugal intimacy betrayed a reluctance to defy embedded cultural understandings of the home as a place of collaborative production, and not as a ludic space for play. The remainder of the chapter discusses the way these understandings are imprinted on the urban landscape in the form of love hotels, and the way the ritualised ‘sex talk’ – as distinct from sober everyday conversations, which avoided salacious themes – provided a discursive equivalent to the love hotel as a space for play.

Chapters 6 and 7 relate social relations within sharehouse to changes in Japanese society, and ask what (if any) effect sharehouses can be expected to have on its changing institutions. Chapter 6 begins by discussing the shifting regimes of garbage disposal during my tenure at Cheznew, and how these regimes reconfigured the relationships amongst residents. The significance of garbage disposal practices does not end there, however; garbage has a special significance in Japanese communities because compliance with local garbage disposal and recycling protocols – often complicated and inconvenient – not only signals a concern for hygiene and ecology but, more importantly, participation in neighbourhood regimes of collective self-management. The chaos resulting from Cheznew’s failure to properly dispose of garbage symbolised the challenges of integrating the sharehouse’s unorthodox composition into the existing social fabric of a traditional community. The remainder of the chapter discusses the challenges and possibilities for sharehouses to integrate into local communities, like Minami, that lie outside of urban centres and are highly vulnerable to population loss.

Chapter 7 considers some of the more radical and relevant possibilities for the sharehouse to respond to gripping problems like the social isolation and vulnerability of older people in the aging society and the steadily declining birth rate. It discusses the uses of the ‘village society’ in sharehouse marketing rhetoric to suggest that the sharehouse can help restore traditional ‘social bonds’ (*kizuna*) previously associated with family, workplace, or regional community. While recent years have seen the emergence of sharehouses that welcome

elderly residents or single mothers, it is not an accident that the majority of sharehouse residents are young, urban, and independent. The chapter discusses the experiences of two older female residents, Honda and Fumiko, at Cheznew, which demonstrate that the inclusionary rhetoric of the 'village society' obscures the fundamentally neoliberal logic of the sharehouse.

The Conclusion (Chapter 8) summarises and synthesises the findings in the previous six chapters and lists the contributions of the present work to existing literature. It discusses the limitations of the present work, and the directions future research on sharehouses might take.

憧れ

Chapter 2: Aspiration

I chose to call it 'cocoon' because it is a safe place for women to stay... and so by the time they leave they become beautiful and they can fly, like a butterfly

–excerpt from an interview with Daisuke Watanabe, owner of
'Cocoon' female-only sharehouses

As an alternative to the family home, the sharehouse presents an experimental space to construct new social identities. At Cheznew, most female housemates were what sociologist Arakawa Yū describes as the 'dream-chasers' (*yumeoigata*), employed at the lower end of the service sector while dreaming of (and, nominally, pursuing) a career in the culture industries. This chapter discusses the way sharehouses are marketed as a space that supports professional success, a promise contradicted by the realities of my housemates' stagnant working lives.

Welcome to Cheznew

Cheznew was virtually empty during the first several weeks of my arrival, which roughly coincided with its rebirth from a workers' dormitory to a sharehouse. The management company devoted considerable revenue to 'resident recruitment' during the month of March, and Ms. Umeda would show up nearly each day to give a tour to a prospective housemate, reciting the same enticements she had on my first day. The campaign was successful, and by the third week of the month we were notified that another eight housemates would be joining us soon. The existing

housemates now numbered six (including Yamada, the young businessman who taught me to use the rice cooker, three Hong Kong natives on working visas, and myself); of these original six, only Yamada and I would last more than a month. As the end of the month approached, we began speculating about our future housemates as we gathered in the living room in the evenings; in just several weeks we had adjusted to each other and contemplated the arrival of so many newcomers with excitement and some trepidation.

By virtue of his friendship with the owner Kobayashi, Yamada was the only one who had any knowledge about the people with whom we'd be sharing our new home. He teasingly confided precious data to us a bit at a time, to maintain both our curiosity and his authority as the bearer of this privileged information. After I jokingly expressed a preference for male housemates because they were quieter and easier to live with, he gleefully disclosed that the new housemates included 'lots of women', and, raising an eyebrow mischievously, specified 'lots of *young, cute* girls'.

At the end of March, Yamada began to mention a 'welcome party' for the new arrivals, to be held on the eve of their official April 1st move-in date. I understood this to be his own suggestion to welcome our new housemates, but it became clear that Yamada's planning had been at the behest of the management company when, during the party, they sent representatives to

take photos for future marketing. Nonetheless, new and old housemates cooperated in cleaning, decorating, and food preparation.

Yamada had not been misled: at the end of March, rooms in the house began to fill up with two men and many more women, most of whom were young and attractive. The two men were Matsuhiko, the future House Manager and aspiring photographer; and Kenichi, the conscientious software engineer. The women included one young Korean woman in her twenties who left the house after one month to find a new job in Tokyo, and five Japanese women: Sachiko, Akiko, Akari, Haruko, and Yume.

Socialising began in earnest once our new landlords, satisfied with their photos raising toasts and introductions, left us to ourselves. 30-year-old Kenichi, who earned a higher income than the rest of us as a software engineer, had brought a selection of regional *sake* bottles and attempted a *sake* tasting demonstration for us. He was drowned out by the din of small talk that predictably became more boisterous as the night wore on. 35-year-old cameraman Matsuhiko was at the centre of giggling attention from the 'cute young' women Yamada was clearly delighted had arrived as promised.

When Matsuhiko occasionally excused himself to roll and smoke a cigarette behind the kitchen, my new female housemates and I were left to make small talk. Nobody volunteered very much about herself on this first night, in part because we were all more interested in Matsuhiko's tales of

overseas adventure. I did manage to ask the small circle of women why they had come to a sharehouse in Naniwa. Everyone but Akari, who worked in a special 'international exchange' programme through the local Y.M.C.A., planned to commute to work in Osaka. Yume worked as a web designer; Akiko as a customer service representative in a call centre; and Sachiko as a retail store department manager. Haruko, dressed in an avant garde tee shirt and ostentatious jewellery, beamed and said, 'I'm in *fashion*'.

Haruko

At age 25, Haruko was elegant and poised, slightly prim. When in the subsequent months our parties became raucous, or when our after-dinner conversation turned salacious, she would quietly retreat to her room with a look of embarrassment. Despite her incongruously ostentatious (though never immodest) fashion sense, with her classical features and her slim, graceful figure she always struck me as the model of Japanese femininity.

Haruko was the older of two daughters from nearby Nara. Raised in an upscale residential area of the city, she described a somewhat charmed childhood. After studying fashion at a prefectural college, her parents had indulged her wish to spend several months studying English in London, as she regularly reminded us.¹⁰

¹⁰ Haruko was one of three housemates, including Kenichi and Akari, who had had the luxury of studying overseas for some short period. I discuss the cultural cachet of English language acquisition in Chapter 3.

Housemates spoke very little about their working lives in the house, which they treated as a respite from the realities of their daily drudges; we did not know that housemate Chie, who moved into the house in July, worked at a call centre until she quit precipitously and one of her former co-workers came to the house looking for her and left his *meishi* for her, imploring us to have her call him.

Haruko, however, volunteered that she worked in a boutique in the city, selling expensive casual fashion to tourists and fashionable young Osakans. I had never heard of her shop, but the several housemates claimed they knew of it gasped approvingly that it was cool (*shibui*) and very stylish (*oshare*). Despite her low rank as a retail salesperson, her affiliation with this brand conferred a *niche* form of cultural capital based on her participation in, and connoisseurship of, contemporary Japanese fashion. To my astonishment, by the time she moved into the sharehouse, she had worked in the same boutique for three years without promotion. In the first six months I knew her, she maintained that this was her entryway into a career in fashion, although she was ambiguous about the way this would happen.

Unlike most of the other housemates, except 35-year-old Matsuhiko and 28-year-old Yume, Haruko had been living away from her parents' house for two years before she arrived at Cheznew. She had been living with another young woman, a co-worker at the boutique, in a small flat in a cheaper neighbourhood in the city. Wanting to save money, her friend had decided to move back in with her family, and Haruko explained to me that she thought living alone would not only

be expensive, but lonely. 'I started reading about sharehouses and they seemed so cool and fashionable. I thought, it would be so interesting to live with different kinds of people – I meet lots of people at the store, especially foreigners, but there's no real connection with them because they're only there for a short time'.

My own friendship with Haruko was hampered by our divergent personalities, but we enjoyed moments of *rapproche* when she would confide more personal details about her life. Like my other housemates, however, she did not readily disclose personal difficulties in the house. In general, housemates preferred to leave the world at the door, but she was especially taciturn about her challenges and disappointments. Rather than discussing grim realities, when asked about her employment, she quickly shifted the conversation to her future aspirations 'I always loved art, and fashion is a kind of art. So my dream is really to design, maybe to make, beautiful clothes. I've always wanted to live overseas, maybe San Francisco... I want to have children, so maybe I could open my own boutique there. That's why I'm working at the boutique, it's good experience for my own business'.

Given Haruko's reticence about her personal struggles and her assertions that fashion was her *akogare* (aspiration), she surprised me with the sudden news that she was planning to quit working at the boutique. It was late in August and we stood in the kitchen alone together drinking coffee. Haruko was looking uncharacteristically matronly in a wide floppy hat, baggy jeans and gardening

gloves, in stark contrast to the flamboyant outfits and jewellery she wore to work and often around the house. From the beginning of the summer, Haruko had been spending her days off clearing the neglected strip of land behind the house to plant a small organic vegetable garden, coaxing what she could out of the tiny plot of reclaimed land that separated our lot from the neighbouring *manshon*. The garden was to have been a cooperative project with Yamada, who paid for the gardening supplies but never aided her sowing and weeding.

‘...because it’s not leading anywhere’, she explained with unusual candour, searching the bottom of her mug and avoiding my eyes. ‘I keep doing the same thing. I still love fashion, but I want to do something to help people’. Over the following weeks, after she had given her notice at work, she announced her shifting career goals to me, which included therapeutic massage; traditional medicine; or ‘something with organic vegetables’. Fortuitously, Yamada was in the process of establishing a new business concern, a small import/export business in Osaka city, just as her notice at the boutique neared its end and she began facing the prospect of unemployment and moving back to her parents’ home. Yamada offered her a job in his tiny office as his secretary, a position she accepted and held for approximately six months, until he insisted she accompany him on a business trip and booked a single room for them to share. The following week, he discovered her revising her resume during work hours and angrily terminated her.

Haruko returned to her career in retail. When I asked her about her *akogare* in summer of 2014, she claimed to have lost her interest in farming and distributing organic vegetables but still thinks about studying massage therapy or aroma therapy, ‘something to help people.’ Haruko met her husband, Sotarō, in the sharehouse, and has quit working. As of this writing, she is a full-time housewife, caring for their child in the small flat they now share.

Yume the *yosei*

28-year-old Yume was from the small city of Miyazaki in western Japan, a regional identification she occasionally deployed when she referred to herself as a bumpkin (*inakamono*). Despite this self-deprecation, she was more worldly than many of our housemates; for one thing, she was older than most of the other women, the majority of whom were in their mid-20s. Like Haruko, Yume had lived alone sharehouse in an apartment before she came to Cheznew. During a tour of her old neighbourhood in Den-Den Town, Osaka’s equivalent to Akihabara Tokyo’s electronics mecca, Yume wistfully pointed out her favourite electronics stores and maid cafes, chagrined by my inability to match her enthusiasm when she bragged that she could watch cosplay parades from her bedroom window. She missed Den-Den Town, but claimed it was a waste to rent a flat on her own as she was so rarely at home. Plus, she wanted to meet new people, outside of her office, where she spent an average of ten hours a day: ‘I like privacy, but it’s sad coming home to an empty apartment, especially late at

night. I am always at work in the evenings, doing overtime, and so it is hard for me to make time for people. It gets sort of *lonely*, so...'

Like many of the male housemates, but in contrast with the female housemates like Haruko, Yume was in secure and professional employment. She is a web designer, a role she enjoys and excels at. She was the only non-administrative female employee in her office, and her boss entrusted her with numerous side projects of his, including a smartphone application he innovated independently. Yume herself moonlighted with various side projects, designing logos and websites for small businesses, including many bars and restaurants she would take me to visit. She glowed when her clients lauded her work to me, gave us extra dishes to try, and generally expressed their gratitude for her strong work.

Yume had never studied English but had achieved a surprising level of technical and colloquial English by reading the materials accompanying her various Apple purchases, and by watching American television. Like many of the women in the sharehouse, Yume expressed a longing to live overseas in America, if only for a short time, because she admired 'retro' American advertising design and modelled her own style on its bold, contrasting colours. Kelloggs cereal boxes were her special obsession, especially the 'Tony the Tiger' character who adorns boxes of Frosted Flakes.

Unlike the other female housemates, Yume flouted conventional gender roles. She was wholly uninterested in maintaining a tidy room or the 'soft, cute'

appearance the others worked so hard to maintain. Her interest in romance was at that time limited to casual encounters that she typically initiated. She admitted that she could not cook, which isolated her from a central conduit for socialisation in the house: Yume was at the margins of the core social group that began after the first influx of new housemates to coalesce each night after work in the kitchen and living room.

Yume was not wholly disengaged, but she wanted to control the terms of her engagement with other members of the house. When Sachiko's birthday arrived in early April, Sachiko, Yume, and I decided to bake a strawberry cake together and headed out to the grocery store for ingredients and candles. They were appalled to discover that I shopped at the local discount supermarket *Supa Tama De* rather than the tonier supermarket chain, where prepared foods were steeply discounted at the end of the business day to prevent waste. Together we cruised the aisles for baking supplies and treats. It was still early days in the house, so we had not accumulated a supply of dry goods to share; this would happen later, and would lead to conflicts over the use of kitchen space. Yume laughed uproariously when I unwittingly added funeral candles to our basket for Sachiko's cake, and she gave me the first of the countless sympathetic but stern reprimands she would issue during our time in the house together.

Yume filled her own basket with junk foods to keep in her room, explaining that because of her workload she seldom had time to cook for herself. In any case, she added in a self-deprecating tone, she wasn't a very good at 'woman things'.

Sachiko, who was very good at ‘woman things’, from transformational makeup application to the preparation of intricate *bentō*, cooked an elaborately structured meal every evening for herself and her boyfriend, Kiyoshi, who had recently moved into the house. Sachiko frowned that Yume’s diet was so poor and her lifestyle both rigorous and lonely (*kibishikute sabishii*). She suggested that she could make an extra portion of dinner each night to set aside for Yume, who eagerly accepted and agreed to contribute to the cost of groceries.

Thus, early in their stay at Cheznew time-rich and money-poor Sachiko and busy, high-earning Yume negotiated an arrangement in which Yume subsidised the cost of groceries and Sachiko prepared an extra portion of whatever she made for her boyfriend Kiyoshi and herself. Sachiko usually set it aside in the otherwise nearly barren half-shelf allotted to Yume in the communal refrigerator. Yume, a heavy user of social media, communicated with Sachiko about what she was preparing and often would post status updates and photos publicly thanking her or expressing her excitement over a particular meal. These charming exchanges made clear the symbiotic nature of this arrangement; it fulfilled one of the promises of sharehouse living that was not visibly at work elsewhere, the pooling of resources and cooperative conservation.¹¹ Sadly, their arrangement

¹¹ This arrangement also highlights the extent to which the social order in Japan is predicated on uncompensated female domestic labour. The salaryman requires not only an OL’s support in the office, but the inputs of labour by a ‘professional housewife’ (*senmon shufu*) at home. As more women like Yume begin to enter the professional workforce (and as more young Japanese postpone or refuse marriage) alternative solutions to the basic problems of food provisioning and preparation are necessary. Although this potential was not realised in practice except by Yume and Sachiko, the prospect of resource- and

came to an end when Sachiko returned to Saitama at the end of the summer, by which time Yume had already become alienated from the rest of the house.

Yume, with her boyish fashion sense, her fear of the kitchen, her ironic sense of humour, and her sense of independence, did not fit in with the other female housemates and slightly intimidated some of the male housemates. For these reasons, and simply because she was so rarely present, she was from the start at the margins of the house's tightening social circle. There was an additional factor at work, however: in the last week of April, only a month into Yume's tenancy, Yamada invited me for a drink and segued quickly, as usual, from small-talk to gossip. When we reached the subject of Yume, he said with a meaningful look, 'she's not a good person. I don't trust her. Don't become friends with her; I can tell, she's not trustworthy'. I was already accustomed to Yamada's opinions and, taking this with a grain of salt, continued to spend time with her. Several days later, in fact, Yume approached me and in whispers asked if we could speak privately about a personal matter. We went to the disused women-only restroom and she locked the door before confiding that she had made a small cash loan to Yamada of 20,000 yen (approximately 107 GBP) a week earlier, which he had not repaid despite her repeated attempts to contact him. I nervously suggested that Yamada was not accustomed to women pestering him and that I was certain he was both embarrassed and surprised by her audacity in

labour-sharing promised by the 'sharehouse lifestyle' serves as an enticement and a possibility that might be exploited to greater effect as sharing becomes more intensive and mainstream.

demanding her money back. Yamada quietly and angrily repaid Yume the following week, but the damage had been done to their relationship. Yamada, who exercised considerable influence over public attitudes in the house, continued his successful campaign against Yume.

Over time, Yume increasingly avoided the common spaces, even at the end of her protracted working day. Like the other Japanese housemates, Yume never allowed anyone into her room, but she disclosed to me that she had a little refrigerator for drinks and snacks. Her refrigerator was not only a convenience. It gave her some additional privacy and longed-for distance from the rest of us, each of us bumping elbows as we crammed what we could into our allotted half shelf in the shared refrigerators downstairs. This little refrigerator was both a material expression of her independence, and her alienation from the culture of the sharehouse.

Yume gradually disappeared from the common areas and laughingly referred to herself in conversations with me, over drinks or lunch outside the house, as the sharehouse *yosei* (fairy). By October, she was inconsolable. At a fancy traditional restaurant she insisted on taking me (and, to my embarrassment, treating me to dinner) she reflected on her growing claustrophobia and the respite her room provided: 'I try not to go home early anymore, and when I'm there I just want to be alone in my room. [The other housemates] have to do everything together, and I'm never invited. Yamada has made them hate me, so I

just work overtime as much as I can. When I'm there I'm a *yosei*; I'm there but they can't see or hear me'.

Unlike many of the other female housemates, including Haruko, Yume had not entered the sharehouse to fill a void left by professional or social disappointments; her working and social lives gave her satisfaction and pleasure. But, for this reason, she was not driven to engage as fully in the house's social environment as the others, and came to feel excluded. Her lifestyle, which we jokingly compared to that of a *sararīman*, and her androgynous self-presentation were obstacles to her acceptance by the others, especially the other women. Despite its theoretical openness to experimentation in social identity, in our sharehouse the appropriate performance of conventional gender and sexuality exerted a powerful influence on a woman's social success or failure. Most damningly, however, by demanding Yamada return her money as promised, she embarrassed and alienated an older male housemate and *pseudo-patriarch*, who exacted revenge by poisoning her already vulnerable relationships. She continued to live in the sharehouse for nearly a year after I left, but moved out in late 2013 to a new flat with a female friend. She began dating a practitioner of natural medicine she consulted for depression; in late 2015, she went into business for herself. She does not regret leaving the house.

Aspiration in the sharehouse

There were a number of reasons Haruko enjoyed popularity and Yume did not, but one important difference between the two was their level of professional accomplishment. As I have explained, Yume was unique amongst the female housemates in having built a successful career. Male housemates, who tended to be high-earning and high-achieving, typically worked longer hours and were present less frequently in the house; because female housemates tended to work fewer hours in more precarious employment, they were more frequently present in the house. Thus, to a significant extent, life at Cheznew manifested the conventional association of women with the home and men with the workplace. Yume's professional success and absence from the home (and in particular the kitchen) subverted the structure of gender roles in the house.

Nonetheless, the other female housemates expressly rejected the idea of leaving the workforce, despite foundering in work roles that were mostly unrelated to their career interests. Like Haruko, who described herself as being 'in fashion' without discussing the realities of her low-paying retail job, their identities within the house were linked to their professional aspirations rather than their daily realities. It did not matter that Haruko's position in the boutique offered little hope of promotion and was extremely unlikely to lead to a job in fashion design; at Cheznew, she was Haruko, who liked fashion and organic vegetables. Sachiko, who had been to an art school, dreamed of being an illustrator, and this was the point she and others accentuated about her, not her retail job at 'Loft.'

Hina dreamed of working overseas but, realising that opportunities were limited for a Japanese monoglot, she worked at the 7-11 convenience store by the next train station. In the house, however, she was Hina, the future foreign journalist. And Chie, who was known in the house for her artsy photos of urban decay, rarely mentioned her work at the call centre; she was 'Chie the photographer'. Their aspiration took the place of achievement as the primary marker of their identity. This was not the case for any of the male housemates except Matsuhiko, whose part-time job as a child photographer at a swimming school was secondary to his fanciful identity as an art photographer. His erratic part-time work schedule meant that of the men he was the most frequently present at the house, which contributed to his promotion in early September to House Manager.

Women as non-paradigmatic labour

According to Anne Allison, economic restructuring and the fracturing of the job market has eroded the access to a comfortable, 'ordinary lifestyle' for young people of both genders:

Those in a position to have what once constituted the social contract of postwar Japan—hard work today tied to marriage, home, and progressive prosperity for children tomorrow—tend to be limited to those with regular employment. What was such an 'ordinary lifestyle' (*hitonami no seikatsu*) now has become a privilege of a diminishing minority... (2013: 33).

The effects of this shift affect men and women differently, however, because women's participation in the Japanese labour market has never been afforded the same importance or security as men's. 'Long before there were *freeters*,

NEETs, and *purekariāto*¹², Inoue Miyako explains, ‘there were “women” (2013: 197). What Inoue pithily references here is that women’s labour has long been viewed as ancillary and supplementary to male labour, dependent on fluctuations in the labour market and secondary to the needs of the family. As a result, women’s labour participation tended to be in less skilled and less stable positions. As Allison explains,

Stuck at a low pay level, irregular workers are often unprotected at the workplace... easily replaced and fired, their rights are minimal at best. This is particularly true for female workers, who experience the worst gendered wage disparity of all industrialized countries. Women make up 70 percent of irregular workers, and their treatment is not much better even in regular employment where – based on the premise of the male breadwinner – they make only 67.1 percent of men’s salaries (2013: 32).

The flexibilisation that recently eroded the stability of young men’s working lives has long been a feature of women’s work, and has had a comparatively greater effect on women’s already unstable employment. According to Genda and Kurosawa (2001: 465-88), female graduates in the arts are the group who suffered the most from the recent economic restructuring. In addition to the long-standing undervaluation of female labour, the preponderance of female graduates seeking work in industries that offer the fewest opportunities at the greatest risk exacerbates their risk of professional exploitation. In his work on claims that *yarigai sakushu*, the exploitation of aspiration, labour sociologist Yamada Masahiro describes young aspirants to the culture industries as ‘the

¹² This is a catch-all term introduced to Japan in 2004, which includes various types of non-contract, self-employed, and provisional workers. The term originated in Italy, which has experienced similar structural changes in the labour market, in 2003 and spread throughout Europe (Kyoto Shinbun 2007).

unwitting victims of an economic system that duplicitously sacrifices their futures' (Yamada 2001: 129).

According to education sociologist Arakawa Yū (2009), *yarigai sakushu* has been aided by the 'career education' (*kyarīa kyōiku*) that was instituted in 1989 encouraged students to hope for a strong vision of one's 'future dreams' (Arakawa 2009: 3). The educational reforms were amendments to an educational system that, as Rohlen (Rohlen 1983)¹³ demonstrated, already reproduced social inequality. In his comparison of four Japanese high schools, he suggests that the ideology of meritocracy in the system, with its reliance on exam performance, cloaks the underlying stratification within the system. Beneath its theoretical equality of opportunity, the reality of Japanese education was that students from poorer districts were much less likely to matriculate to the most prestigious universities and achieve professional success.

Japan's neoliberal education reforms began as the Nakasone administration's attempt to emulate Reaganite and Thatcherite 'roll-back' policies that emphasised 'individualism' and 'diversity'. By shifting the responsibility for students' success away from the education system, these reforms have unfortunately exacerbated educational stratification, while encouraging students to pursue more and more far-fetched professional options. Andrea Arai claims that Japan's current emphasis on 'patriotic education'

¹³ Although the Japanese case may be especially conspicuous, Bourdieu and Passeron (Bourdieu and Passeron: 1990) argue that the education system is a primary element in the reproduction of social structure.

does not mean more direct control by the state but rather more responsibility placed on the individual for securing his or her own future at a time when the social safety net for which Japan became famous has been removed, the path from education to work is shifting, income gaps are widening dramatically, and the securing of personal futures is more uncertain.... (Arai 2013: 193-4).

Now, according to Arakawa, it is increasingly within middle- and low-ranked schools that ideas like 'interest/concern' and 'future dreams' are accentuated at the expense of academic performance, eliminating them from competition for the most desirable positions. In addition to the emphasis on individual responsibility, the new curricula encourage individuality in the form of unorthodox career choices, perhaps as a means to obscure the dwindling career opportunities in mainstream professions. 'As opposed to the old system where a monolithic standard penetrated into every nook,' Arakawa explains, 'we could say that today there exists a society where a unified competition unfolds among the higher social elements, and for the middle and lower elements a pluralistic society that has come to be removed from this meritocratic competition' (Arakawa 2009: 179).

These circumstances make students from lower-ranked schools, to whom progression to the highest paying and most secure positions was already more or less foreclosed, all the more susceptible to *yarigai sakushu* in what Arakawa terms 'ASUC *kigyō*': 'Attractive,' 'Scarce,' and 'UnCredencialised' (Arakawa 2009: 1-10). The fashion industry, where my housemate Haruko dithered for years, typifies ASUC *kigyō*: according to cultural theorist Angela McRobbie, young

people working in the fashion industry believe that the glamour and (often endlessly deferred) promise of a 'dream job' compensate for precarious employment, under-compensation, deplorable working conditions, and intense competition. According to McRobbie:

as neo-liberal values make inroads into the culture industries, a process which is warmly approved by the government, the star and celebrity system becomes even more firmly installed as a hallmark of fashion culture. But these will only ever be a handful of names, and that leaves the many young people leaving college with fashion design qualifications without an infrastructure of support, looking for work in a harshly competitive environment where almost no possibility of setting up their own independent label. Thus, they are forced into de-specialisation, multi-tasking, even retraining... working for a [fashion] company does not usually mean becoming a full-time employee; instead, it means being a sub-contracted or short-term fashion assistant... (McRobbie 2002: 61)

Thus, the emphasis on individual initiative is especially strong in ASUC industries like fashion, which do not offer career progression on the basis of tenure and seniority. As in schools, where students come to understand their success or failure as a function of their own effort and ability, those labouring in industries like fashion rely on their own emotional resources, including aspiration (*akogare*), to persevere through the insecurity and under-compensation of their work. In this way, aspiration is mobilised in the interest of a predatory labour market. According to Philomena Keet's 2012 ethnography of the fashion industry in Tokyo,

Akogare is a crucial concept in this world in which there are no clear rules to follow, as in a company or university. One is overall required to 'be oneself', but this is a difficult thing to do without any sort of model as a reference. Those with *akogare* let their personal desires and motivations drive their career progression, not external standards and values. Often, however, the only way to progress at all in this competitive field is to leave

this *akogare* behind and settle for work that allows for less *yarigai*, or personal fulfilment (Keet 2012: 214).

Haruko's experiences working at the boutique are symptomatic of the challenges facing young women in the workforce who were educated in the post-reform era. While the educational reforms and structural changes in the workforce – particularly the extensive flexibilisation of labour – affected both young men and women, the overrepresentation of women in irregular, creative, and un-credentialised employment has exacerbated the effect on women.

My female housemates languishing in low-paying dead-end jobs took considerable liberties in the way they narrativised their professional lives, as discussed above. To some extent, they were uncomfortable discussing their difficulties in the workplace and preferred to rhapsodise about their dreams than bemoan their realities; but they accepted and corroborated each other's fanciful self-descriptions in part because women's identity and status has traditionally been less strongly tethered to professional achievement than men's. Gordon Mathews observed this phenomenon in the mid-90s:

Although young women today are, at least in theory, able to pursue career-track jobs on an equal footing with men, many of the women we interviewed who engaged in *shūshoku katsudō* (job-seeking activities) did not see their future jobs as determining their life chances, since they did not feel that they would remain in those jobs for life. They had a more flexible outlook... than did the men we interviewed (Mathews 2003: 122).

While a man's social identity remains strongly tethered to his success in the workplace, women's marginalisation offers a compensatory freedom to

construct a social identity outside their careers. Although the lives of the women I describe in this chapter were difficult and stressful, as Sharon Kinsella observed, Japanese media often sees women's exclusion from the conventional labour market in terms of emancipation from its demands:

Young women - by virtue of the strength of their oppression and exclusion from most of the labour market and thus from active social roles - have come to represent in the media the freest, most un-hampered elements of society. Young women pushed outside mainstream Japanese society are associated with an exotic and longed-for world of individual fulfilment, decadence, consumption and play (Kinsella 1995: 244).

It would be a stretch to call Haruko's long hours selling tee-shirts and stocking shelves as 'decadent' or 'playful'; the reality of ASUC employment entailed physical and mental drudgery, frustration, and disappointment. When she returned to the sharehouse at night, however, Haruko shifted into a more playful realm where, unlike at work, she had the power to determine her own professional identity -- if only discursively. For fashion designer Haruko, as for art photographer Chie and illustrator Sachiko, the sharehouse became a space for whimsical self-invention and exploration. Their lives were, in a sense, compartmentalised schizophrenia, occupying one identity at work, and another in the home.

Marketing the sharehouse: making yourself at home

Although in practice most of my female housemates were employed in full-time work wholly unrelated to their professional aspirations, within the house they

carried on *as if* they were living – or at least, pursuing – their dreams. The sharehouse became a frame for experimentation in terms of their subjective identities, unburdened by the realities of their day-to-day lives. Much of the sharehouse marketing literature emphasises the emancipatory potential of a space, free from the social conventions associated with the family home and the workplace, where residents can be their ‘true selves’. In this way, sharehouse marketing was complicit in my housemates’ personal fictions by representing the sharehouse *as if* it were a laboratory for personal development that would translate into professional achievement. In fact, for women like Haruko, living *as if* living in the sharehouse constituted a plan of action toward their professional goals substituted more meaningful action.

The website for a woman-only sharehouse in the fashionable Meguro neighbourhood¹⁴ of Tokyo, for example, makes this appeal to career women explicitly.

On a typical woman's salary, simply living in Tokyo takes all one's energy. However, it's important to invest in oneself for a better career while you're young. That is why we opened our share house to offer you an economic, convenient, and safe environment to live in, where you can give it your all without having to be alone.

Finding a place close to work gives you the luxury of waking up later, and you can say goodbye to tiresome commutes home. Living in a popular town like the ones seen on TV or in a magazine, there will be

¹⁴ Although my fieldwork took place primarily in Kansai, many of the sharehouse companies included in my field survey were multi-regional. This ad copy is included here because it is posted on the website in English and because it is typical of the sharehouse marketing rhetoric, that is uniform in its themes regardless of the physical locality of the sharehouse(s) it is marketing. Hitsuji Real Estate, for example, publishes a ‘regional’ sharehouse flyer for each of six major cities, but aside from the cover art the content is exactly the same.

plenty of fun times to be shared with your friends. You can even make a little time to treat yourself for working so hard (Tulip Real Estate, 'Witt Style Yoyogi' [website]).

This website, which refers to Tokyo as the 'Town of Aspirations', emphasises that the sharehouse meets the practical and emotional needs of working women; its collegial tone reinforces camaraderie, solidarity against the male-dominated workforce. But the rhetoric of 'investing in oneself' also subtly echoes the responsibilist ethos of the post-reform education system and the precarious world of ASUC employment.

References to the suitability of the sharehouse for workers in alternative and irregular employment are frequent in sharehouse marketing. In one example, then female-only sharehouse Mokumoku Hub addresses workers in non-standardised employment, with explicit reference to 'dream-chasers' (*yumeoibito*):

Shibuya Mokumoku Hub... reopened as a woman-only sharehouse in December of 2012. Here entrepreneurs, those who follow their dreams (*yumeoibito*), and those who want to change the world... it's here to give them support! Now recruiting! (Colish [Concept x Life x Share]: 'Mokumoku Hub').¹⁵

¹⁵ Mokumoku now allows male residents, but retains its neoliberal emphasis:

When people from different industries live under one roof... productivity is high, and maybe something new can be born. In this fleeting time, packed with faint hope, more than anything you want to benefit from the stimulation of various people. Shibuya Mokumoku raises the first cry' (Colish: 'Shibuya Mokumoku Hub' [updated]).

Here, the sharehouse is advertised as providing ‘support’ for women pursuing their aspirations. Indeed, much sharehouse marketing suggests that the mere act of living in a sharehouse prepares women for their future success, incubating them until it arrives. In the following passage from Nishikawa Kyoko’s 2012 *Sharehouse Guide for Adults*, a female sharehouse resident explains the transformative influence of sharehouse living on women, where acquiring ‘interpersonal skills’ translates to better performance in the workplace:

We construct real connections as we borrow and lend soy sauce and other ingredients, not to mention our special expertise, with each other. ...Women live longer than men and will probably have to live alone at some point; girls who polish a high level of interpersonal skills in a sharehouse will be stronger in the future! Won’t having the happiness special to these girls who share also give them the will to persevere in the workplace? (Nishikawa 2012: 174).

A place where you can communicate

When Nishikawa’s informant references ‘interpersonal skills’, she is alluding to the open communication fetishised by both sharehouse marketing and my housemates as a special attribute of sharehouse living. Marketing references native understandings of the self to promote shared housing as a means to self-cultivation through routinised interaction and cooperation in daily tasks. A central index of, and mechanism for, self-cultivation in Japan is appropriately managing interpersonal relationships through skilful communication. Many of my housemates lamented that they struggled with cultural taboos against speaking their minds freely at home and with their families, and many reported a desire to polish their cultivation skills in a new social setting:

Hiromi, a 25-year-old clerk at an automotive manufacturing plant, explained 'At home I was kind of a "pet daughter" (*hako iri musume*) [laughs]. I guess I wanted to try a little bit of independence, and to live with different types of people. Interacting with others, learning to communicate, I wanted to become more independent'.

Haruko drew a distinction between 'real' and conventional communication (her special sensitivity to the burden of scripted speech may be due to her work in customer service, but she was not the only housemate to make this distinction). The 'real' communication Haruko hoped to find at Cheznew was not wholly unalloyed – she emphasised the need for tact – but neither was it confined to the recitation of pleasantries (*serifu*) she relied on in other areas of life, especially the workplace: 'I get along well with the people at work, but that doesn't mean it's real "communication"; at times, I get discouraged when I feel like I just recite my lines (*serifu*)'.

Finally, Yume emphasised the benefit of communicating with people from other backgrounds and perspectives. 'I like talking to foreigners like [you] especially, because your way of thinking is so different. But even amongst other Japanese, I wanted to meet people of different backgrounds; to be able to communicate with people who think differently is important to me in my work'.

These housemates described the limitations of authentic communication in contexts where it has been highly conventionalised. Alongside the emphasis on the freedom to experiment with more spontaneous, authentic expression, they also reveal their understanding of communication as a personal proficiency that is only perfected through practice – in this way, skilful communication is both spontaneous and practised. These understandings reflect familiar Japanese ideas about communicating with others, which arise often in sharehouse marketing and guidance literature.

In a four-page interview for 'Discover Japan's' special edition on sharehouses, *A Way of Life to Suit You* (*Jibunrashi kurashikata*), sharehouse company HumanNote representative Kataoka Yoshitaka explains that the sharehouse gives rise to 'natural, spontaneous communication', as distinguished from communication in the workplace:

In speaking with different types of people [in the sharehouse], you expand your perspective... As you enter the workforce, your interpersonal relationships narrow, as does your outlook on the world... In the sharehouse, living with people from different professions, you can gather in the lounge and talk naturally. It's ... totally different from the people you meet at work and rich interpersonal relationships spring up naturally (Discover Japan 2013: 48).

As Haruko emphasised, this 'natural' and 'spontaneous' communication is, in fact, a cultivated skill, neither instinctive, nor untethered from the demand for social nicety. Nishikawa quotes another of her informants:

In order to live with people of differing perspectives and living habits, 'a tolerance to accept other people' and at the same time 'an attitude of resolve to say disagreeable things are disagreeable' are both important.

... it's not a case of repeating 'NO'; it's counterproductive if you don't devise ways of saying 'NO' appropriate to the person and the situation... I've developed a sense of how to choose the words to reach the heart of the other person (*aitei no kokoro ni uttaeru*)(Nishikawa 2012: 108-9).

Nishikawa concludes that 'In the course of sharing, [this woman] acquired one essential thing, didn't she? That thing is called "personal power"' (Nishikawa 2012: 109). Thus, in theory, living in a sharehouse empowers young people – especially young women – by providing a testing-ground for 'communication' which, as we have seen in these two examples, is fetishized in sharehouse literature.

Not merely persuading, but 'reaching the heart of the other' requires finding the words appropriate to the person and situation, which cannot be determined in advance. As Jane Bachnik explains, this fundamental cultural aptitude is *kejime*: the ability to adjust to the situational context within the poles of *omote* (outward appearance) and *ura* (the side hidden from view; authenticity). According to Bachnik,

It is no accident that understanding *kejime* rather than *omote* or *ura* is highly prized as a major attribute of personal maturity. *Kejime* is essential to correctly interpret *omote/ura*... for *kejime* is the ability to define which point on the axis of formality/informality is appropriate for *this* particular situation (Bachnik 1992: 24).

The sharehouse, with its ambiguous social context and potential for 'disagreeable things' to arise through the sharing of intimate space, is an ideal site to practice *kejime*. In theory, a sharehouse operates like a finishing school, preparing its residents to deftly and tactfully handle thorny situations arising

elsewhere, particularly the workplace. In fact, many of the service sector jobs my housemates worked, including retail and customer service, do require polished communication skills. However, it is not clear whether my housemates' communication skills developed as a result of living at Cheznew, much less whether they will realise any professional advantage from their time in the house.

'You don't have to *amaeru*' – gender performance at home and work

The emphasis female housemates placed on communication is surely due to the expectation, in the traditional realms of workplace and family home, that communication follows conventions determined by age, status and gender. By comparison, sharehouses are thought to offer a radical, egalitarian departure from these expectations, making communication both freer and more fraught. Sharehouse advise manuals often encapsulate this idea of mainstream communication as role-driven social performance, from which the sharehouse offers emancipation, in the trope of *amae*. Social psychologist Doi Takeo famously identified *amae* as 'a key concept for the understanding not only of the psychological makeup of the individual Japanese but of the structure of the Japanese society as a whole' (Doi 1981 [1971]: 28). Doi translates *amae* imperfectly into English as 'dependence' or a 'lack of restraint' and suggests *amae* is emblematic of the Japanese primacy of interdependence over individualism and Japan's vertical social structure. According to Doi, 'being dependent' or 'childlike' - is a key cultural capacity because the Japanese prioritise

interpersonal over individualistic prerogatives. As Sharon Kinsella claims, Japan lacks a tradition in which adulthood entails independence from others:

There is in Japan no strong pattern of thought which links adulthood with individual emancipation. Maturity, which in the west has been linked to the authority and rights of the individual, still tends to be thought of according to the Confucian model in modern Japan. That is, maturity is commonly considered as the ability to cooperate well in a group, to accept compromises...and to carry out social responsibilities (Kinsella 1995: 242-3).

Thus, the ability to acknowledge, or to affect, dependence on others is a key social capacity. For the majority of Doi's book-length analysis, *amae* is timeless and genderless - 'I would suggest that the basic emotional urge that has fashioned the Japanese for two thousand years is none other than this *amae*' (Doi 1981[1970]: 82). However, Doi recognises that *amae* was initially 'associated with relations between the sexes' (Doi 1981:79-82). In its practical use, *amae* retains this sense of gender difference, with online advice columns assisting women on how to *amae* more effectively for success in romance and the workplace. While it is culturally appropriate for both genders to *amaeru* (seek or request indulgence), the original and lingering significance of *amaeru* are linked with the idea of women performing their structural subordination by affecting childlike and dependent personae. Little wonder, then, that sharehouse marketing and advice texts promising to support young women's personal and professional aspirations renounce the gender-political subtext of *amae*.

One subchapter of Nishikawa's *Sharehouse Guidance for Adults* advertises the sharehouse as a 'Space that calms women who can't *amae* and who persevere on

their own' (2012: 167). In the following interview transcript, Nishikawa cites a woman who attributes her decision to abandon her career in business to open a sharehouse:

'...When I entered the big company Zenekon as a new recruit, it was meant to be a one- or two-year *koshikake* (temporary employment) until I got married. But as I got accustomed to it, work gradually became more enjoyable. There were periods when I secretly thought, 'I'm really coming up in this place!' But at that time in the construction industry the tide of male chauvinism and misogyny was that much stronger. The only jobs I could get were assistant-type jobs; I wasn't able to gain any responsibility at all.'
'[at age 30], it hit me like an explosion: 'because you are a woman you ought to *amaeru*.' Even though I'd thrown myself into my work, my promotion and salary increases had hit a ceiling. If I thought about it, my marriageable years had passed and even if I looked for a marriage partner the outlook was bad. In both the first and the second, I was put outside the 'ladder' and, dangling there and, in that position, I couldn't win for losing (Nishikawa 2012: 169-171).

For this sharehouse owner, the expectation that she should *amaeru* was symptomatic of the 'tide of male chauvinism and misogyny' in her industry. The sharehouse she opens in response is by implication a place where she can be free of this institutionalised presumption of female subordination, where she is not compelled to *amaeru*.

The workplace is not the only area where the expectation that women *amaeru* becomes burdensome and handicaps independence – in the family home, too, children (particularly daughters) are presumed to *amaeru* as an expression of their deference to parents, grandparents, and older siblings. In Kubota's *Young People Who Live with Others* (*Tanin to kurasu wakamonotachi*), one young female informant explains one of the charms of shared living:

...you don't have to *amae* [be dependent], unlike in the family. I thought it would be lonely, making a 'sort-of by yourself' life. 'Sort-of by yourself' means life not entirely on your own, but independently through cooperation with others; it's paradoxical but it makes possible that variety of independence that is so hard to attain. And at the same time, the connection between 'not to depend on' and 'not to be lonely' is (though paradoxical) is of course to be able to attain that variety of intimacy that is so difficult in the family (Kubota 2009: 69).

This is an inversion of Doi's original representation of the family, where *amae* occurs naturally as an absence of social distance (*enryō*): 'in the [family], there is no holding back because the relationship of *amae* means there are no barriers...' (Doi 1981[1970]: 41). For Doi, it is the realm of significant but unrelated others (*tanin*, as in the title of Kubota's monograph) where individuals must be vigilant in observing distance and exercising restraint. In this way, Doi's description of the family happily overlooks the micro-politics of gender and age in favour of an appealingly neat ideological archetype. As Takie Sugiyama Lebra explained,

... the home is not always ideal for communication of unity or spontaneous expression, for two reasons. First, home is where domestic chores must be done, and the family members are more or less task-oriented, not always ready for emotional communication or unity. Second, and more important culturally, the Japanese home, especially the middle-class home, is involved in the maintenance of status distance between its members on the basis of generation birth order, and sex. ... (Lebra 1976: 118).

It seems that for young women, whose position within the family structure is one of gender- and age-based subordination, *amae* may not be a blissful absence of self-restraint but a burdensome ritualised performance. Sharehouse marketing to young women, especially for women-only

properties, emphasises personal autonomy to contrast the sharehouse against life in the family home.

In the section entitled 'Finding a life that feels right' in a sharehouse guide published by sharehouse marketing company SharePark, an anonymous 23-year old female housemate testifies that 'because [a sharehouse] is not [living with] family or lovers, you can do your own thing as you like, without *amae*' (Ooshima and Takisa [Share Park] 2013: 112). Nishikawa agrees:

In a house limited to single women, there's no particular sense of difference. And interacting with other women who are living independently and persevering breeds courage, like 'It's okay being on my own!' (Nishikawa 2012:171).

Conclusions

Discover Japan's special edition on sharehouses (Discover Japan 2013) proclaims, 'Gathering and living is new!!' (*atsumatte kurashi wa atarashii!*) The eager adoption of this 'new lifestyle' by some Japanese women can be read as a demand for greater personal autonomy. Many of my female housemates at Cheznew were so-called 'dream-chasers' (*yumeoigata*) who were ill-equipped to realise these dreams under their current circumstances. Participating in the sharehouse lifestyle may be read as a strategy of self-determination that is unavailable to them in other realms, especially in their working and family lives, and the idea that the sharehouse contributes to the cultivation of personal and career skills remains a powerful enticement for these women. Today's Japanese

student in a lower-tiered school is encouraged to 'follow' his or her 'dreams', without guidance and independent of the structural support and opportunities represented by the now mostly defunct Japanese system of lifetime employment. Obscuring the lack of opportunity and security is the illusion of choice and self-determination, an irony that persists through their adulthood in which a proliferating array of commodities, including ready-made 'lifestyles' like the sharehouse. Sharehouse marketing de-emphasizes the economic benefits of shared housing in favour of more abstract values like self-cultivation, perpetuating the myth of self-determination and obscuring the reality of limited options.

Like the 'cocoon' sharehouse owner Watanabe-san sees himself furnishing to young women in the epigraph to this chapter, the sharehouse is touted as a secure, restorative environment where bodily and psychic energies can be replenished; and a liberating atmosphere where, absent the pressure to *amaeru*, they can fully and freely cultivate their own capacities. Ironically, however, the one housemate who was successfully pursuing a career did not enjoy these benefits, but instead was alienated from the others. Nor did living in the sharehouse do nothing to improve the professional lives of the *yumeoigata* like Haruko, who remained in a career holding pattern working non-professional jobs and aspiring vaguely after something else.

My housemates understood that the aspirational identities they asserted in the absence of real achievement were not likely to come true. Nonetheless, they

insisted that they were, in part by living in a sharehouse, cultivating themselves just *in case* the right opportunity should arise. They were living a hypothesis: *as if* these aspirations were achievable, meanwhile preparing themselves in what Crapanzano calls ‘the field of desire in waiting’ (Crapanzano 2003: 19). As Crapanzano explains,

...hope can in fact lead to paralysis. One can be so caught up in one’s hope that one does nothing to prepare for its fulfilment. ...One hopes – one waits – passively for hope’s object to occur, knowing realistically that its occurrence is unlikely, even more so because one does nothing to bring it about (Crapanzano 2003: 18).

My housemates were doing nothing to bring their dreams about, but their dreams careers in the arts and fashion were unlikely to come about regardless of their efforts. As we saw above, sociologist Arakawa Yū attributes the failure of *yumeoigata* like Haruko to neoliberal educational reform and the powerful ideology of following one’s dreams that has gained traction in recent years. Meanwhile, the Japanese educational system, notorious for streaming and its focus on exam preparation, is not well-suited to provide career guidance to young people with unconventional career aspirations. Moreover, the breakdown of the Japanese economy in the 1990s accelerated the rise and of ideological and economic neoliberalism, core tenets of which include the individual responsibility of workers for their successes or failures in the labour market and the encouragement to follow fabulistic ‘dreams’. This emphasis on the individual and the dogma of limitless possibility urged a generation of young Japanese to construct unconventional fantasies about the future that, sadly, remain elusive to the majority. Sharehouse marketing discourses like Nishikawa’s (2012) and

Kubota's (2009) appeal to the needs of the women they imagined themselves becoming, rather than the women they were.

In the final analysis, perhaps whether living in a sharehouse improves residents' personal skills or aids their professional aspirations matters less than the comfort in the narrative of 'following your dreams'. As essayist Robert Fay reflects, 'among Japanese people born since 1970, "following your dream" has become a kind of mantra for the possibility of change, of having a fulfilling life within a rigid social order' (Fay 2012). In the context of diminished possibilities for professional achievement (for reasons I outline in the first half of the chapter) it seems that these young women formulate strategies for the articulation and cultivation of the idealised self, of which the decision to live in a sharehouse plays an important part. Many of these women find their agency in processes of identity formation circumscribed by structural features beyond their control – both cultural expectations like the gendered conventions of conduct, including the expectation to *amae*; and the socioeconomic realities associated with the present education system and labour market. In this context, choosing to live in a sharehouse is an articulation of the self that might take the place of deferred and mostly hypothetical ambitions. This is what Crapanzano refers to as the 'interlocutory dimension' of hope (Crapanzano 2003: 16): the palliative effect, to those in distress, of expressing one's hopes aloud. According to sociologist Genda Yuji, 'Hope is a story that is needed when confronting an uncertain future. A certain story exists wherever there is hope' (Genda 2008: 24).

Whether the aspirational fantasies that composed my housemates' identities were realisable – and in most cases it was clear to everyone, including themselves, that they were not – the expression of these dreams took the place of real accomplishment. That women like Haruko could claim a professional identity within the house, and have that claim received without scepticism, demonstrates that the house represented a distinct sphere from the outside world, where their professional identity would be determined by their material successes and failures. In this way, the home was a sanctuary – a 'third space', as we will see in the next chapter – marked by its difference from other spheres of social interaction. It also means that these housemates sustained at least two social identities at all times – at once, the 'as if' of their dreams in the sharehouse and the factual reality of those dreams' stagnation, in the outside world. In this way, the sharehouse becomes a physical field in which for Crapanzano's hope as 'desire in waiting' to play (Crapanzano 2003: 19). The 'interlocutory dimension' of my housemates' hope meant that merely vocalising it in the language of dreams was sufficient for them to live as if those dreams were reality.

The growth of the sharehouse industry in recent years can be partly attributed to the efficacy of marketing rhetoric appeals to hope. This rhetoric emphasises that the sharehouse is an alternative space for the realisation of dreams and the enactment of identities not possible

elsewhere. Like Watanabe's metaphorical 'cocoon' in the epigraph to this chapter, the sharehouse is advertised as a safe place for these young people – especially women - to pupate until their dreams come true; but, as Crapanzano warns, it becomes a literal field where desire waits but is not actively pursued.

Chapter 3: International Exchange

Living together, you get to know what type of person you are... It's like the consciousness of Japanese who have gone overseas.... You become aware that the things you held as common sense until now are particular to your upbringing... With this as your inspiration, you learn to respect other ways of doing things (Kubota 2009: 71)

My housemates' ideas about the 'foreign lifestyle' of the sharehouse were cobbled together mainly from images in foreign media, the government's 'internationalisation' campaign, and sharehouse marketing materials. These sources depicted the sharehouse as a space where social differences are erased and residents are free to cultivate themselves as cosmopolitan subjects through exposure to and interaction with foreign people, lifestyles, languages, and patterns of thought. The 'imagined world' of the shared life is commoditised and marketed through appeals to young people's – in particular, young women's – demand for 'international exchange' (*kokusai kōryū*) that weave together tropes of freedom, education, self-knowledge, travel, and erotic experimentation. In this chapter, I explore some of the ways marketing discourses promote these associations and contrast them against the realities of intercultural living in Cheznew.

Internationalism at Cheznew: the right kind of *gaijin*

Having settled into my role as the resident Westerner, I met the news of Alan's arrival in late April with ambivalence and petulant territoriality. As usual, Mr.

Yamada was the one to break the news to the house and, as usual, I had the privilege of hearing it first. I found him in the kitchen one morning in April, bleary-eyed and preparing himself miso soup as he waited for the rice cooker to finish its work. Seeing me arrive to prepare my own breakfast, he lit up. 'Oh! Have you heard the news?' he asked cryptically, knowing of course that I had not. 'New housemate, *gaijin*! A man! Handsome man', he said, gesturing at his face. Reading my dismissiveness, he insisted, 'Next week!'

Within the day, Yamada had spilled the news to the rest of the house, who eagerly awaited the arrival of our new 'handsome Western man'. Hiromi caught the first glimpse of Alan when he arrived in Naniwa for a tour of the house (as it turned out, he had already committed to the lease over email, as I had done months earlier, from overseas). Housemates pressed Hiromi for details, and she gleefully obliged: he was American, tall, muscular, and 'very good looking' with light hair, blue eyes and 'tall nose' – 'like Cait's little brother!' 'Are you excited?' Yamada probed, provocatively. To his delight, I quipped: 'I just hope he behaves himself'.

Alan arrived the following week as promised, smiling a broad smile. I had intended to avoid him, wary of foreign men in Japan¹⁶. He was, physically, as described, and seemed bursting with American overconfidence. Nonetheless, his self-deprecating pathos made him more likeable, and I cautiously assented to sharing a pot of coffee in the living room. He explained in a neutral tone how he

¹⁶ The stereotype of the opportunistic Western lothario is aptly caricatured in Larry Rodney's long-running 'Charisma Man' cartoons (Rodney 2011).

had grown up in a suburb of New Jersey, United States, where he had graduated from high school and taught himself computer coding. He and a friend had built a software company instead of attending university and became millionaires by their mid-twenties.

Notwithstanding, or perhaps because of, his early successes, he met with an existential crisis in his late 20s. He sold his share of the company to his partner and headed to Asia to 'find himself'. He self-destructed his way through urban China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Korea before ending up in a seedy *gaijin* guesthouse in a northern suburb of Osaka. He married a woman he met in a video game arcade, and they lived together for several years before moving to the United States to live with his parents. Their relationship could not withstand the strain of the move, and by his admission Alan did not treat her well; worse, her parents had found him arrogant and disrespectful. She had initiated divorce proceedings and fled back to Japan; at length, he had determined to win her back, the purpose of his move to Cheznew. This was proving difficult, however, as she would not respond to his attempts to contact her - even including an uninvited visit to her parents' house in neighbouring Hyogo Prefecture. 'I've made some bad decisions', he told me with a wry grin.

Initially, Alan's eagerly-awaited arrival was celebrated, especially by my female housemates, who spoke eagerly of his height and his easy charm. Once he moved into the sharehouse, however, Alan was soon given to distraction. Trying to win back the affections of his wife was hard work, and Alan's work ethic had been

compromised by years of well-compensated but sporadic employment. Making the best of a bad situation, he established several online dating profiles. He met new girls almost nightly, often inviting me along to ease the drudgery of another first date with a girl about whom he only knew age, blood type, and bra size – all of which he collected on a spreadsheet to keep them straight in his mind. He had overnight visitors so often (despite house protocol and, later, management company policy) that he bought a pair of rubber slippers from the 100 yen shop for his guests to wear in the public areas – in a men’s size, so that he could convince his overnight guests that he was lending them an extra pair of his own.

To their credit, my female housemates overcame their initial fascination with Alan when he began returning home with inebriated, underdressed women. His unrestrained nihilism gave him a kind of folk hero status amongst male housemates, most of whom were woefully unpopular with women. Even those who would, on occasion, disapproved of his excesses held him in slightly envious admiration. They marvelled at his conquests, which included a tryst in the ground floor mixed-sex multi-stall toilets during a late-night drinking party.

Marketing Diversity in the Sharehouse: ‘Study Abroad at Home’

Several months into my stay at Cheznew, I began working a few hours a week as a private English tutor to adults in our neighbourhood. I had not mentioned it to anybody in the house, in partial rebellion against the stereotype that all foreigners were English teachers. I foolishly confided in Mr. Yamada, however,

and was confused by his delight at hearing the news. Within a week, a new housemate moving his bags into the house eagerly introduced himself to me, addressing me as 'sensei' and emphasising how excited he was to practice English with me. The management company, I later learned, had begun mentioning my new professional credential to potential housemates. Where I had been a native English speaker, now I was marketable as a *bona fide* English teacher.

Unbeknownst to me at the time, many sharehouses market themselves as offering English language conversation and 'international exchange' (*kokusai kōryū*) with its foreign residents, even when (as in most cases) little or no formal English tutoring is provided. What is being commoditised and marketed by references to 'studying abroad at home/in Japan', is the fantasy of a more cosmopolitan, 'international' lifestyle.

As sociologist John Clammer has argued, Japan has long approached foreign goods, ideas, and indeed people, as importable (Clammer 1997). He claims that the Japanese experience of internationalisation is best understood in terms of consumption:

The much-discussed issue of *kokusaika*, or the 'internationalisation' of Japanese society, is interesting... While the rhetoric occurs at the national and occasionally at the local political level, the practice, insofar as it exists, takes place mostly through consumption activities – eating in restaurants that specialise in 'ethnic' foods, consuming foreign products, and learning (or pretending to learn) foreign languages, especially English... (Clammer 1997: 5)

Importing otherness became government policy with the Nakasone administration's *kokusaika* ('internationalisation') scheme in the late 1980s (McConnell 2000: 85). Politically, *kokusaika* was aimed at re-establishing warm relationships with Western regimes and elevating Japan's international reputation; culturally, it encouraged Japanese to cultivate a more cosmopolitan orientation, in part through English language acquisition. A central element of the government's *kokusaika* scheme was the Ministry of Education's establishment of the JET Programme, which, as the title of McConnell's 2000 ethnography *Importing Diversity* wryly suggests, brings young foreigners from selected countries to Japan temporarily to provide English language education and 'international exchange'. According to the Programme's official English-language website,

The Programme was started in 1987 with the purpose of increasing mutual understanding between the people of Japan and the people of other nations. It aims to promote internationalisation in Japan's local communities by helping to improve foreign language education and developing international exchange at the community level (CLAIR 2010).

Via the JET Programme, the Japanese government brings foreigners to teach English language and cultural literacy through 'international exchange' (*kokusai kōryū*). Young foreigners from approved English-speaking countries are dispatched to schools throughout the country to 'support' the English language programme, typically as assistants to Japanese faculty who lack English fluency.

The JET programme is not the first instance of the Japanese government 'importing' foreigners to assist in this way. In the beginning of the Meiji period,

when the newly-installed Japanese government felt the country required Western technology to enter the world stage, it hired so-called *gaijin ōyatoi* [foreign experts] to train Japanese workers in engineering techniques. Whereas the *gaijin ōyatoi* conferred specific technological expertise, however, Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) are not required to have any experience teaching English and are often valued for less quantifiable attributes. According to McConnell, ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers) were evaluated on their physical attributes and country of origin as much as for their teaching experience, if any. In the applicant screening process, ‘...informal hierarchies clearly existed. [Those] with lighter skin colour were more desirable than those with darker skin colour...; younger ALTs were more desirable than older ones ...; males were more desirable than females ... (McConnell 2000: 135-6).

In importing foreigners as cultural representatives, the Japanese government promoted a desire for ‘international exchange’ amongst young Japanese through the medium – in some cases the mere appearance - of English language instruction. The influence of *kokusaika* as a popular movement was buoyed along at first by a strong economy, which made international travel more widely accessible. According to Recruit Company, Japanese baby boomers

...experienced the bubble economy at the precise peak of their working lives and popularised overseas travel; carrying a sense of longing to see life in other countries firsthand, they hoped to give their children this experience. We can assume that, regardless of the current outlook for Japanese society, this younger generation now coming of age after the bubble’s collapse have this international orientation (Recruit 2010: 123).

Even after the collapse of the bubble economy, this ‘international orientation’ drove a frenzy for study abroad; the number of exchange students expanded by 10,000 between 1998 and 2000, and continued to rise until a peak in 2004, just prior to the start of the sharehouse boom (MEXT 2016: Figure 10). Of course, this does not mean that study abroad was available to everyone, even at its peak; and in a diminished economy, opportunities have become more limited.

According to a report by three researchers at Dōshisha University’s Faculty of Commerce, overseas travel by young people declined by nearly 35% from 2000-2007 and according to more recent government statistics, this trend of *wakamono no kaigai ryōko banare* continues (Nishimura, Takai, and Nakamura 2010). According to a Keio University report prepared for ISFJ Policy Forum, young people reported that the two biggest obstacles to foreign travel were the inability to take vacation time (39%) and lack of money (38%) (Nagano et al. 2009: 11).

Marketing the sharehouse as ‘study abroad at home’ offers an opportunity for those who studied abroad to replicate their treasured experiences – or their cherished imaginings – of ‘international exchange’, but without the hassle and expense of going overseas, in a time of straitened financial means:

...it’s an environment that answers the demands of those who ‘want to be immersed in a living language’ and who ‘want to understand foreign cultures’. That means that without the expense of overseas study, without having to take time off from work, you can interact with foreigners (Nishikawa 2012: 51)

The trope of '*ienaka ryūgaku*' may be a reference to a highly successful and memorable marketing campaign by what was one of the biggest companies offering one-on-one *eikaiwa* (English conversation) tuition with native English speakers. The NOVA Company's *ekimae ryūgaku* ('study abroad in front of the train station') marketing campaigns of the late 1980s and 1990s invited Japanese

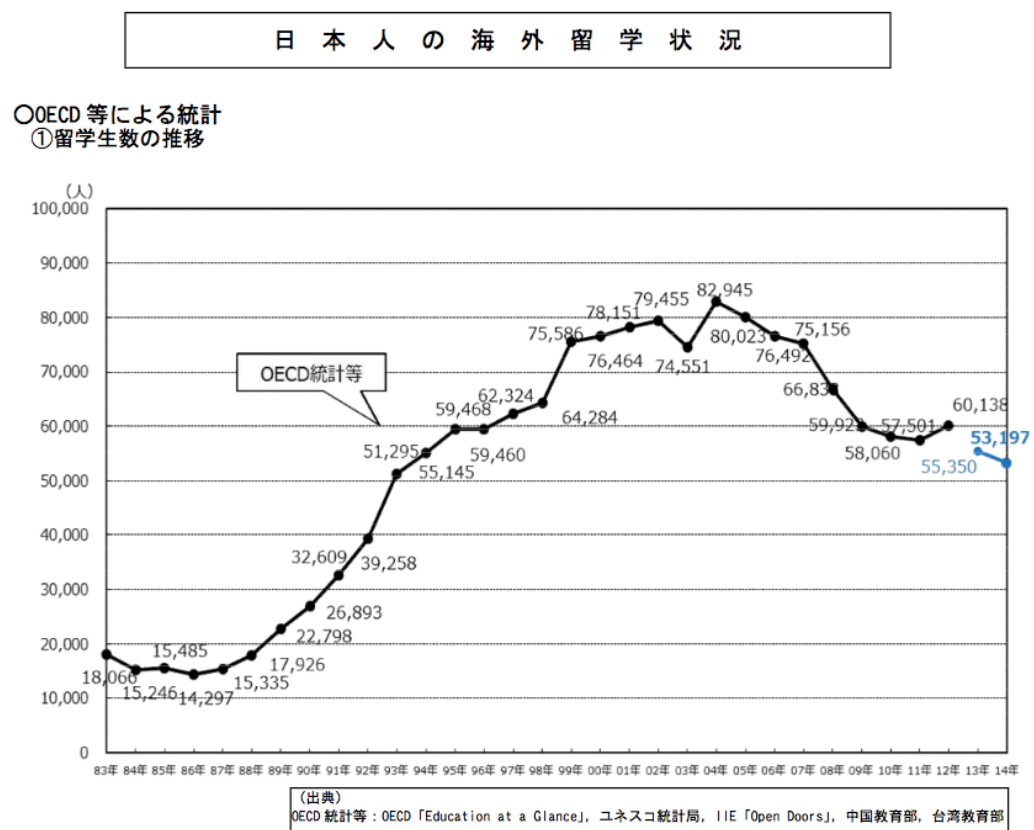


Figure 10: The State of Japanese Study Abroad (*Nihonjin no kaigai ryūgaku jōhō*). Note that the number of Japanese exchange students begins to decline in 2005, immediately prior to the sharehouse 'boom' (MEXT 2016).

consumers the opportunity to practice English with a native speaker, typically in a café by the nearest train station to his or her home or work. NOVA sold the idea of bringing the transformative experience of study abroad to the client's neighbourhood, which the sharehouse's *ienaka ryūgaku* pushes into the home:

‘Some people have changed their way of living itself through studying as a part of shared living... In the shared living room English often flutters about, a sign that you can lead a life steeped in English without leaving Japan’ (Nishikawa 2012: 148-9).

‘The theme is that daily life becomes a study abroad: to learn English while living the shared life’ (Hitsuji 2010: 88).

‘...while living in the country, you can have a little taste of study abroad’ (Tabippo: ‘Nine sharehouses for international exchange’).

‘Japanese and foreigners create value for each other. It’s not merely extending the sharehouse, it’s stimulating intercultural exchange based on community.... It’s not confined to language; it’s an opportunity for individual growth’ (Project Design Online: ‘Language edition Tokiwa Manor: a place where you can learn everyday through “In-home Study Abroad”’).

‘When young people from around the world live under the same roof, it gives rise to international exchange. ...BORDERLESS HOUSE offers a multicultural sharehouse life replete with awesome encounters with housemates transcending nationality and the experience of different perspectives. You want to try life in a new international environment! You want to mingle with foreigners! You want to improve your language skills! If you’re this kind of person, by all means try this “study abroad in Japan” at BORDERLESS HOUSE!’ (BORDERLESS HOUSE: ‘The study-abroad lifestyle at home’).

In each of these iterations, English language secondary to the ‘experience’ of international exchange, once more widely available through study abroad.

Indeed, very few of the properties above deliver any formal English lessons, but rely on the presence of Western housemates to provide the sense of ‘a life steeped in English’. Thus, in *ienaka ryūgaku*, as in NOVA’s *ekimae ryūgaku*:

... the *ryūgaku* destination is more diffuse and universal than the local station... or any other location. The destination is instead a social space (LeFebvre 1991) termed the West.... The commodity – that is, the *eikaiwa* – is not a thing: it is both the process of English-language learning and the Occidentalised lifestyle of (female) English speakers depicted therein (Bailey 2006: 125).

Images of foreigners in sharehouse marketing

As in the Japanese government's *kokusaika*, the 'foreignness' envisioned by sharehouse marketing is often, for all intents and purposes, 'Westernness'. When Westerners appear in sharehouse marketing – and they appear with some frequency – they are almost uniformly white.

White men appear with much greater frequency than white women. In one example, the sleek *Tokyo Share Life* produced by Hitsuji Incubation Square (Hitsuji: 2010) includes images of six recognisably Western foreigners, four men and two women, in its 15 profiles of sharehouses in and around Tokyo. This book-length brochure uses selective focus throughout (blurring some details and focusing on others). The four men's faces are all in focus, while only New Zealand-born Margaret, the owner of Sharehouse Uluka and yoga instructor, is shown full-face and in focus. In both photos of Margaret, she is pictured alone, and in the larger of the two she is pictured from behind as she practices yoga in her home studio, where she also offers lessons (Figure 11). In the accompanying text, resident testimonials explain that Margaret does not live onsite, but visits several times a week to lead yoga practice.

Images of Western women are often shown out of focus or from behind, identified either by their hair colour or descriptive text captions. Reassuringly friendly but unobtrusive, like Margaret, they are often teachers. By contrast, Western men are depicted as charismatic, often holding court at the centre of

group photos. The two-page photo of Sharehouse Gargoyle (which immediately precedes Sharehouse Uluka) shows three Western men and a young Japanese woman relaxing on a roof patio (Figure 12). In this shot, two of the men chat together in the background, their faces blurred; in the foreground, a third is talking with a female Japanese housemate, who is leaning forward and laughing. Her face is cannily obscured by what appears to be the blur of the camera, but, given the high production quality of Hitsuji's marketing, it cannot be an accident. This effect allows the young Japanese woman contemplating a sharehouse – perhaps Gargoyle – to imagine herself on this roof, being regaled by this handsome young man (whom we see in a subsequent shot playing the piano in the parlour while his friends take a turn entertaining her). This charismatic character is the only one whose face is visible in sharp detail; he is barefoot, his posture relaxed, elbows on knees, his hat casually cocked back. The hanging lanterns backlight his features, and the viewer can detect the shadow of his left bicep.

Unlike the accompanying text for Uluka, which mostly assures the reader that Margaret is rarely about, the accompanying text for Gargoyle advertises less for the house than for the dashing Vincent, whom we are told is a 25-year-old former exchange student from France. Vincent's interest in Japan began with the literature of Oe Kenzaburo and Murakami Haruki, and a photo insert of his bookshelf displays several works of modern Japanese fiction in translation; another shows Vincent quietly reading on his bed. The profile explains that the sharehouse began when the owners acted as Vincent's host family, and he has returned to live there since his graduation. The owners testify that: 'living

together with foreigners, we were able to get a sense of the fun of encountering others, like *traveling overseas while in Japan*' (Hitsuji 2010: 35, emphasis mine). The profile concludes that '[the owners] are still actively recruiting foreign residents, so another special feature is the daily presence of a roster rich in foreignness' (Hitsuji 2010: 36)¹⁷.

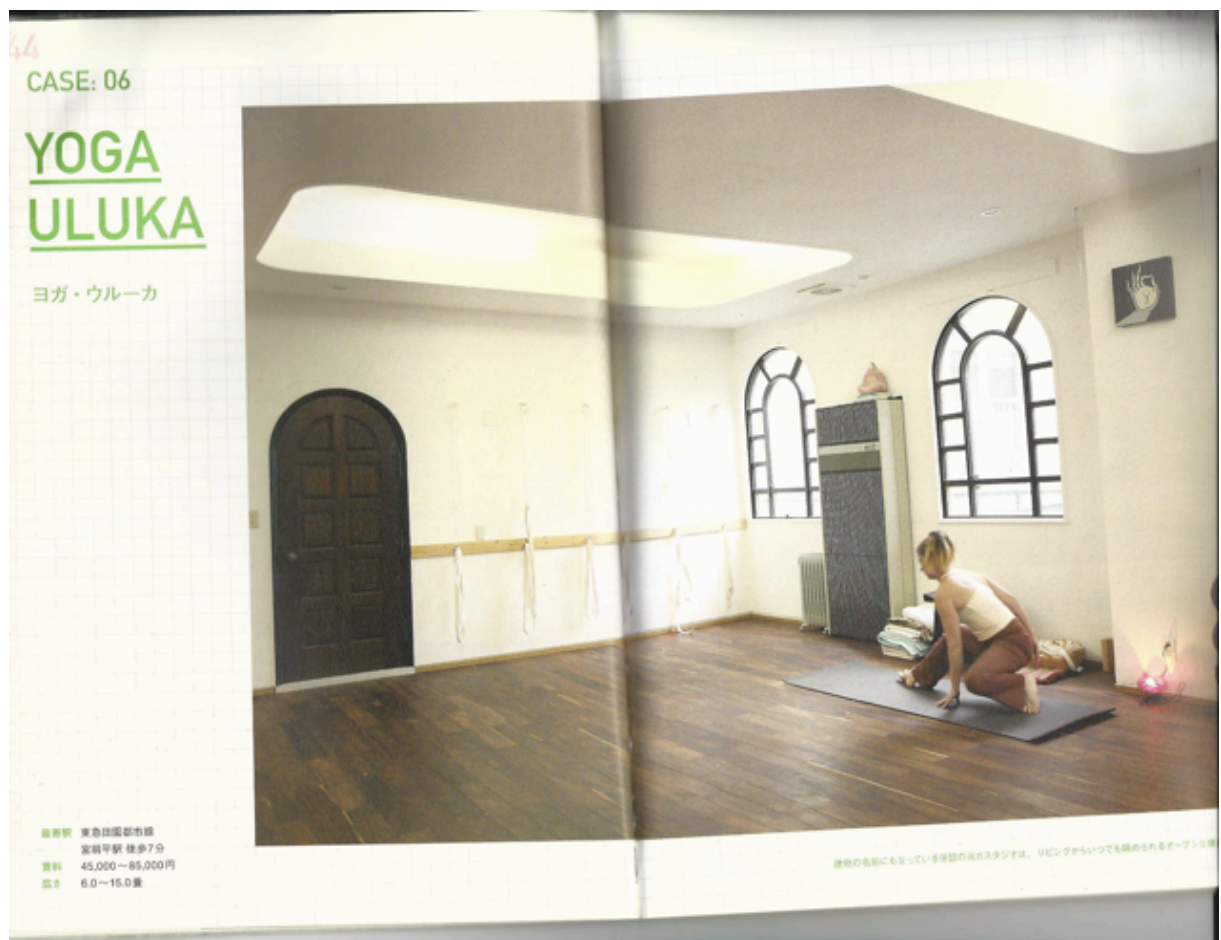


Figure 11: New Zealand-born sharehouse owner Margaret practices yoga alone in her studio (Hitsuji 2010: 44 – 45).

¹⁷ BORDERLESS HOUSE, the sharehouse whose website serves as the epigraph of this chapter, now offers free rent to foreigners.

Importantly, Vincent is not a teacher – at least, not at Sharehouse Gargoyle. If anything, he is the student, diligently developing his Japanese language skills and reading contemporary Japanese authors in translation. We are told that he is currently seeking work, having finished his schooling, but that he hopes to stay at Gargoyle as long as possible. While Margaret is valued for her teaching abilities (and, for most of the week, her absence) Vincent's value as a Western man is in his company and his charisma.

Global persons and 'imagined worlds'

Prior to meeting Alan, I asked my Japanese housemates about their expectations of living with foreigners, many of them described fanciful scenarios where social differences are erased, and rather than nurturing old resentments residents freely represent their feelings and opinions. 'Going to Italy', Matsuhiko explained, 'I got to experience the foreign lifestyle. I thought I wanted to try it in Japan. There are fewer rules, and foreigners are more relaxed than Japanese... Also, there is less pressure to be like other people. Foreigners always express their true selves'. When I asked him whether free self-expression was necessarily a good thing, he paused and thought. 'Maybe sometimes there will be trouble, but if everybody can communicate how they feel you can solve problems that way. It's better than keeping secrets and holding grudges'.¹⁸

¹⁸ Matsuhiko's image of intercultural exchange relied on a somewhat sanitised vision of Japanese/foreigner relations. It bears mentioning that during fieldwork, Japanese ultra-nationalist parties were gaining traction, and attitudes to immigration remained unenthusiastic. Even in the home, as I discuss below,



Figure 12: Vincent and his friends entertain on a rooftop garden (Hitsuji 2010: 32-33).

While only about one half of my Japanese housemates had the opportunity to travel overseas, all of them had been exposed to the lifestyles of young Westerners through foreign media, the source of many of their ideas about foreigners and foreign lifestyles. They had been especially fond of the American television programme *Friends*. Yume, comparing me to the character 'Rachel-san', explained that the programme had instructed her on 'how to follow my dreams and to be myself. The characters move to New York so that they can have freedom, and become what they want. It is hard sometimes, but they

many Japanese housemates expressed dislike for different foreigner groups, particularly other Asians.

support each other. I thought I wanted to move away from home and meet different people, like that'. Sachiko admitted the programme's influence on her own trajectory from exurban Saitama to slightly less remote Naniwa: 'It's so exciting, to leave home and to live a new kind of life, doing what you want to do. I watched it and thought, "Wow, they're so elegant and cool"'.

Sharehouse guidance literature attributes some of the popularity of sharehouses to the Western lifestyles fictionalised and glamourised on American television. Abe and Mohara, authors of *Sharehouse: Why We Live with Others*, trace their own curiosity about sharehouses to 'the popularity of foreign dramas like *Beverly Hills 90210* (FOX, 1990-2000) and *Friends* (NBC, 1994-2004) that introduced a lifestyle that had been unknown in Japan and began to make people see living with others in a positive image' (Abe and Mohara 2012: 40-41). The 'sharehouse guide' *Living in a Sharehouse* published by rental company Share Park proclaims: 'It seems there are many young women who longed for a foreign roomshare depicted on foreign television!' (SharePark 2013: 48). In *Friends*, for example,

...young people experience all the hardships of people in their 20s, but solve their problems with optimism and humour. Even when troubles seem tough, it is delightful when you can celebrate with others. It is odd how perfectly you can imagine yourself in this shared life (Share Park 2013: 49).

Nishikawa Kyoko claims the television programme *Ally McBeal* also enchanted Japan's female audiences in her *Sharehouse Guide for Adults*. According to Nishikawa, the eponymous American attorney who finds herself working alongside her ex-boyfriend and his new girlfriend in a firm that famously (and

controversially) featured a unisex washroom, became an aspirational figure for Japanese 'office ladies' who longed to experience her independence and freedom of self-expression. Moreover, the tensions and antagonisms that arose out of the intermingling of the characters' personal and professional lives were ultimately resolved through camaraderie, communication, and the temporary erasure of social hierarchies: the shifting romantic entanglements between the firm's partners and associates; and the unisex washroom's erasure of gendered spaces. The show encouraged its audience of working women (OL) to imagine their own lives in a space for freedom and personal experimentation outside the axes of work and (family) home, a 'tertiary space' rarely to be found elsewhere in Japan, which the sharehouse could provide:

...with the exception of the *naraigoto* classroom, the primary space of activity for contemporary Japanese is probably is probably the workplace or the home. This 'tertiary living space' certainly would have seemed fresh. A lot of OL probably thought, '...I want to experiment with living this carefree life, unbound by social position and restraints!' (Nishikawa 2012: 110).

In their consumption of images of foreign lifestyles like those in *Friends* and *Ally McBeal*, my housemates were participating in what Arjun Appadurai identifies as a key aspect of modernity: the invention, consumption, and dissemination of 'imagined worlds' through global media. These 'imagined worlds' encourage viewers to invent versions of themselves that bypass the structural realities of local power:

... there is a peculiar new force to the imagination in social life today. More persons in more parts of the world consider a wider set of possible lives than they ever did before. One important source of this change is the mass media, which present a rich, ever-changing store of possible lives, some of which enter the lived imaginations of ordinary people more successfully than others (Appadurai 1996: 53).

Imagined worlds not only captivate the imagination of its audiences but, through the privilege of some imagined worlds over others, articulate local preferences and priorities that cannot find expression elsewhere. In this way, they expose and critique local power structures. In the previous chapter, I discussed the way sharehouse marketing appeals to this audience's personal and professional aspirations as a departure from the sexual politics of the home and workplace. In the 'imagined world' of the sharehouse, daily interaction with foreigners makes housemates more authentically themselves by allowing them to recognise, and thus to transcend, the barriers of their own culture. For male housemates like Matsuhiko, these barriers might be cultural norms against free self-expression. For female housemates, the 'imagined world' of the 'third space' promised an alternative to the gender politics they associated with the Japanese workplace and family home.

Erotic internationalism

As we have seen, sharehouse marketing claims to offer the experience of study abroad through living with foreigners, often through spurious claims about the availability of English language tutoring. What is really being offered, however, is the more elusive 'international exchange' or, as Keiron Bailey put it, 'Occidentalised lifestyle of the (female) English speaker' (Bailey 2006: 125). Bailey emphasises the erotic dimension of foreigner-marketing in the *eiwaika* industry, a strategy more subtly at work in contemporary sharehouse marketing.

He refers to 'eroticised discourses of "new selfhood"' (Bailey 2006: 109) in which women pursue their self-cultivation as cosmopolitan subjects through travel and transnational romance. Thus

In many... *eikaiwa* marketing campaigns *atarashii jibun*, or 'new selfhood', is conflated with 'erotic possibility' and displaced from domestic terrain into the Occidentalised West. These productions deepen the embedded relationship between travel, self-realisation, and erotic possibility... (Bailey 2006: 112-113).

As women remain more than 70 per cent of the sharehouse market (Hitsuji 2013), the representations of foreigners in these materials are designed to anticipate the desires of a young female audience: Western woman as friend and teacher and, often, Western man as romantic partner.

Indeed, the 'Western world' imagined by some of my housemates, especially Yume and Haruko included dalliances or romantic partnerships with foreign men. In an interview shortly after Alan's arrival, Haruko and Yume explained that their desire for Western men was not based strictly on physical attributes – the long ('tall') nose, the tall stature, and blue eyes commonly associated with Westerners generally – but also with a more egalitarian outlook on marriage and the role of women than their native counterparts.

Author: Why do you prefer Western men?

Yume: Western men are cool-looking, and nice.

Haruko: Yeah, they're NICE!

Author: They're not all nice! Believe me.

Haruko: They seem nice. They're romantic, and they support you!

Author: How do they give you 'support'? What does that mean?

Yume: They would help around the house – do the dishes, or tidy up a little, for example, when you're busy at work.

Haruko: And they help with children sometimes. They're different from Japanese men like that.

The association of foreign – specifically Western – men with kindness and a more egalitarian division of household labour appears a common idea in Japan (ironically, as many Western men go to Japan seeking mates with 'more traditional values'). For Yume and Haruko, desire for partnership with a Western man also related in part to their personal and professional ambitions, which they felt they could not achieve in Japan or in partnership with a Japanese man. According to Karen Kelsky:

Among the women with whom I spoke, *gaijin* men were desired not primarily for their amatory prowess (or penis size) but for their *yasashisa*, glossed as kindness, gentleness, or chivalrousness... the point of the *gaijin* male's alleged *yasashisa* – as well as his supposed sexiness, English ability, sophistication, and good looks – was that these qualities were claimed to be entirely absent in Japanese men (Kelsky 2001: 138).

Beyond the *yasashisa* Yume and Haruko expected of Western partners was their longing for the lifestyle that an international marriage could facilitate. In their eyes, it was one that featured travel and professional development, sustained by the support of a loving and progressive-minded partner.

Yume: My *akogare* ... is to marry a foreigner and live in America! It's so cool, and I want to have lots of American friends. Plus, I want children with blond hair and blue eyes. I think we would go to San Francisco, so I could become a famous designer... even after I have kids.

Haruko: I think San Francisco is the best, too, although maybe New York... I could work in fashion and have a nice American husband.

Author: But don't you worry about being in a foreign country? It's hard when you're not a native speaker.

Haruko: It's okay. I'd practice English and get better.

Yume: And your husband can help you, too.

'Erotic internationalism', as Kelsky (1999) has termed it, perches at the nexus between desire and power. Historically, although Japanese women have not enjoyed equal opportunity in the workplace (see Chapter 2), they have exercised their power as consumers to critique and challenge the conditions of their daily lives. 'Internationalism' - the preference for foreign consumer goods and experiences - emerged in response to and quiet protest of women's social position and represents a strategy for emancipation from the cultural status quo:

Internationalism is an important and indeed courageous choice for Japanese women among a highly circumscribed range of domestic options. Women's domestic exclusions occur at both the family and corporate levels; indeed, the exclusions reinforce each other (Kelsky 1999: 233-234).

When foreign goods first became broadly accessible in the Taishō period, the *mo-ga* ('modern girl') raised the hackles of conservative social elements with her promiscuous appropriation of foreign commodities and ideas. According to historian Sarah Chaplin, she '... epitomised the cosmopolitan lifestyle' and had profound impacts on society and Japan's self-image at the time (Chaplin 2014: 56). It was not just the exotic objects of the *mo-ga*'s acquisitive desire that affronted conservative culture, however, but her newfound consumer power that threatened the gender hierarchy. Her preference for foreign goods (metonymised by her imported shoes and haircut) was part of a more thoroughgoing adoption of foreign ideas that, according to Chaplin, included her

campaign for emancipation from the home. As Freedman, Miller, and Yano explain, she

...was not merely a passive consumer of goods; she was also an active producer of customs. Among the many traits assigned to the modern girl, her ... seeming autonomy from the family system... most vividly illustrated her subjectivity in and subjection to this moment of rupture with the past... (Freedman, Miller, and Yano 2013: 6).

Since the 1980s, as young women have joined the labour force in greater numbers, many have asserted their autonomy from traditional family system by forestalling or rejecting marriage and motherhood. Their emancipation from traditional domestic responsibilities and increased purchasing power, permitted them to spend more money on themselves. Once again, conservative voices responded with contempt, with sociologist Yamada Masahiro caricaturing the so-called 'parasite singles' who maximised their buying power by living at home with their parents (Yamada 1999). This consumer power, coupled with their high demand for foreign goods and experiences, have granted young women access to a world outside of Japan:

Using the money generated by the Japanese economy to embark on a program of intensive consumption of foreign goods, food, and travel, young single women soon emerged as the most thoroughly 'cosmopolitan' population in Japan. In the process, some of these women... began to pursue more serious involvement with the foreign through language study, study abroad, employment in foreign-affiliate firms, and other means... (Kelsky 2001: 85-86).

Alongside the diminishment of the Bubble period's economic excesses, Japan has seen a society-wide retreat from 'the jubilant, flagrant sexuality of the early 1990s' (Bailey 2006: 112). Nonetheless, the 'idealised masculinity embodied in

white English-speaking males' (Bailey 2006: 112) remains visible in contemporary marketing to women because cosmopolitanism, self-improvement, travel, education, and sexual freedom are interwoven into the heavily commoditised idea of 'international exchange'. According to Bailey, the sense of 'longing' (*akogare*) deployed in the marketing of international exchange encapsulates

a set of elusive, phantasmagoric notions such as freedom from ideologies; increased social mobility; excitement; openness; change; space; power... *Akogare* is desire: in this case it is women's desire for power, work, and the consumption of an idealised masculinity embodied in white English-speaking males (Bailey 2006: 110).

The wrong kind of *gaijin*

Yamada was especially keen to befriend Alan, whom he courted with a puppyish sincerity. They began spending time together in the late summer, and in August a bored Alan, whose savings were running low, accepted a job at Yamada's new business interest importing and distributing trolleys. Alan dutifully covered his arm tattoos with a white armband in deference to office protocol, despite the humid summer weather. (When forgot his sleeve one night at a nightclub, Yamada spent the following morning on his mobile phone apologising to the receptionist in the adjacent suite). Yamada began spending more time in the house, returning home late with Alan after a long night of after-work carousing at Yamada's pricey club with his own bottle-keep, or (depending on business) at lower-tier 'snack bars' closer to home.

Some nights I was invited along for dinner. I would take the train to meet them in the city, closer to Yamada's office, where we would pretend I was ignorant of their cooperative womanising (Alan would insist on telling me later). Most nights, however, I saw them at the house late at night after a weeknight bender, when the two would squabble, exchange lascivious descriptions of women, and eventually retire for a few hours' sleep before waking to face another day like the one before.

They continued to work and play together throughout the summer. Yamada was making full use of Alan's misleadingly wholesome American features and natural charisma on the regional circuit of trade shows for his new import interest and on Osaka's active nightlife scene. As they entered a trade show, Yamada (who always retained his ability to separate business from pleasure) admonished Alan not to embarrass him with the models, Alan's preference for whom was well documented.

One evening, Alan and I persuaded Yamada to join us for dinner at our favourite chain restaurant, despite his snobbery. The cheap beer soon quelled his superciliousness, and he laughed with boozy affability as Alan and I bantered about our lives in Japan. This was one of Yamada's favourite topics of conversation - in part because he prided himself on being more cosmopolitan, and therefore more casual about foreigners, than other Japanese. 'Japanese don't understand how to act around foreigners; they get nervous', he scoffed, in response to the awkward and bizarre anecdotes we provided for his delectation.

Thinking I was giving him the praise he believed himself due, I exclaimed 'You're not weird around us! I guess you're not a typical Japanese!' Suddenly silent, he lowered his eyes and pointed to his nose. 'I'm Korean. Please don't tell the others'.

The wrong kind of *gaijin*, part II

Sharehouse marketing offers 'international exchange' through day-to-day interaction with foreigners, but not all foreigners are created equal. Like the Japanese employees of the JET Programme, the sharehouse owners and marketers I interviewed admitted that they screened foreign applicants on various criteria like age, sex, appearance, ethnic background, and nationality. In an effort to maintain the distinction from *gaijin* guesthouses, in practice many sharehouse owners/managers impose rigid quotas on the numbers and profiles of foreigners they will accept.

For approximately half of my tenancy at Cheznew, for instance, I was the only Westerner and for several brief periods I was the only foreigner. Through my friendship with Yamada, I was privy to the fact that management maintained a strict quota on certain types of non-Japanese Asian residents, too many of whom would threaten the house's social cohesion. Yamada explained the hierarchy of foreigners to me: white foreigners were the most desirable, but only in small quantities; Hong Kongese, Taiwanese, and Chinese were good company but were not trustworthy because they 'only thought of themselves', so it was best to limit

them as well. When in midsummer the house contained four young Taiwanese on working holidays, Yamada confided to me that he and owner Kobayashi were concerned that this was too many because ‘they cluster together too much’ and had agreed that they would try to control their numbers better in the future.

The numbers and nationalities of foreigners in a property vary significantly according to the preferences and prejudices of owners and managers, as well as their target clientele. Marketing for houses like Daisuke Watanabe’s female-only ‘cocoon’ franchise that emphasised safety and order placed tight restrictions on the number of foreign residents allowed. Watanabe happily reported to me that he had found the ideal ratio of one foreigner for every four Japanese through trial and error. This was enough to make a property ‘international’ (*kokusaiteki*) without letting things get out of hand. ‘Too many foreigners is no good’, he explained, because ‘after all, this is Japan and we are Japanese’. With only one foreign ‘sister’ in a house, on the other hand, Japanese women would want to ‘support’ her: ‘Japanese residents want to help foreigners. They will take them to see the geisha in Kyoto, they will help them wear kimono... things like this’.

In general, sharehouses targeted at younger Japanese tended to permit a greater proportion of foreign residents; in Kamimoto Muneaki’s ‘Japan & Foreigner House’ franchises and Yusuke Komori’s Expo House properties in Kyoto’s university district, approximately half of the housemates are foreign. Cheznew’s management team fell somewhere between these extremes, carefully vetting a limited number of foreigners, but without any official quotas.

Processes of self-selection also affect the number and variety of foreign housemates in a property. Because contracts are rarely available in languages other than Japanese, for example, those foreigners who are able to navigate the move-in process must have some level of Japanese language proficiency. Because of the lack of a long-term rental contract and key deposit, the sharehouse provides an opportunity for foreigners to enter Japan on a temporary basis, often in the hopes of connecting with other ex-patriots from their home country with whom they might set up a more permanent shared household. Cheznew's two housemates from Hong Kong only stayed in the house long enough to find accommodation elsewhere, as had two young Korean women who came and went without having interacted significantly with the rest of the housemates. For them, too, Cheznew was an entry point to Japan from which they quickly sought an escape: one to Tsuruhashi, Osaka's Koreatown, and the other to Tokyo, where she moved in with Korean girls she met through friends.

The wrong kind of *gaijin*, part III

It was poor timing that Yamada was away on business when Alan announced that his friend Darrell, whom he met on his first trip to Japan years before, was coming back to Osaka for a visit in September. Amongst Yamada's quirks was a fascination with black people, and he was always sure to point them out to me on the rare occasions the opportunity arose. This was usually when we spent time

together in Osaka, but he was delighted when he spotted a ‘funky black couple’ at the fish market one Sunday.

Alan knew Darrell from the *gaijin* guesthouse where he had stayed years earlier when he had first arrived in Japan with little Japanese ability. The house where they had stayed together was small – it housed only five people, four of them foreign – and was located in a quiet suburb on the other end of the city with as homogenous a population as Naniwa’s. As a consequence, most of his Darrell stories concerned Darrell’s uneasy reception from the locals, and occasionally his very enthusiastic reception by Osakan girls.

By the time Darrell came to visit, he had been living in Korea for three years, working as an English teacher but aspiring to become a model and fashion photographer. It was in this capacity that he had met his girlfriend, a stunning Korean model, and they came to visit Alan at the house with a male Japanese friend for dinner and drinks. Alan and I prepared *gyoza* for his friends, and then we took them for an *izakaya* dinner before a late party at the house. Somewhat surprisingly, we did not see many of the housemates, who ate dinner quickly and returned to their rooms; only Matsuhiko stayed long enough for several cans of *chūhai*, and only left after exchanging information with Darrell (possibly in the hopes that the beautiful Korean had an eligible friend).

I was concerned about the housemates’ reaction to three visitors staying overnight, but they were not my guests. Our rental contract stipulated that

overnight guests were permitted at a charge of 1,000 yen per night per guest, a fee the management company had never enforced despite reports from Yamada about Alan's almost nightly houseguests, so Alan prepared himself to part with the 3,000 yen and staggered up to bed. I awoke to a knock at my door several hours later, and Alan whispering my name. Without invitation, he let himself in. 'I need your help. Kobayashi and Umeda are here. They've been receiving complaints since last night, and they're threatening to call the police'.

I pulled myself together and ten minutes later joined Alan on the sofa facing Umeda and Kobayashi. Despite the early hour, they were both in business dress and had traveled nearly an hour from their offices in the city. 'It's just', Kobayashi explained in measured tones, 'the housemates were scared. We don't want anyone to call the police. The neighbours would see, and... what if someone was raped?', he asked, gesturing at me. Umeda frowned, frustrated. 'It's just that Japanese people see a black face, and they're scared'.

Following the Darrell episode, relations between Alan and the other housemates degenerated. Kobayashi had refused to disclose which of the housemates had complained to him, so we were abstractly suspicious of all the housemates who had been home on that night. Alan continued to work long hours in Osaka for Yamada's new operation to return late to the house after an insalubrious night on the town. By this time, several of the housemates had made comments to me about Yamada and Alan's late nights, their comedy now tinged with a slight wariness.

In the second week of October I was in my room working when I heard Yamada slurring loudly, his voice thick and hostile. We were under management company instructions (conveyed by Yamada) not to disrupt the neighbours with excessive noise, and it was unusual to hear anything but the rumbling of the train after dark in our sleepy neighbourhood. My room was in the rear of the house, facing a *manshon* separated by only a few metres. That I could hear Yamada and Alan meant they must be in the parking lot at the front of the house, and if I could hear them, our neighbours in the adjacent *danchi* surely could as well.

I bolted down the stairs to find eight housemates seated on the sofas. All were facing the television monitor, eyes unwavering from the video game racing track where Ueno and Chie were competing at a video game. From a distance of about thirty feet, I could hear Yamada's voice becoming louder and more forceful. From outside, the sound of Alan's voice rose, slowly repeating 'don't hit me'. We heard a punch and, suddenly, silence. The housemates around the TV, who had been doing their best to replicate a normal night at home with forced, slightly hushed expressions of encouragement for competitors Ueno and Chie, glanced at each other anxiously. Alan, perhaps the most drunk I had ever seen him in a storied career of overindulgence, strode in with a wry smile to collapse on the nearest sofa, scattering nearby housemates to the other side of the living room. Yamada followed, speaking loudly but mainly incomprehensibly while Alan, still smiling eerily, echoed 'You hit me'.

The other housemates looked away; Mario Kart had been quietly resumed, and the others stared at the screen, leaning in to listen to Yamada and Alan. Alan's thousand-yard stare alternated between Yamada and a point on the floor several feet ahead. When I offered to call the police, Yamada stood over me, menacingly, and bellowed that the police wouldn't care about *gaijin*. My housemates did not move their eyes from the screen.

Overnight, the swelling over Alan's eye had blossomed into a grotesque tapestry of purple and yellow. Yamada called Alan midmorning, telling him not to come to the office for several days. By the time Alan's eye recovered its regular form, Yamada had brought himself to apologise and invited him back to work; but by this time, Alan had moved out and into a seedy motel in down-market Shinsekai, where he paid 1,500 yen per night. A week later he left Japan, abandoning everything but a suitcase of his clothing and books, in his room. He did not respond to Cheznew management's repeated attempts to contact him, demanding that he clear out his room before returning to the States.

Conclusions: Buyer's remorse

Sharehouse marketing draws on the unsatisfied demand for 'international exchange' promoted by the government in its *kokusaika* initiatives of the late 1980s and early 1990s and intensified through popular consumption of the 'imagined worlds' of foreign media since the 1990s. They call to mind a sanitised vision of intercultural relations by erasing the realities of ethnic tensions in

Japan and, in emphasising the ‘newness’ of living with foreigners, ignore native antecedents where poorer Japanese shared living space with foreigners, specifically Koreans (see the Introduction). Instead, it envisions ‘international exchange’ as unproblematic and improving, a fiction that is aided by carefully curating the images featured in marketing materials like Hitsuji’s 2010 *Tokyo Share Life*. The hierarchised taxonomy of foreigners Yamada divulged to me, Yamada’s suppression his own ethnic identity, and our housemates’ reaction to the presence of a black foreigner (*kokujin*) in the house, demonstrated the specific way a desirable ‘international exchange’ is imagined, commoditised, and consumed.

In sharehouse guidance literature and on marketing websites, the trope of ‘study abroad in the home’ or ‘study abroad in Japan’ becomes shorthand for the edifying influence of living with foreigners, with some properties offering very limited English language instruction to strengthen the association. In the absence of rigorous language study curricula, and with uncredentialised and non-native English speaking ‘teachers’, however, what is being sold is less an educational than a touristic experience. The *ienaka ryūgaku* rhetoric also echoes contemporary ideas about the value of ‘experience tourism’ as self-discovery through the accumulation of experiences and interactions over souvenirs. Merry White describes the ‘new tourist’ to Italy as a woman

...in search of an imagined self-in-Italy, a knowledgeable, sophisticated woman of the world displaying her cosmopolitanism in a learned Italy, but remaining open to transformations of that self possible only through an engagement beyond the safety of what she already knows... What she brings back is not armloads of *omiyage* but what she may display as

'experience' or 'personal transformation' into a global person (White 2009: 206).

In the complicated realm of 'study abroad at home', the roles of 'tourist' and 'native', 'student' and 'teacher', become blurred. As foreigners teach Japanese residents to be more cosmopolitan, to express themselves more freely, or perhaps a few words of English, Japanese residents like those Watanabe describes 'support' their foreign 'sisters' by teaching them about geisha and kimono. Edward Bruner's description of the touristic encounter as a 'borderzone of engagement' is particularly relevant to the way day-to-day international exchange both exceeds and fails to satisfy the idealised expectations of international exchange:

Although the borderzone is located in an actual place in the world, what is created there is a cultural imaginary, a fantasy, in itself not a real-life culture but a constructed theatrical one... Of course, it doesn't always work well, and there are conflicts of interest – natives can become hostile, performances can be uninteresting, the narrative structure can become muddled.... Rather, both locals and tourists engage in a coproduction: they each take account of the other in an ever-shifting, contested, evolving borderzone of engagement (Bruner 2004: 18).

No matter how thoroughly foreign residents are vetted, or their numbers controlled, their presence is likely to be disruptive in a way that is desirable in the limited context of a foreign holiday but burdensome in everyday life. The misalignment between the idealised social space of the sharehouse as a site of constructive international exchange and the realities of intercultural cohabitation came clear during my tenure at Cheznew, including my own failure to meet my housemates' expectations of unobtrusive Western women. Alan's

behaviour, meanwhile, steadily dismantled my female housemates' illusions about white male chivalry (*yasashisa*). Though a rather extreme example, was Alan was not unique amongst foreign men in having come to Japan to escape himself and enjoy some erotic experimentation without long-term social consequences; female housemates like Haruko and Yume, on the other hand, sought a supportive long-term partner who would also serve as their ticket to a new self and ideally a new life overseas. Their interest in Western men was strongly motivated by an idealised image of specifically white manhood characterised by chivalry and progressive ideas about gender equality when, for men like Alan, Japan was an opportunity to escape those expectations. The encounter between Japanese and foreign housemates was, as I demonstrate above, often characterised by this mutual miscomprehension and the confrontation between imagined versions of international exchange.

Chapter 4: Public and Private

*What I don't understand about the sharehouse is... what about the genkan?
What do you mean? Of course we have a genkan.
But do you have just the one, or is there a little one for every room?*

--excerpt from a conversation with Murachi-san, an engineer in his mid-fifties, about my work in the sharehouse

The experimental space of the sharehouse presented opportunities and challenges for young people with limited experience of living outside the family home. As I describe in this chapter, Japan came to associate privacy with the home and family during the 20th century, so a domestic space unrelated to the family presents certain conceptual difficulties. This chapter explores my housemates' and the sharehouse marketing industry's strategies for managing this conceptual ambiguity - by disavowing or emphasising its resemblance to the 'private' family home. Within Cheznew, efforts to distinguish the house from the template of the family home included the proliferation of instructional posters that referenced, both linguistically and stylistically, the iconic manner posters in Japanese subways; prohibitions against the placement of privately-owned goods in shared spaces; and female housemates' sartorial self-policing.

'I'm not towel! I'm bathmat!'

The first instructional poster showed up in Cheznew in April, just after the first influx of new housemates. It was, I regret to say, in response to my inadvertent misuse of the washing machine. I had been unwittingly pouring laundry

detergent into the wrong part of the washing machines for approximately a month when I returned to find an A4-sized hand-lettered sign reading 'do not put detergent here!' underlined in red, over a detailed rendering of a washing machine and an 'x' over the area in question. The tone of the poster was gently coercive, and the illustration diligently rendered. Its author had clearly taken pains to communicate her message without offense. Nonetheless, it was jarring to find this poster in the entryway. There were at this time only ten residents in the house, so it would have been possible, probably simpler, to bring the issue up casually face-to-face in the evening, when housemates converged in the kitchen.

It was immediately clear who had produced this little cartoon missive. As we all knew, Sachiko had studied art in school and dreamed of a career as an illustrator. Her recognizable style identified her as the sign's author even though she had not signed it, and she had faithfully reproduced our washing machine in pencil before embellishing it with red and black marker. The machine was foreshortened and its hard angles softened, though the importance of using the machine correctly – and the fact that its misuse had not escaped notice – was conveyed without ambiguity. Unlike many of the posters to follow, the cartoonishness of the doodle was restrained (the washing machine did not have a face, nor did it speak), and it was written entirely in Japanese.

Sachiko's decision to hang a poster was based on a desire to avoid direct conflict, as she confirmed when I approached her in the kitchen the following day, confessing to misusing the machine and thanking her for telling me how to use it

in such a gentle way. 'Oh', she blushed, 'I thought so, because you're not from here so you don't know things like that. But I didn't want to embarrass anybody'.

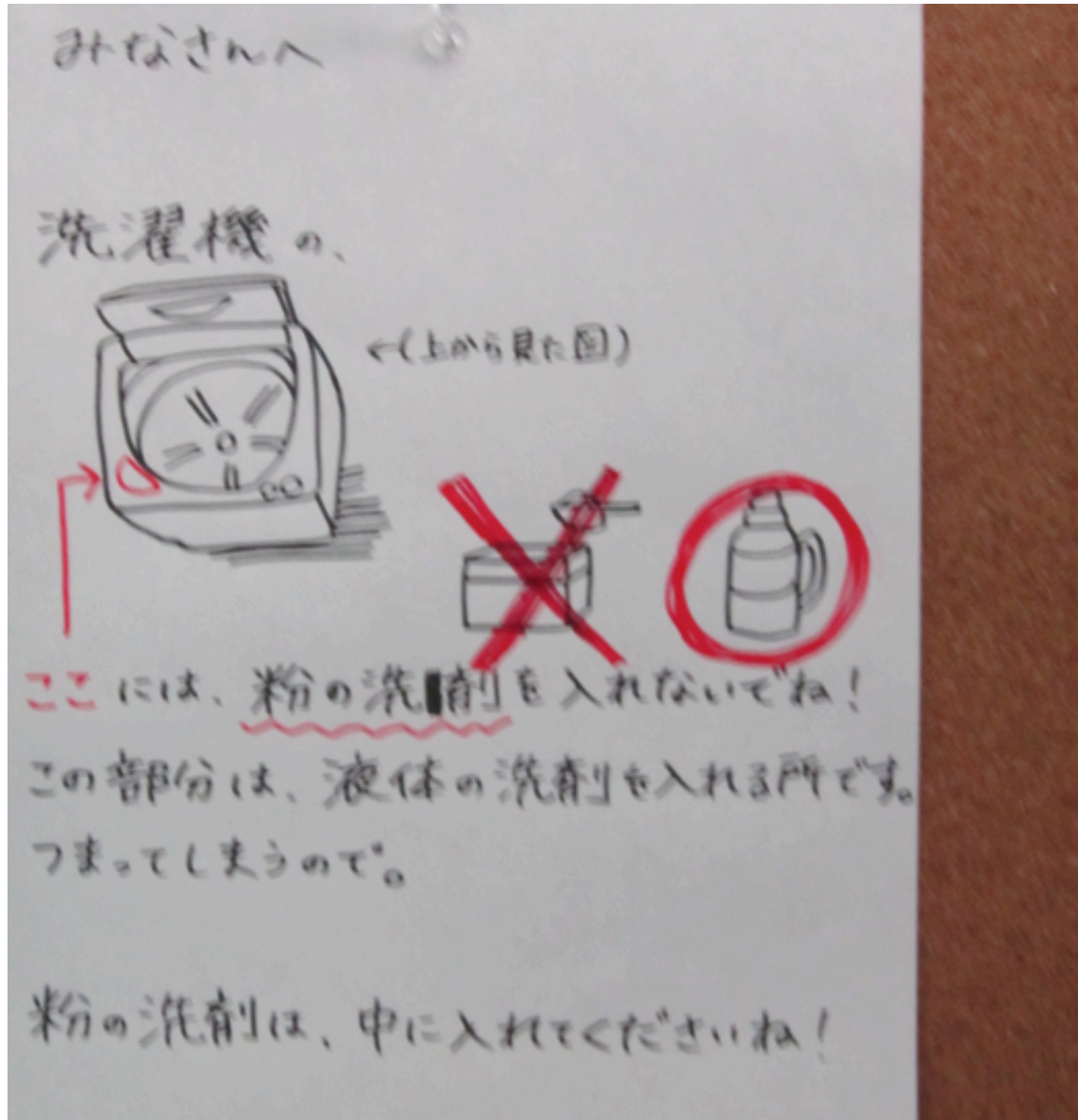


Figure 13: Cheznew's first instructional poster, by Sachiko. 'Everyone: with regard to the washing machine (view from above), do not put WASHING POWDER HERE. This part is for LIQUID DETERGENT. It will build up. Washing powder in the drum, please!'

This poster not only improved my laundry room etiquette; it set the precedent for what would become a scourge of didactic posters and signs instructing other

housemates on everything from cleaning the bathtub after use to how to operate a cockroach trap. Over the following months, the signs increased in number and sophistication. At one point, I delighted those present when, returning home to find a small easel had been erected on the kitchen table instructing us not to leave sharable food supplies there (and occupying valuable food preparation space), I demanded with exasperation whether we could keep any space free of instructional literature.

Yume, the web designer, was the most prolific author of illustrated posters, many of which were polychromatic masterpieces: angry-looking bathmats begging to be hung up after use; instructions for the use of (anthropomorphised) insect repellent she had provided; where and how to store shared cooking staples; and so forth. Her unmistakable style immediately identified her authorship, although (like Sachiko) she did not sign her name. Where Sachiko's artistry had been restrained, Yume's was extravagant. The effort she dedicated to illustrating these vibrant polychromatic missives - sprinkled with her favourite English collocations 'God dammit!' and 'Go to hell!' - was out of proportion to the severity of the problems they addressed. Making the posters became a hobby for her, one that advertised her artistic talents and her English language abilities to the others.

Yamada and I were the only housemates who openly objected to living amidst the signs, and as it turned out his objection was at least partially *ad hominem*: he remained fiercely in conflict with Yume for the duration of his stay in the house

due to the issue of borrowed money in April. Returning home from a boozy dinner, I remarked on the appearance of yet another sign by Yume. Yamada didn't require any further encouragement, and tore the sign off the wall. The next morning, I lied to Yume (to spare her feelings, to avoid escalating hostilities between my two friends, and to cover over my own involvement), speculating that it must have fallen off the wall due to the moisture in the air. She did not seem to believe me, but she was undeterred and continued to manufacture manner posters at the same unrelenting pace as before.



Figure 14: An instructional poster by Yume in her characteristic style.

Other less artistic housemates left their own signature on the posters they created. Left-brained programmer Kenichi did not draw pictures, but used English as a decorative flourish on his multi-media campaign against leaving hairs in the bathtub. There were only two native English speakers in the house, and we were competent in Japanese while most residents were not competent in English. The purpose of the English translations was more performative than strictly communicative; like Yume's carefully rendered household items, Kenichi's use of English (though riddled with errors) conveyed a message about his upbringing and opportunities that was in some respects more crucial than the diegetic messages about bathroom hygiene.

Like Yume's and Sachiko's artistic talents, the appearance of English language proficiency was a mark of distinction among the housemates. The most proficient in the house were Kenichi and Haruko, who had the benefit of studying English for some short period abroad following their completion of compulsory education. Even their limited English ability gave the *cachet* of worldly sophistication, of course, but it also indicated a privileged background. English language instruction is included as a mandatory subject in the Japanese curriculum but typically results in very limited functional ability. According to MEXT, 'due to the lack of sufficient ability, many Japanese are restricted in their interactions with foreigners' (Yamada 2014: 26)¹⁹. Moreover, 'English learning is

¹⁹ In 2013, Japan ranked 40th out of 48 countries, despite decades-long government initiatives to increase English proficiency (Educational Testing Service: 2013). C.H. Kwan, Senior Researcher at Japan's Research Institute of Economy, Trade, and Industry attributes Japan's low level of English language

clearly linked to economic and business sectors and may create a socio-economic disparity in Japan' (Yamada 2014:26). English language ability functions as an index of elevated social class because it generally requires the investment of family resources in private, extra-compulsory education. The meritocratic ideology at the centre of Japanese educational discourses suggests a natural correspondence between academic knowledge acquisition and social level.

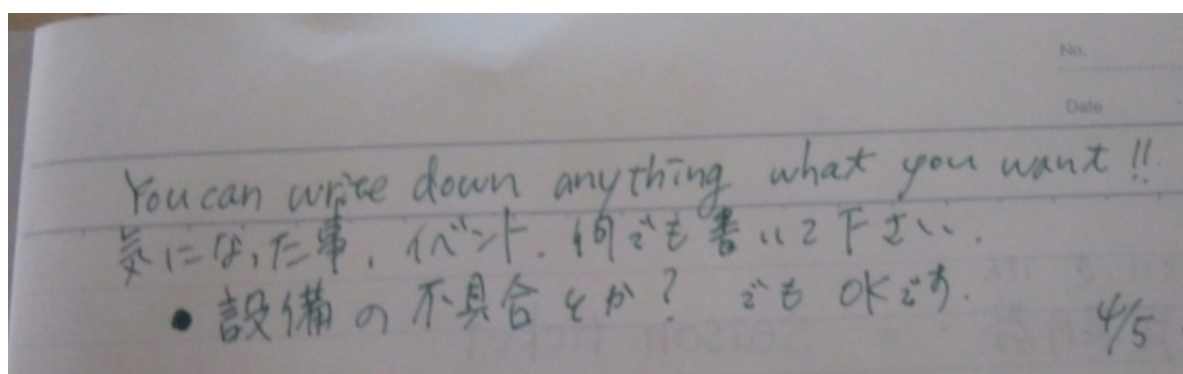


Figure 15: Kenichi demonstrates his English in the message book he provides.

Posters and public space

As I have suggested, the function of my housemates' manner posters was not primarily the moral suasion and behavioural guidance that was their putative purpose. Thick black hairs continued to accumulate in the drain. I still entered the bath to find the bathmat crumpled and damp, only now I saw it glaring up at me from the floor with Yume's assiduously rendered cartoon scowl. An important purpose of these posters was for housemates to make claims about the social atmosphere in the house and their own roles within it. These posters,

proficiency to students' lack of motivation to learn and the country's reliance on a pedagogical philosophy that emphasises test preparation over functional proficiency (Kwan 2002).

even including the admonitions in Kenichi's notebook, maintained a sense of playfulness even as they asserted the authors' authority to instruct.

The obvious stylistic precedent for the posters my housemates created (including in some cases the gratuitous use of English) is the public safety sign ubiquitous in Japan. The most iconic of these instructional posters are the 'manner posters' that originated on Tokyo subways in the 1970s. Tokyo University architect Julian Worrall claims that these posters are a medium through which a specific type of public space is created, maintained, and reproduced: 'the "manner poster" can be regarded as an advertisement for social virtue in public space. Lacking legal force, they are exercises in "moral suasion"' (Worrall 2004: 154).

Housemates' use of anthropomorphic bathmats and washing machines, as opposed to human figures, did work to soften the moral message; housemates read it as 'suasive' rather than bossy. Sachiko, who contributed only the first poster, said she saw subsequent posters as helpful or, at least, inoffensive: 'Maybe different people came from different homes, so it's possible they weren't taught these things. I think they're cute, and this way everybody knows how to keep the house clean in the proper way'. Tomoko explained that 'I feel that they consider people's feelings; they are funny and they don't make people feel like they are being bossed around'.

The cuteness of the drawings mimics contemporary conventions of subway manners posters. Worrall discusses a stylistic shift from the earliest posters in 1974, which featured mostly photographic imagery of Japanese commuters (or actors) to teddy bears (Worrall 2004: 158-9); since the publication of Worrall's analysis, the use of 'cute' cartoon depictions of humans and animals has continued to increase. Brian McVeigh confirms the ubiquity of Japanese 'authority cuteness' in which 'centres of authority... attempt to associate themselves with smiling babies, innocent children, talking animals pretty colours, innocent funny creatures and *akarui* (cheerful) things' (McVeigh 2000: 150) as a means of softening their image - but not their very real institutional powers (McVeigh 2000: 152). At Cheznew, the combination of the evocative imagery and didactic text in these posters made it possible for housemates to assume a social role to instruct others without appearing presumptuous.

According to Laura Miller, the use of cartoons in manner posters 'defuses its preachiness' (Miller 2011: 236), but has the additional advantage of generalising the message's audience by avoiding any specificity of address:

The use of animals is a form of displacement that renders potentially dangerous or sensitive domains and topics safe and acceptable... they permit greater reader, audience, or consumer inclusion by erasing or abating such traits as gender or class from the imagery (Miller 2011: 236).

In posting these instructions in the foyer and other shared spaces, my housemate sign-makers avoided directly addressing any one housemate or group of housemates (for example, sparing both Sachiko and me the awkwardness of a 24-year-old instructing a 35-year-old about how to use household appliances).

According to linguistic anthropologist Patricia Wetzel, Japanese manner posters and advertising often manipulate the lexical ambiguity of speaker and subject (the 'shifting social deixis' in Japanese (Wetzel 2010: 325-342). Although, unlike the advertising examples Wetzel provides, the housemates' posters typically used the polite imperative ('please') rather than the first-person plural 'let's', posting signs in shared spaces was sufficient to diffuse the accusative tone of the instruction. This strategy both expanded their audience and avoided the awkward aggressiveness of direct allegation, even when (as was usually the case) the identities of both the poster maker and the target audience were clear.

These messages, which might have been conveyed at a house meeting or otherwise from hand to ear, took on a different meaning when they became materialised in this format: the transposition of a recognisably public communicative medium into an ostensibly private domestic space, communicated a correspondence between 'common space' in the sharehouse and 'public space' in the world. That correspondence implied a specific type of social relationship, distinct from the presumed 'privacy' of the family home. In posting signs with these stylistic and linguistic attributes, housemates effectively underscored the public-ness of the shared living room, bathrooms, and kitchens; and in so doing they categorised the social relationships within the house as properly civic, rather than quasi-familial. The use of English as an advertisement of personal distinction, meanwhile, underscored the distance from the family home through an insistence on social difference.

Negotiating boundaries at Cheznew: the politics of display

Cheznew's owner, Kobayashi, had spent time backpacking through southeast Asia in his late 20s and had shared living spaces there with backpackers from all over the world. Through his travels, he had developed a curiosity about the possibilities for living in a structured shared environment - but Kobayashi was also a shrewd businessman in his early 40s. Since those experiences more than a decade earlier, he had found some success in a variety of business ventures, the nature of which remained opaque to Cheznew's residents, but Cheznew was his first sharehouse, and he was clearly learning on the job.²⁰ As a result, the first six months at Cheznew saw continuous shifts in policies regarding acceptable uses of common space.

When I moved in to the nearly empty Cheznew, there was nothing in the common areas that had not been furnished by the management company and its designer. There were functional amenities like electronics and furniture (mainly mismatched sofas and a small table positioned around the television in one half of the room, and a large table with benches and several café tables with matching chairs in the other). There was a single computer provided for public use, which went unused by everybody but myself because housemates accessed the internet easily and privately on their smartphones. The only decorations were several aromatherapy candles, a single interior design magazine, and a red clock, lending

²⁰ Hitsuji president Kitagawa Daisuke corroborated in our interview that Cheznew suffered the inexperience of the ownership and management staff, which Mr. Kitagawa promised he was working to help Kobayashi remedy.

the giant, concrete-walled living room an even starker and more institutional appearance.

As time went on, however, the storage spaces in the bathrooms and kitchen designated for things like our toiletries inevitably began to fill up. The racks by the washing machines saw piles of washing powder boxes, and in the kitchen, rarely used cooking supplies purchased in contemplation of an exotic project began to accumulate on the benches and shelving. Until about midsummer, the living room remained virtually empty of personal effects, with the single exception of Chie's old 'Supa Fami-con' gaming system, which everyone was permitted to use and which dominated our evening socialising.

During the day, the housemates would use the living room to eat, read, watch television, catch up on work, or simply to linger. As a result, many of us were carrying armfuls of work materials back and forth from our bedrooms to the living room each day. We had been provided a kind of bookshelf composed of cubbyholes that ran along one side of the living room, and I proposed that we each designate one space for storage of our personal affects. The cubbyholes were below eye level and behind a sofa, and sensing no objections, several housemates – including Ueno, Matsuhiko, Yume, Haruko, and I began leaving books and other materials in the cubbyholes, available for use as needed.

The presence of these materials went unremarked for several months. Over the same period, small personal effects began to show up elsewhere in the living

room, though usually because they had been forgotten rather than consciously placed there. The few items that were placed purposefully included some inoffensive travel photographs taken by Matsuhiko, which he hung with binder clips on a string on the far wall. As housemates attended festivals and brought home various souvenir toys and decorations, these, too, would lie discarded on the large table. Housemate Kiyoshi would bring home the occasional promotional toy from Loft, the gift and stationary retailer where he worked as a clerk. There were markers and paper for absent-minded doodling and well-thumbed beauty and fitness magazines, as well as rotating supply of *omiyage* brought back from housemates' travel.

The transition from the house's initial sterility to the homey disorder was gradual and organic; but the return to a more strictly managed atmosphere was sudden. I returned in middle of September from a weeklong research trip to Tokyo to find the living room much changed. Under instruction from the management company, newly installed House Manager Matsuhiko had packed away or discarded these little artefacts of our lives - the paper fans, toys, and sweets. The unauthorised books and reading materials that had been stored in our cubbyholes had been packed into a box and stowed in the supply closet behind the 'fitness room' amidst the cleaning supplies. Instead, on the bookshelf had been arranged more of Matsuhiko's photographs, a couple of small potted cacti, and several hardbound photography books, including a collection of photographs from 'National Geographic'. The management company had initiated a new regime of aesthetic standardisation that prettified the space

while eliminating individual claims on it. In this way, the encroaching ambiguity of the space was corrected and the environment arranged in accordance with a unified aesthetic vision. The sense of co-ownership that had incrementally emerged through the material accumulation of residents' experiences had been replaced with a self-conscious management of the sharehouse's interior aesthetics, restoring the bland anonymity of the 'international café'.

Curating the space in this way was part of a more thoroughgoing rationalisation of life at Cheznew dedicated from above in response to events that betrayed emerging tensions among residents over the nature and appropriate use of shared space.²¹ The banishment of the relatively few personal or personally supplied objects from the living room (and eventually the kitchen and bath) served a symbolic as well as a practical objective, limiting individual uses of the shared spaces.

'If it were a family, we wouldn't have this'

Amongst the sharehouses I visited, I saw varying degrees of formality with regard to the arrangement and decoration of common space. When I visited J&F (Japan and Foreigner) House in Osaka, the common space (with appliances of various make and size installed haphazardly) bore the traces of recent and

²¹ As I described in Chapter 3, some housemates (including Alan) had begun to invite non-residents over and while there was no explicit prohibition against overnight guests – in fact the resident contract included an explicit provision that overnight guests were permitted for an additional 1,000 yen per night – some housemates had complained to management about the presence of non-residents on the property.

ongoing resident use; soft toys, old *manga* and CDs, several gaming systems, and (remarkably) a blue electric guitar lay about, making the space visually chaotic. Company owner Muneaki-san confirmed to me during an interview in his offices that he preferred to take a casual approach to the management of interior space, allowing residents to do what made them feel at home.

The *shiriai* ('acquaintance') sharehouses managed by Komori Yusuke in the student district of Kyoto, meanwhile, had been decorated to a high standard by his artisan contractor father, incorporating existing architectural features like exposed roof beams alongside state-of-the-art kitchen amenities in a flowing, open plan with new tatami floors. However, the countertops were littered with notes with apparent in-jokes between residents; stylistically incongruous clay toys sat atop the shoe rack in the *genkan*. Everywhere I looked, the traces of the housemate's lives were visible. According to Komori, 'it's their home, so I want them to be comfortable'. He happily tolerated these expressions of shared ownership of common space.

When I spoke with Watanabe-san, the owner of Cocoon, we were seated in the common area of one of his five-room sharehouses in a high-rise apartment building in north Osaka. This apartment was structurally identical to the other three he'd shown me on different floors in the same building, but he had decorated each to suit a theme or 'concept'. We had seen 'Cuisine', with mass-produced posters designed to look like reproductions of vintage advertisements;

‘New York City’, with decals of artist Keith Haring’s iconic 1980s designs and others replicating graffiti; and ‘Crafts’, with its little plastic Singer sewing machine and a dedicated area for knitting and paper crafts. Now we sat in ‘Café Life’, (his favourite) the theme of which was reinforced through reproductions of vintage café signboards, a bookshelf with books and magazines, and an oversized souvenir menu from a Swiss restaurant he had visited displayed on an easel.

Most remarkable about these interiors, painstakingly curated by Watanabe according to each house’s ‘concept’, was his absolute loyalty to the motif. No object disrupted the house’s theme, because he had personally installed every item of decoration. Watanabe confessed to being a true believer in the efficacy of protocol. He continued to work as a hotel management consultant, where a career’s worth of experience had instilled his devotion to ‘systems’. As long as protocols were clear and in place, he explained to me, there would be no problems; or, if there were, they were easy enough to correct. Watanabe had been drawn to the sharehouse business not because of any turning point in his own life, unlike the majority of the owners I interviewed, but a more detached desire for financial success in a new market: ‘my *kikake* was an emerging market!’. As such, he was not susceptible to the more romantic visions of sharehouse living. When I asked him whether the sharehouse was becoming a new type of family, as I had read in sharehouse literature, he chortled, gesturing at the bulletin board full of notices and chore rotas his wife had painstakingly produced on their home office laser printer. ‘If it were a family, we wouldn’t have this’.

Privacy, family, and the home in modern Japan

The presumed isometry of home and family, which the sharehouse disrupts by inviting non-kin (*tanin*) into the domestic realm, is one of the reasons sharehouse living retains its associations with foreignness. Sharehouse marketing and guidance literature grapples with the degree of similarity or difference between the sharehouse and the family home, because the assumed equivalence of home and family remains ideologically entrenched despite recent empirical changes in household composition. My housemates' material practices in the home, and the various policies managers and owners imposed with regard to private belongings in their properties, demonstrate the ambiguity and ambivalence about replicating or deviating from the template of the family home.

The idea of the family home invoked in these comparisons is the *katei* (nuclear family household) that came into being in the modern period and isolated private and public spheres. As urban studies scholar Richard explains, 'the Japanese home is characterised by a strong interdependence on the order of the family and the physical order of the house, and is thus considered the materialised order of the family (Engel, 1964)' (Ronald 2011: 168).

According to historian Jordan Sand, the composition of the Japanese home as family was a consequence of progressive intellectuals' projects to correct Japan's cultural backwardness through the increasingly complete segregation of public and private spheres:

As the residuum ... of [the] construction and differentiation of public space, the home possessed a double heterogeneity, not only distinct as one of many institutions within bourgeois society but also distinct as a space apart from the political space that was dubbed 'society'... (Sand 2005: 4-5).

One obvious consequence of this process is that the family home became conceptually conjoined with the notion of 'privacy' captured by the idea of *uchi* (which can also refer to the household). The frame of *uchi* and its opposite (*soto*) are a central prism through which the Japanese perceive and mediate social relationships (Lebra 1976; Lebra 2004: 99-223; Bachnik 1995: 3-37; Hendry 2013: 23-40; Martinez 2006: 32). As Ritsuko Ozaki and John Rees Lewis explain,

The distinction between the inside and the outside ...relates not only to physical spaces, but also to psychosocial values. That is, the inside is associated with purity, cleanliness, safety, and intimacy (inside the group as well as inside a physical space), and the outside is associated with impurity, dirt, danger, and strangeness (Ozaki and Rees Lewis 2006: 93)

Thus, the *uchi* (private, inside) pole references interiority, but it also comprehends membership, affinity, and belongingness, while its opposite - *soto* - encompasses exteriority, otherness, and various kinds of difference and exclusion. According to Ritsuko Ozaki, in the modern period the equivalence of the family with the home and privacy was so absolute that the concept of personal privacy did not exist:

...what Japanese society meant by privacy was not quite the same as the English term. It was not 'personal privacy' but 'familial privacy', because the family, not the individual, was the basic unit of society... The house did not contain personal spaces because of the lack of a sense of personal privacy... (Ozaki 2001: 354).

Over the course of the 20th century, the family home as the seat of *uchi* was sanctified and segregated through its so-called 'nuclearisation', which redefined

the family according to direct biological ties and forbade cohabitation with non-relatives (*tanin*), who came to personify *soto*.²²

Yet, even as the interiority of the home and family was being conceptually sequestered against the outside world in the modern period with the ascendancy of the *katei* model, stricter spatial districting within the home disrupted its unity. Owing to Japan's post-war affluence and the rising middle class, new construction accommodated the compartmentalisation of family member's private activities into spaces demarcated for individual use. Most importantly, the provision of private bedrooms, thought to encourage children's study habits, realised the realm of 'personal privacy' Ozaki rejected.²³

In practice, the *katei* is not a stable 'interior' space demarcated by the threshold against the outside world, the *genkan*: the liminal space that 'marks [the] transition from family space to the world at large' (Ronald 2011: 177). As Inge Daniels demonstrates, even in a conventional Japanese home, the structure of the

²² In practice, this segregation of family and *tanin* was never complete, and the categories somewhat fluid. Japan has a long tradition of manipulating kinship categories, as adoption served as a solution to inheritance and continuity problems (Befu 1962: 34-41; Kurosu 1998). Krogness (2011) explores the various ways the *koseki* is manipulated and adjusted to accommodate new kinship arrangements, including those headed by women; in 2010, the city of Nanto bestowed a 'special *koseki*' on the Japan-produced robotic therapy seal PARO (Robertson 2014: 571-598). Richard Ronald confirms that 'Essentially the Japanese home has acted as a medium and embodiment of cultural values and an ideological system that has facilitated social change whilst (sic) maintaining a vision of continuity which has supported social order and hegemony' (Ronald 2011: 168).

²³ It was also in this period that Western-style fixtures like the bed became more common, indicating a less fluid attitude to the use of space (Waswo 2002: 124-130).

genkan is permeable in practice (Daniels 2010: 78-9), and not the absolute barrier it represents conceptually. Neither is space within the home evenly private; spaces are more or less public and private, relative to each other and in accordance with use practices. According to Dorinne Kondo:

Uchi can refer simply to the physical structure of the house. Within the house, members can indulge in informal, relatively uncensored behaviour...But matters are more complex: the house itself is divided into varying degrees of *uchi*-ness, so to speak. ...Likewise, the rooms of the house itself can be classified into varying degrees of *soto* and *uchi* (Kondo 1990: 144-145).

Thus, the vision of the family home as absolute and undifferentiated *uchi* is more a conceptual template than an empirical reality. The *katei* is an attempt to stabilise categories that exist, as Jane Bachnik explains, in a '...special kind of continuum... [a] potential – consisting of possibilities that can be expressed in time and space' (Bachnik 1992: 7).

Beyond the family home

According to Sand, "Home" in Japan... struggled into existence, consciously cobbled together from a variety of native and foreign models' (Sand 2005: 5). Just as the early modern home 'was an abstract space waiting to be moulded in concrete form' (Sand 2004: 25), the contemporary sharehouse sees this process at work in a still nascent and microcosmic form. Contemporary sharehouse residents participate in this 'moulding' process through a variety of practices in the same way that the emergent middle classes of the early modern period sought to define space through the arbitration of home décor as expressions of cultural capital. In each case, ideas about the appropriate

composition of the home and the relationships amongst its members found formal expression in material practices. My housemates at Cheznew referenced and critiqued the template of the idealised family home, either in an effort to replicate it or, more often, to distinguish the sharehouse as a departure from its conventional roles and interdependence.

My housemates' material strategies to create a quasi-public realm in the living room and other shared areas echoed the ambiguity of these spaces, a frequent theme in sharehouse guidance literature. Sharehouse advocate and cultural theorist Kubota Hiroyuki, argues that the ambiguous nature of common space in the sharehouse eclipses the traditional binarisation of public and private to reveal the essential complementarity of these spheres:

You might call the common space in a sharehouse, which preserves the continuity of the bedroom as a private space while sustaining the continuity of the outside world as a public space, the 'brackish waters' between communal and individual. Perhaps what makes it distinct from living with the family or in a one-room apartment is that in a share[house] the meaning of public space and public-ness are effectively transformed. Based on the model of sharing, common space and private space do not exist in opposition to each other, but could even be said to exist in a complementary relation (Kubota 2009: 128).

In a number of passages, Kubota explicitly contrasts the freedom of the sharehouse with the repression of the family home. For Kubota, in the family home repression is a function of parental interference:

Let's look in greater detail at the difficulties of living with family or alone, the situations that are compared to sharing. ...From the perspective of the child the difficulties of living with family can be expressed directly as 'interference.' This 'interference' is, for example, connected to the fact that even if you have your own room, your privacy is not guaranteed. Living

with people of the same age with similar interests and concerns, on the contrary, you can live the life you want doing whatever you choose, escaping this supervision (Kubota 2009: 68-9).

Here, familial interference is blamed for stultifying individual growth, while the independence and social distance the sharehouse offers are praised for their role in individual self-cultivation. For Kubota, the strength of the sharehouse lies in freedom – a freedom associated with the public sphere - over the ‘private’ sphere of the family home, where it is disrupted by the burdens of intimacy and ‘interference’. In this regard, the sharehouse is an extension of the resident’s public persona into the private sphere of the house, and Kubota echoes the Western politico-philosophical conceit that ‘[t]he public person is fuller, more rational, more complete, and more liberated than the person in private life’ (Sennett 2002: 384, in Worrall 2004: 35).

In sharehouse marketing discourses, references to this potential for individual liberation often promise a ‘third space’, distinct from the realms of work and home (note, however, that in this formulation ‘home’ refers to ‘family home,’ underscoring this conceptual affinity).²⁴ For example, the crowd-funding website for ‘Liverty House’ in Shibuya exclaims, ‘We want to make a sharehouse

²⁴ Cultural geographer Homi Bhabha (1994) coined ‘third space’ to describe a site of exchange and ‘hybridity’ in a postcolonial context. Though subsequent iterations the concept has been deliberately dis-placed: Soja (1996) in particular emphasises the metaphorical over the material sense of the term. In Japanese social scientists’ appropriation, however, a sense of the original material spatiality is retained, perhaps because physical places and the social identities they reproduce/engender are conceived – both by social theorists and Japanese themselves – as strongly isometric. However, contemporary Japanese evocations of ‘third space(s)’ retain Bhabha’s original emphasis on the potential in a third space for the exploration of alternative identities; and the hybridisation of discreet binary categories.

to become a “third space” (*sandai no ibasho*) after home and work (or school)’.

One of its founding members laments:

When I became a full-time worker and had no place other than work and home, I had no place to share my troubles and my ambitions.... In my heart, I could not be satisfied with this loneliness. Feeling this way day in and day out, I could not understand what I really wanted to do, with no impulse to act, my everyday life was nothing but coming and going from work to home. This is why we’re making a ‘third space’! (Liverty House: ‘Making a Third Space’).

The third space signifies escape not only from intrusion by the family, but also from loneliness and *ennui*. Most importantly, however, the language of ‘third space’ carves out a quasi-public realm for human action. According to Chizuko Ueno, urban sociologist Eiichi Isomura introduced the concept of the ‘third space’ in 1975 as a realm differentiated from the first and second spaces of the family home and school/work (Ueno 2009: 223-224). As Ueno goes on to explain, the distinguishing feature of the ‘third space’ envisioned by Isomura and elaborated by subsequent sociologists is that the bonds formed there are selective, as opposed to blood or corporate bonds (Ueno 2009: 224-225). Kyoko Nishikawa, author of the *Sharehouse Guide for Adults*, emphasises that the value of the third space is in its ability to transcend the restrictions of the other spheres.

Nowadays the home and office aren’t the only sites for individual activity. It is an era when each of us, one by one, is discovering the ‘self as an individual’ that is neither worker nor son/daughter, in ‘third spaces’ (neither the home nor the workplace). ... In [the sharehouse... residents] have been able to encounter the ‘third self’ they aspire to. What you can’t see when you are working yourself to death, what can’t be grasped, is the selves they reclaim in this ‘village-like life’ (*murateki seikatsu*) (Nishikawa 2012: 118)²⁵.

²⁵ Chapter 7 offers a more extensive analysis of the concepts ‘village society’ (*mura shakai*) and ‘*ibasho*’.

The 'third space' contemplates a specific model of social relationship freely entered and abandoned, premised on equality and choice and experienced as a respite from the role performance demanded at home and in the workplace/school. In this way the 'third space' strongly resembles the Western concepts of civil society and the public sphere, which as Helen Hardacre has suggested remain underdeveloped in Japan: 'the scope for a public sphere in the classic liberal sense... has throughout modern Japanese history been extremely limited, in addition to being dominated by marketplace issues' (Hardacre 1991: 219).

'A café-like space where we gather and live'

The closest analogy owners and marketers have found for the 'third space'-iness of the sharehouse as a realm distinct from family and work is the café. Merry White suggests that Japanese cafés are a 'private-in-public' (White 2012: 20) that offer a 'neutral or unmarked social space between public and private zones' (White 2012: 36). The café transcends the simple binarisation of *uchi* and *soto* because it requires neither the obligatory intimacy of the family (that sometimes finds expression in the obligation to *amae*, as we saw in Chapter 2) nor the workplace's required obedience to vertical structure. According to White,

The café... is a 'third space' that offers what neither [home nor work] offer (sic), a place where the responsibilities of those primary locations have no weight and a place where the definitions of the individual are concomitantly lighter and more fluid. In workplaces, strong pressure for performance and loyalty is brought to bear on individuals whose identity is wrapped up tightly in the organisation. Home was a place of serious endeavour as well... The café can ... be seen as an alternative community, not replacing either of the primary ones, but through supplying respite

space it may actually facilitate or support participation in the spaces that 'count' (White 2012: 25).

Sharehouse owners and marketers encourage this association between sharehouses and coffee shops: the majority of the large-scale sharehouses I observed, including Cheznew, featured a 'café space' as a standard facility. The gargantuan Anteroom Osaka I discussed above has two 'café' areas, and Mr. Tsujimoto confirmed that these were to encourage 'free interaction and peaceful relaxation'. Sharehouse café spaces are separate from food preparation areas and dining areas and rarely contain any coffee-making equipment, although they often contain books available to all residents to borrow or read onsite. Without coffee and its accoutrements, their resemblance to a 'café' is symbolic, as a quasi-public space for spontaneous socialisation. In *Tokyo Share Life*, Hitsuji advertises the Premiere Kugahara Bali Style on the basis that it offers 'Balinese resort café' on the premises: 'separate from private areas, you can enjoy an atmosphere with an international café because you want to unwind in the sharehouse from the tensions of daily life' (Hitsuji 2010: 58-9).

In addition to the provision of cafés within sharehouses, many sharehouses are marketed on the concept of the sharehouse-as-café, like Chiba's 'At home café'; the 'Kyoto Café Sharehouse'; Osaka's 'Plow & Co.'; Yamanashi's 'café a casa'; Kamakura's 'Goyatei'; Tokyo's 'Couri'; and the five properties that compose the CafeHouse Tokyo's 'CaféShare Series'. Hitsuji Real Estate describes the Bauhaus Minami Senju sharehouse as a 'café-like space where we gather and

live'; and insists that 'this international atmosphere is more like a café or bar than a home' (Hitsuji 2010: 12). Meanwhile, websites titled 'roomshare café' and 'sharehouse café' profile available rooms and proffer advice for sharehouse residents.

Recently, an editorial in the architecture and urban planning journal 10+10 lauded nomadic place-making as a response to the difficulties facing young people and as a strategy for local revitalisation. It encapsulates the themes of difference from the family home, resemblance to the café, and the deficiency of the public/private binary. It reads, in part:

In the past the house was entirely closed off as a perfectly private place for the family only. But as rumours of domestic violence and abuse become publicised, there is the odd sense that the so-called 'community' is too closed. Therefore, maybe it's better to be able to disperse one's *ibasho* [place of belonging] in a number of places rather than to live according to the dualism that 'the house is private' and 'everything else is public' and instead to embrace the graduated complexity of public and private.

Personally, I think that if we have guesthouses and sharehouses (the slightly public house) and the café (the slightly public living room), one can live anywhere in Japan... (pha: 2015).

Clearly, the resemblance of the sharehouse to the café is imperfect. In abstract terms, the relationship between the two 'unmarked spaces' ought to be read as an inversion rather than an equivalence. While the café is, as Merry White points out, a 'private-in-public' where one finds 'isolation when society is too demanding' (White 2012: 20), the common spaces of the sharehouse are constructed, through the material and discursive practices I explored in the present chapter, as a public-in-private. Thus, to reiterate an earlier point, the

references to a café-like lifestyle subtly demonstrate the intricate interplay of *uchi* and *soto* in practice, which contradicts the stable dualism of *katei* ideology.

Coda: Clothing, propriety, and the visibility of the female body

While the management company eventually began to monitor the appearance of the living room, from the beginning each of my female housemates carefully managed her appearance in the common areas of the house. When she returned from work, Chie habitually sported tee shirts with the names of American rock bands; fashion connoisseur Haruko favoured dramatic harem trousers in a bright gaudy design and a loose-fitting batwing tee shirt. Yume wore boxy tee shirts over knee-length men's shorts, while girly Sachiko unfailingly wore matching sets of ruffled roomwear in a palette dominated by pinks. At all times, they were covered to the collarbones, although their skirts and shorts were often quite short.

The majority (everyone, in fact, except Yume, Hina, and Fumiko) also resolutely refused to appear without full makeup except when they hurried out of the shower, head down, to their rooms. When I asked the younger girls about wearing makeup in the house, they responded that it was just a matter of politeness and propriety, and was not meant to enhance their appearance to other members of the house. Sachiko explicitly described being seen bare-faced (*suppin*) as poor manners: 'It's just impolite (*rei ga tadashikunai*), to be seen like that...being seen barefaced says you aren't paying attention to other people'.

Haruko described it in similar terms, as a kind of carelessness: 'When we see a

woman who isn't wearing makeup we think she hasn't prepared herself for the world, that she doesn't care'. Others, like Tomoko, insisted that they were personally uncomfortable being seen without makeup. Tomoko explained that 'appearing barefaced doesn't feel right. It's a "behind-the-scenes" sort of thing'. Even Yume described her own not wearing makeup (somewhat tongue-in-cheek) as evidence of her lapsed femininity: 'I'm just not very good at being a proper woman; I can't cook, I'm messy, and I don't wear makeup'.

In fact, young Japanese women rarely appear publicly without makeup and this appears to relate as much to questions of social propriety as vanity. The strict cultural prohibitions against the public exposure of those elements collectively designated as *ura* – 'back' or 'interior' – that corresponds with *uchi* and the concern for the meticulous self-presentation– means that appearing *suppin de* (without makeup) is seen as a transgression against norms of appropriate public behaviour.²⁶ Popular discourses about women applying makeup in public dwell on the point that the presentable woman is one whose appearance is already polished and ready for public scrutiny. In Japan as elsewhere, social pressure to wear makeup is only partially related to the desire to prettify oneself; it is overburdened with cultural understandings about virtue and propriety. In her discussion of 'consumerist femininity' amongst young Saudi women, Sylvie

²⁶ Indeed, some women-only sharehouses refer to the freedom to go without makeup as a special enticement. One of Nishikawa's informants explains that living together creates family-like human connections in a woman-only sharehouse, to such an extent that 'You can take naps together with no makeup!' (Nishikawa 2012: 180).

Renard explains that ‘taking care of one’s appearance [is] seen as indicative of a good upbringing and superior morals’ (Renard 2014: 137).

In the house, a woman’s failure to meet public standards was explained with reference to her inadequate education and low social class. The only housemate I observed without a bra in the house was forty-five-year-old single mother Fumiko. As I describe in a later chapter, Fumiko struggled to establish good social relationships with the other housemates, most of whom were much younger than she. More damning, she did not conform to the unspoken codes of appropriate dress for women in the house, especially as she was older and her body less tidily svelte than the others’. Her appearances in the living room in a yellow strapless terrycloth wraparound that revealed her substantial cleavage prompted Yamada to shake his head and murmur she was *darashinonai*, a slangy adjective to describe a woman’s sloppy self-presentation and lapsed sexual morality.

It is no coincidence that Yamada’s muttered denunciations of Fumiko’s revealing bathrobe referred to her as either ‘slovenly’ (*darashinonai*) or ‘low level’ (*hikui reberu*). He elaborated the connection between lapsed virtue and low social position several times to me, but he was most explicit when Fumiko upset me with her tactlessness: ‘She comes from low people’, he explained, ‘a low-level family, so she doesn’t know better. That is why she dresses the way she does; that’s why she has a daughter [out of wedlock]’.

As Yume explained it to me, *darashinonai* describes a physical state of disorder – a messy room; ill-fitting clothes; shoes dilapidated through overuse; and a state of moral degradation tinged with implications of sexual permissiveness. ‘It can be used both for appearance (*gaiken*) and inner disposition (*naimen*)’, explained a student at the Takusa Women’s Junior College to Anthropologist Brian McVeigh. “‘If we make our appearance disorderly (*darashinaku*), then our interior (the way we feel) becomes disorderly” (McVeigh 1997: 107).

For my female housemates, appropriate bodily comportment took on a moral as well as an aesthetic significance. As Edmund Leach explained in 1954,

Logically, aesthetics and ethics are identical. In order to understand the ethical rules of a society, it is aesthetics that we must study. ...for the living individuals in a society such details can never be irrelevant, they are part of the total system of interpersonal communication within the group. They are symbolic actions, representations’ (reprinted in Hugh-Jones and Laidlaw, eds. 2001: 154).

My housemates’ insistence on wearing bras and makeup in the living room whilst playing video games should therefore not be read simply as self-promotion to potential romantic partners. It reflected cultural priorities regarding the appropriate presentation, exposure, and concealment of the female body. As individuals, most of my female housemates were cautious to protect their personal reputations in the house against appearing too careless or sexually provocative. In covering and decorating themselves according to accepted standards, they anticipated and defended against allegations of lacking virtue or respectability. They were also venturing, in their modest way, a socio-spatial theory about the ‘brackish waters’ of the living room: it was a place that

was private enough for the category of clothing known as ‘roomwear’, but public enough to require an underwire bra and – for the majority – a full face of makeup.

The website Share Parade offers dozens of advice columns for female-only sharehouse residents, including ‘Sharehouse underwear discourse’, which explains that one should only wear things in the sharehouse that she would not be embarrassed to wear outside. For this reason, the author explains, the majority of women in the sharehouse opt to wear a bra even though it is less comfortable. (ShareParade ND). Many pages on the site discuss how to dress in the sharehouse, including ‘The new concept of “sharewear”: in the aperture between outerwear and room wear’ (ShareParade ND). The author explains that room wear does not feel right in the sharehouse because it is made for the perfect privacy of the bedroom, not the ambiguous space of the sharehouse living room where one is visible to others. The author confides that when she began working from the common space of her sharehouse in fluffy (*mokumoku*) pyjamas, for example, she began to feel ‘out of place’ (*iwakan*). On reflection, she advises:

It’s suitable to wear *mokumoku* in one’s own bedroom, but to wear it in common spaces you feel it’s too much like a dressing gown. I started unconsciously to feel it was *darashinai*. Before I knew it, I had begun each day to choose the type of casual wear that you could also wear outside. Common space is, obviously, a ‘slightly outside’ place compared with the bedroom, is the perfect way to think about it (ShareParade: ‘In the Aperture Between Homewear and Outerwear, the New Concept of “Sharewear”’).

She concludes that the 'dialectic' between private, bodily comforts, on the one hand, and the public priorities of concealment and conformity, on the other, is 'sublimated' by sharing and sharewear. The public takes priority over the private, however, when the yardstick for appropriate clothing is whether one would wear it outside.

Conclusions

in the course of the 20th century, Japanese came to associate privacy with the home and family. In contemporary Japan, the *katei* model that favours the family home as the material site of *uchi* remains ideologically normative, meaning that collective living arrangements have, until recently, been stigmatised. This has delayed their acceptance as an alternative to the traditional lifecourse of living with parents until marriage. But recent economic shifts, structural changes in the labour market, demographic challenges, and an increasing interest in imported lifestyles have led Japanese in their 20s and, according to the most recent statistics, increasingly those in their 30s, to undertake the sharehouse lifestyle at least on a provisional basis.

The construction of Cheznew's living room as a quasi-public 'third' space between home and the workplace involved strategies like the proliferation of instructional posters that reference, both linguistically and stylistically, the iconic public manner posters in Japanese subways; prohibitions on private possessions in shared spaces; and female housemates' conformity with public codes of self-

presentation within the house. This demarcation of a 'third space' within the house served two purposes. First, it preserved the inviolability of the private bedroom (a feature of the modern Japanese nuclear family home); second, it demarcated an interior public (a public-in-private) available for experimentation and improvisation into their 'third selves'. In this way, the sharehouse is brought to realise the promise to 'extend the family' (Kubota 2009: 64-68) while also 'offering a separation from family "roles"' (Kubota 2009: 68-70).

This process demonstrated the continued relevance of socio-spatial coordinates *uchi* and *soto* and the persistent equivalence of family and home. However, they also demonstrate the dissonance between these neat conceptual distinctions and actual practices. In the epigraph to this chapter, Mr. Murachi's asked about the presence of a single or multiple *genkan*, the threshold between the household and the outside world. In essence, he was asking Cheznew was, conceptually, a large-scale household (a single *uchi*) or a cluster of smaller ones, each *soto* in reference to each other. While the property Cheznew only featured a single *genkan*, it is clear that the space within it included, conceptually, a honeycomb of one-person households around the shared spaces that functioned as something closer to a town square than the prototypical, if not the empirical, family home.

Chapter 5: Nuisance

Because you will see the people you live with in a good light, there will be cases of romantic play ... but it is the general rule that at the least you have to be careful not to be disagreeable (meiwaku) to others. In truth, what was repeated in our interviews over and over was, 'it's important to be independent of each other', so 'even if romantic play takes place, it's better for others not to see it' ... In response to a housemate's boyfriend repeatedly staying over, one woman ... left the sharehouse because, as she claims, 'THE HOME IS NOT A LOVE HOTEL!' (Abe and Mohara 2012: 35)

In this chapter, I consider the way housemates made sense of the new relationships that emerge through sharing domestic space. One important index of the awkward accommodation of the private-within-public I described in the previous chapter is a general taboo against dating in the sharehouse, in part an expression of the persistent Japanese uneasiness about the place of conjugal intimacy within the home. In the context of the sharehouse, there is the additional concern that excessive intimacy between two residents subverts the distributed intimacy and internal harmony of the group by causing a nuisance (*meiwaku*). While transgressions against this taboo were tolerated provisionally, housemates managed the threat of *meiwaku* in various ways: by avoiding sexual activity in the house, by limiting sexualised discourse to ritualised occasions, and by 'graduating' from the sharehouse once a relationship was established.

Sachiko and Kiyoshi: Love and secrecy in the sharehouse

24-year-old Sachiko moved in alongside Haruko, Yume, and the others in late March. Originally from Saitama, the suburban prefecture north of Tokyo city, she had come to Osaka because of a forced relocation by her employer, the giant gift store chain Loft. Sachiko had attended a vocational school for the arts. At her parents' suggestion, she had taken a position as a sales clerk in high school to lessen her financial dependence on them and she had worked her way up to her position as manager of the stationery department. She had aspired to becoming a full-time illustrator, but she had not found any success in the northern suburbs of Tokyo, so she accepted the compulsory transfer to Osaka that came with this promotion, and earned just enough money to survive on her own by living at Cheznew. She enjoyed her new position because, as she told me, 'I like pretty and artistic things, and I like to have some responsibility for others'. By the time she had reached Cheznew, she had worked for Loft for over two years and was no longer actively seeking work as an illustrator, but often left little illustrations in our '*keijiban*' notebook. Housemates referred to her as Sachiko, the artist.

Her other notoriety was for her *josei chikara*, her talents at womanly things.

Most of the younger female housemates were careful about their self-presentation in the house, but Sachiko was the most conscientious about preparing herself for public viewing. Aside from the standard-issue light grey suit she wore to work, she was unfailingly coordinated in shades of pink, down to her house slippers. Never without flawless makeup, she was known for giving

impromptu makeup tutorials in the living room and coached me on how to apply false eyelashes.

During Sachiko's first month in the sharehouse, we knew Kiyoshi only as Sachiko's 'friend'. On most evenings, she would ask permission for him to visit. We were all happy to have cheeky, affable Kiyoshi join us playing video games in the living room after the two of them enjoyed the meal Sachiko had lovingly prepared for him. At the end of the night, he would say thank you to us for allowing him over, then Sachiko would walk Kiyoshi to the front door to say their quick goodbyes.

24-year-old Kiyoshi had been one of the first people Sachiko had met on her arrival in Osaka. At the time, he was living with his family in a suburb of Osaka; while he did not have any family problems to speak of, he complained about his lack of independence there. He had not been a successful student, and had begun working at the Loft store in northern Osaka a year earlier. He was a reliable worker and popular with customers, but – unlike Sachiko, who had been quickly promoted – he did not advance. According to Sachiko, their bosses found him a little bit goofy and immature. If Kiyoshi's lack of seriousness did not recommend him for management, it nonetheless made him very pleasant company, and the ten residents then living in the house took an instant liking to him.

Kiyoshi moved into Cheznew at the end of April, but not into Sachiko's room. Like the vast majority of sharehouses, Cheznew forbade couples to share a room. Kiyoshi was given a room on the second floor despite the availability of rooms on the first, where Sachiko was my neighbour. In interviews, the two claimed they preferred not to live in adjacent rooms for the sake of privacy. Sachiko, maintaining the transparent fiction that Kiyoshi was merely a nuisance she abided, explained 'I think it's important that we have our own space. I don't want him right next to me all the time like some annoying little brother'.²⁷

In May, about a month after Kiyoshi moved in, several of us were seated around the television, when I ventured to ask about the status of their 'friendship'. I was still new to Japan and had not adjusted to the extent of my housemates' preference for euphemism; but it was also an assertion of my prerogative to ask the slightly impertinent questions the housemates never hesitated to ask me. Yume elbowed and admonished me – *shitsurei!* – in a

²⁷ Housemates often made tactical references to 'siblinghood' to disavow romantic interest in each other. Siblinghood provided a conventional idiom for the expression of appropriately tempered interpersonal affinities. When, for example, we began haranguing Matsuhiko for the time he and Haruko spent together in the evenings, he protested that she was his '*imōto*' ('little sister'). Housemates also used sibling rhetoric on my behalf to legitimate my close friendship with Alan, the other Westerner in the house, referring to him as my 'little brother'. However, the trope of 'family' was deployed inconsistently and in the most abstract terms: when I had a problem, for example, I was reassured that my housemates were supportive because '*minna kyōdai*' (we're all siblings). At the same time, Yamada, despite his quasi-paternal role in the house, was not above attempting dalliances with female housemates, although always in secret and, to my knowledge, without any success.

stage whisper, while Sachiko blushed and covered her mouth with her hand.

‘Yeah, I guess we’re boyfriend and girlfriend now’.

A triumphant Kiyoshi smirked and allowed her to explain: ‘Well, in the beginning I hated him. He’s so young and so annoying. He was always pulling pranks and making fun of me. I thought, “what’s wrong with this guy, anyway?” My boss had assigned him to show me around and I was miserable. Then one day he said he liked me and asked me out. It was like, “what? Are you kidding?” But then I thought, he’s cute. And maybe he’s just bullying me because he likes me’. Kiyoshi gave a conspiratorial smile to the other men, who applauded him for his masterful courtship technique.



Figure 16: Kiyoshi prepares takoyaki in preparation for a house party.

Since Kiyoshi's entering the house, he and Sachiko had continued to spend most of their time together with the rest of us in the living room, avoiding direct accusations of romantic entanglement. Sachiko insisted on preparing the nightly meal for them to share, as well as a *bentō* lunch for him to bring with him to work each day. On the very rare occasions when they spent time alone together in one or the other's room, they were careful not to bring this to the attention of the other housemates. They slept in their separate rooms every night, an arrangement our single beds surely encouraged, until Sachiko received a mandatory transfer in August and moved back to her parents' house in Saitama Prefecture. Kiyoshi left the house shortly thereafter.

Meiwaku

Despite their usual intrusiveness, the housemates cooperated in Sachiko and Kiyoshi's charade, scolding me when I nonchalantly referred to them as 'lovers' (*koibito*). I was probably the only housemate not to have understood what their euphemistic 'friendship' connoted from the beginning, but the other housemates explicitly and assiduously avoided suggestive language like 'boyfriend' and 'girlfriend'. Sachiko and Kiyoshi, for their part, never engaged in any physical contact in front of the others. This made it easier for us to participate in the fiction of their 'friendship', and I relented with the impertinent questions.

During interviews, several of my housemates confirmed the need for discretion around issues of sexual intimacy and volunteered advice for negotiating the dangerous terrain of in-house 'play'. 35-year-old Matsuhiko, charismatic admirer of Haruko and eventual House Manager, considered the question as he sucked on a hand-rolled cigarette behind the kitchen. He concluded, 'hmmm... if it happens, it happens. But it's best that nobody else knows. Secret is best, I think. Japanese people are shy, and we like to be private about these things'. Yume concurred in a separate interview that it might be 'unpleasant' (*meiwaku*) or 'troublesome' (*mendōkusai*) to others, so it's important not to let the others know if it should come about: 'in Japan it's important to remember other people's feelings, so if we can hear something like that.... It's NG (no good). Living together like this, you have to take care not to be disruptive, not to be selfish'. When, on one exceptional occasion in late summer, a housemate who was not well liked was overheard with an overnight visitor, Yume eagerly approached me the next morning to express her disgust with a slightly salacious expression. 'Did you hear that last night? Ugh, how GROSS! (*kimochi warui*). I hope Matsuhiko [who had been installed as the House Manager] will say something²⁸. *Mendōkusai*'

As architect Julian Worrall explains, the admonition against being *meiwaku* ('annoying') or *mendōkusai* ('troublesome') to others is the cardinal rule

²⁸ This rather minor event, which took place at the end of August, was one trigger for the management company's increased oversight of housemates' guests in early September.

governing Japanese behaviour, and one that – through its lack of specificity – encourages unremitting, almost paranoiac self-policing:

Meiwaku (disturbance, trouble, bother) is a commonly encountered evil. It is an open-ended category – anything conceivably could be included under *meiwaku*. This enables it to serve as an all-purpose prohibitory norm. The processes by which certain behaviours are determined to be *meiwaku* are opaque and likely in many cases to be close to arbitrary (Worrall 2005: 158).

What Worrall neglects is the social context of *meiwaku*; that is, as Yasuhito Kinoshita and Christie Kiefer suggest, '[t]he Japanese tend to use *meiwaku* as a gauge of the closeness of relationships' (Kinoshita and Kiefer 1992: 177). In their ethnography of a Japanese retirement community, Kinoshita and Kiefer observe that a concern for *meiwaku* diminishes as intimacy and interdependence increases (Kinoshita and Kiefer 1992: 177-180). The elderly residents they observed in their field site of Fuji-no-Sato:

...achieved a remarkable degree of independence for their age. This achievement was not motivated, as it might be in the West, by a high priority on independence itself... but because it allowed them to avoid causing *meiwaku*. This value was purchased at considerable cost to themselves, and it would simply be inconsistent for them to tolerate high levels of mutual expectation – high tolerance for *meiwaku*, if you will – in their new community (Kinoshita and Kiefer 1992: 180).

According to this nuanced reading, the concern to avoid *meiwaku* is less an expression of concern for the comfort of others than the avoidance of taking on a social debt through the presumption on others' indulgence. Not insignificantly, as Kinoshita and Kiefer point out, this request for tolerance characterises the most intimate relationships, predicated on 'mutual concern', like the family (Kinoshita and Kiefer 1992: 180).

Sachiko and Kiyoshi, newly liberated from their parental homes, had 'purchased' their emancipation at great cost (quite literally, given their low salaries); their refusal to incur the social debt attached to *meiwaku* was, at least in part, a further expression of their self-sufficiency. The other housemates, by indulging the fiction of their intimate siblinghood, observed the social distance implicit in this gesture.

Love as a group activity

While Sachiko and Kiyoshi took pains to conceal the nature of their relationship in the interest of avoiding *meiwaku*, it turns out that theirs was not the only possible strategy for pursuing romance in the house. It wasn't until about a year after I left the sharehouse that Cheznew saw the establishment of its second official couple, whose courtship took place openly in the social theatre of the living room. Haruko, whose thwarted professional aspirations I discuss in Chapter 2, disproved my suspicions about her and Matsuhiko when she became involved with Sotarō.

Sotarō had arrived during my stay in Cheznew, shortly after Matsuhiko had been installed as the House Manager in September. By this time, the management company had begun to find its stride and the daily operation of the house was becoming less chaotic. Since the beginning of the summer, when for the first time the majority of the rooms were full, management company functionary Ms. Umeda had found herself in a position to be more

discriminating about potential housemates. We began to see more male housemates with professional jobs, like 27-year-old interior designer Ueno²⁹ and 29-year-old civil engineer Sotarō.³⁰

Sotarō's move into Cheznew was without the usual fanfare. We nominally dedicated the next *nomikai*, which came at the end of the month, to 'welcoming our new housemate', but by this time the cast of characters in the house had been more or less consistent for several months (since the second influx of housemates in late April) and the function of *nomikai* had shifted from integrating new housemates to exposing and alleviating tensions amongst existing residents. It was partially for this reason that Sotarō's arrival in the house made little impact at first. Another reason for his unremarkable debut was Sotarō himself. At 29 years old, he had already come to inhabit the body and persona of a salaryman bureaucrat, slightly bowed posture and a nascent paunch. Unlike the artistic and fashion-conscious young residents like Matsuhiko and Ueno, preternaturally middle-aged Sotarō happily wore his standard-issue business suit and glasses as he ate his standard evening meal – two convenience store packaged meals, one after the other – when he returned from his job at the Naniwa municipal government offices. However, his outmoded *sararīman* aspect did not put off

²⁹ All names are pseudonyms, and I have assigned Ueno-san a surname because that is how housemates referred to him. In part, this was because he was more professionally accomplished than the majority of the other housemates; and in part it was because he shyly introduced himself by his surname in the beginning, and we referred to him this way as a matter of habit.

³⁰ According to Hitsuji Real Estate's *10,000 Thanks Report*, as of 2013 the fastest-growing markets for sharehouse residence were: men, people in their 30s, and the fully employed (Hitsuji 2013).

my female housemates (despite their occasional, more bohemian fantasies). Instead, they praised him for being earnest (*majime*) and mature (*otonappoi*).

Sotarō had lived with his parents in a suburb of Osaka before somewhat grudgingly moving to Naniwa for work. Ironically, although he had a stable professional life and relatively high salary, he was one of two housemates (along with equally accomplished Kenichi) to cite financial enticements as a reason for choosing a sharehouse: ‘I want to save money’, he explained, ‘so that I can start a new life when I get married: buy a house, have children’. While I was in the house, however, he was the consummate bachelor. He had developed a consistent routine around his work schedule, and his self-sufficiency extended to his social role at Cheznew.

I heard about the romance between Haruko and Sotarō second-hand, when then 21-year-old Hina came to visit me in England in 2014 and updated me on the state of things at Cheznew over her first real ale in an English pub. Though one of the youngest in the house, Hina was also amongst the most adventurous and had gone to India immediately upon finishing high school for six months; at Cheznew, she worked as a clerk in a 7-11, saving her money for trips, like this one to England, France, and Belgium.

I was asking after Haruko when Hina’s face lit up, and she eagerly filled me in on the events since my return to the United Kingdom: ‘Haruko told all the girls that she liked him. I liked him, actually, but I could tell there was no way.

Once she told everybody her intentions, they kind of encircled him. So, everybody closed ranks on him, and finally he gave in to the pressure'. I expressed my surprise: 'Nobody ever wanted to admit they even liked each other when I was there. Everybody insisted that love should be a secret'. 'Yes', Hina explained, 'but Haruko knows what she wants and she pursues it. Plus', she added dismissively, 'they like doing things as a group. So, anyway', she concluded, 'now obviously they have to leave Cheznew, and they have to graduate to their own house and decide whether to get married'.

Where Sachiko and Kiyoshi had expressed their self-sufficiency through the refusal to presume upon others, Haruko and Sotarō made their courtship a collective effort, not unlike more conventional *konkatsu* ('marriage-seeking') practices like *gōkon* (group dating) or, to some extent, *shanai kekkon* ('colleague marriage'). Haruko subverted the question of *meiwaku* by making her desire a common goal. Nonetheless, once established as a couple, she and Sotarō became *meiwaku*; the group's objective now achieved, they were presuming on the indulgence of the other housemates until they moved out together to their new home. As expected, they found an apartment together and moved out of Cheznew in 2014.

I would like to suggest here that, although housemates drew a clear distinction between the sharehouse and the family home (as we saw in the previous chapter), they imported certain understandings about the appropriate conduct of a romantic affair that were based on this fear of

undermining the social order. Sachiko and Kiyoshi pre-emptively controlled the 'individualism' and self-indulgence their relationship represented, as one conceived outside the home, through euphemism, unfailing propriety, and concealment. Haruko, on the other hand, made what was an individual desire into a common goal and, thus, an element of (rather than a threat to) the social order in the house.

'THE HOME IS NOT A LOVE HOTEL!'

Japanese prefer to enact and indulge sexual desires and identities privately, separate from their public roles. Even acceptance of conjugal intimacy within the home was gradual and driven by social engineering projects rather than the organic evolution of social preferences. In the late Meiji era, Christian intellectuals encouraged a reorientation of the home toward a focus on conjugal love as an aid to social, and consequently economic, progress. In reality, however, this focus on conjugal love often was subordinated to other priorities, especially children, or humanity in general. Bachnik explains that

Japanese are 'sensitive' to and concerned about social interaction and relationships [Lebra 1976: 2] For the Japanese, *ningensei* (humanity) takes precedence over everything else... Such sensitivity is not directed primarily towards marital or family relationships but towards 'other relationships, even at the expense of the former'. This means that relationships are primarily identified with the broad spectrum of social life outside the primary group or family (Bachnik 2002: 91).

Thus, while love marriages have become the norm, Japanese attitudes remain apprehensive of love's divisive and destructive capabilities. Indeed, according to legal scholar Mark West, this apprehension finds its way into

legal decisions: 'love... is highly valued in Japan, but in judges' opinions, it usually appears as a tragic, overwhelming emotion associated with jealousy, suffering, heartache, and death' (West 2011: 8). Exclusive romantic love is still regarded with some trepidation as being self-indulgent and disruptive of *ningensei*. Sociologist Tokuhiro Yoko explains that romantic love may still be seen as self-indulgent:

...mate-selection may still be regarded as too important an issue to be handled by the principal and/or determined by love alone, partly because... the individualism involved in love relationships can tend to undermine important aspects of the social order (Tokuhiro 2010: 99).

Within the house, the 'social order' – the microcosmic *ningensei* of the group – was especially prone to disruption, for reasons of its diverse membership and recent origin. The two couples discussed in this chapter pursued their private desires in ways that maintained the integrity of this order, and their places within it. The majority of housemates, however, preferred to segregate their sexual activities from their 'public' lives in the house, confining sexual relations to garishly decorated short-stay hotels. When I asked my housemates whether it was acceptable to 'do takeaway' (to have a lover over to the house), they were nearly unanimous that it was not. (This was despite their tolerance for Alan's fairly regular overnight guests, which they dismissed as evidence of cultural differences.) Instead, both male and female housemates confirmed that they regularly used love hotels, and were eager to show me websites with ratings of facilities in the area. Yamada, for his part, drew me a map to his favourites (Cheznew was felicitously located approximately a mile from Naniwa's 'love hotel city', a cluster of no-nonsense

love hotels beginning to show signs of their age). When I told a stunned Hina-chan about the lack of love hotels in England and America, she asked, 'but if that's the case... where do people have sex?'

Hina's incredulity at the news that the U.S. and the U.K. lacked love hotels (as such) betrayed an underlying cultural conviction that the home is not the place for sexual intimacy. Because of the associations of the home with various types of labour; the infrastructural constraints against privacy, including the continued use in many cases of traditional features like *shōji* that do not muffle sound and typically do not lock; and the widespread understanding of marriage as a functional partnership rather than the acknowledgement of an exclusive sexual and romantic attachment, the home was not traditionally associated with romantic intimacy).³¹ The sequestration of erotic desires from the home and other spheres of social life is written onto the Japanese urban landscape in regions of garishly-decorated hotels beckoning to lovers in search of privacy.

These hotels also function symbolically, with their playful 'fantasy' themes that appeal to the ludic, escapist element of sexual intimacy at odds with the

³¹ As Inge Daniels explains, many married couples still sleep separately, even in different rooms, although there is significant variation according to personal preferences and extrinsic factors like family scheduling (Daniels 2010: 37-8), My married friend and student confided that her husband preferred to sleep on the sofa because he came home late from work at his laboratory and preferred to fall asleep watching TV. She shrugged as she explained that 'this is just how Japanese marriages work'.

everyday performance of social roles within the home and workplace. In her social history of love hotels, Sarah Chaplin explains that in the 20th century:

...the love hotel emerged as a type of building in which excitement could be rekindled, and withdrawal from public life could be assured, albeit temporarily, inserting itself into the interstices of busy working lives.... the love hotel created an environment where one's private life could take centre stage, and actually helped institute the very notion of 'private life' outside of the home for ordinary Japanese people... [I]t ... needed to convey an image of privacy and seclusion, which combined comfort, stimulation, and freedom (2007: 69).

Aside from its more practical advantages, the purpose of the love hotel is a place for individuals to enjoy the 'comfort, stimulation, and freedom' of a 'private life', outside the dictates of the home and workplace. This is structurally identical to the depiction of the sharehouse as a 'third place' omnipresent in sharehouse marketing. Why, then, were housemates unanimous about the need for a respite from the putative respite of the sharehouse? Of course, housemates were motivated in part by practical fears about disturbing others through the production of *meiwaku* (although I note with some chagrin that housemates were happy to disrupt each other's peace by chatting in the hallway rather than breaking the taboo against inviting each other into their private bedrooms). More importantly, however, they responded to shared and unexamined understandings of sexual intimacy as a category of 'private' experience. According to Chaplin, the love hotel has become a stage for the enactment of one's 'private life' and the indulgence of private desires; as we have seen in the previous chapter, housemates constructed the common areas of the sharehouse as a public-in-private. Although the sharehouse offered my housemates freedom from parental

surveillance, even the youngest of them were careful to avoid any reference to conjugal love in the house because it would interfere with their pseudo-corporate identities, and the almost civic sense of etiquette, that inhered within the house.

Let's talk about sex

Just as the commission of sexual intimacy is spatially segregated from the home to the liminal and ludic space of the love hotel, at Cheznew the articulation of sexual desire found its place in the discursive/temporal realm of sex talk. As I have described, housemates avoided any reference to sexuality, even the comparatively innocent designations 'boyfriend' and 'girlfriend', in our daily speech. Domestic propriety and everyday courtesy were strongly predicated on the denial of sexual desire amongst residents, but we indulged in revelatory, confessional sex talk during periodic drinking parties (*nomikai*).

Nomikai, which convened in the living room, either spontaneously or – more frequently – orchestrated by Yamada-san, were the exception to the taboo against references to sex in the house. At Cheznew, the *nomikai* functioned as an airing-ground for minor complaints and a playful way for housemates to disclose things about themselves to each other. In this way, they fostered a temporary sense of distributed, communal intimacy without lingering repercussions.

In my considerable experience within and outside of Cheznew, Japanese sex talk typically proceeds conventionally: when everyone appears to have

reached the necessary threshold of inebriation, somebody addresses the question, 'are you "S" or "M"' ("S" ka "M" ka?) to the group. Using the idiom of dominance and submission, members of the group are asked in this way to identify themselves according to this binary sexual typology³². These English-language initials for 'sadist' and 'masochist' describe whether a person prefers to take an active or a passive role in courtship, though the more salacious implications of the original are of course coyly evoked. Yamada never tired of the "'S" ka "M" ka' ritual, and because it was never initiated with a sober crowd, each of the six repetitions I participated in carried the sense of new self-disclosure with only the faintest recollection that we had performed this giddily transgressive rite before. The regular influx of new housemates, in whose honour most *nomikai* were held, contributed to the sense of novelty as I heard Kenichi divulge for the fourth and fifth times that he was 'm-type' to a chorus of *sasuga* ('as we expected').

In another instance of linguistic borrowing, the preferred term for a physical preference in a partner is *fechi*, a bastardisation of the term 'fetish'. Fuelled by Yamada-san's generous outputs of whiskey and *chūhai*, the next tradition was to take turns confiding our *fechi* to the group. Almost universally, the men named 'big breasts' or, in American ex-patriot Alan's case, 'enormous breasts', to the special delight of Matsuhiko and Kenichi. Women, on the

³² The S/M binary is one metric among many in use in everyday discourse to identify one's personality type. The most conspicuous and frequent of these may be blood type. It is not at all unusual for casual acquaintances, potential romantic partners and even potential employers to inquire about one's blood type, which is believed to reveal one's true disposition.

other hand, tended to identify character traits like stability, kindness, or simply 'suitability', to the disappointment of the male residents who had hoped for something both more concrete and more prurient.

Yamada-san typically inaugurated the shift to sex talk, but younger residents eagerly took the baton in carrying it on. In the spirit of sexual confessional, during our July *nomikai* the usually diffident and boyishly handsome Ueno, who had only been in the house for several weeks, demonstrated how to pause a vintage video game, exposing the pixelated gusset of a female character's panties. He explained to roars of laughter, 'this was my sexual awakening'.

The buoyant atmosphere of the *nomikai*, with its frank but hypothetical disclosures of idealised sexual play, were at odds with more mundane discussions about romantic realities, especially as concerns marriage. In sober, daytime interviews, my housemates often expressed significant doubts about whether they would marry, and the compatibility of romantic love and marriage. Amongst women who expressed a longing for international marriage, this was often a strategy for the achievement of other objectives (as we have seen in Chapter 3) like international travel rather than romance *per se*.

It became clear that, for women like Haruko and even Yume, marriage still connoted the joining of forces toward the creation of a stable, solvent, and

ideally procreative household. It was not (or, at least, not primarily) the expression of exclusive romantic desire. This became clear in discussions of marital infidelity, the likelihood of which they accepted with equanimity: 'what if my husband cheated on me?' Haruko repeated back to me. 'It would be okay, I wouldn't care so much as long as other people didn't know'. Yume concurred: 'Yes, it's how men are. As long as the neighbours don't know, I suppose I would allow it'.

Suggestive banter was a feature of my daily life in Japan, but salaciously candid sex talk was highly conventionalised and, in the house, was reserved for special occasions like the *nomikai*, when housemates were expected to be intoxicated. In this state of temporary release from the rules of appropriate communication, housemates laid bare some of their more intimate desires as a means of establishing intimacy through disclosure. This disclosure importantly marked a break from the discursive *status quo* that forbade explicit references to sexual desire. Just as the performance of sexual intimacy is spatially segregated to love hotel districts, *nomikai* sex talk set temporal and conditional boundaries on expressions of sexual desire.

Anne Allison explains that straightforward discussions about actual sex practices were usually avoided in the hostess bar where she conducted her fieldwork (Allison 1994: 49); nonetheless, she describes men occasionally indulging in 'breast talk', naughty banter that produces a temporary release from formality (Allison 1994: 47). Thus, the object of 'breast talk' had less to

do with breasts than with cementing social relationships amongst male patrons:

Though puzzling at first, considering the repetitiousness and regularity of comments [about breasts], the exaggeration of the response, I came to understand, resulted less from the content of what was said than from the fact that it was said at all. Though blatant reference to female flesh, particularly breasts, is not infrequent in Japan, it triggers in the hostess club an emotion and attitude that men are waiting to let loose. Something of the forbidden, the freedom, the frivolity that the nightlife is agreed to represent, breast talk becomes a signal that the time for play has just begun... (48).

Likewise, sex talk at the Cheznew *nomikai* indicated this shift from normal conversation to a temporary and transgressive realm although, as I describe above, it follows consistent discursive conventions. As with the 'breast talk' Allison observes and the sex talk Dorinne Kondo recounts from an after-hours company drinking party (Kondo 1990: 296), the idiom of sexual desire is chosen primarily to communicate this shift into a new realm of discursive play, not to convey new information about housemates' sexual preferences (particularly in repeated iterations of the same confessional games). As Hirokazu Miyazaki demonstrated in his ethnography of Tokyo market analysts (Miyazaki 2013: 19) the content of the transgressive discourse need not be sexual; he describes the ritualised confession of one's 'dreams' as part of a rambling autobiographical narrative that formed a predictable element of after-work drinking amongst his businessman informants. Offering a glimpse of one's fantasy life is an invitation to violate discursive boundaries and enjoy a temporary sense of social intimacy not permitted under normal circumstances.

Of course, alcohol consumption plays a critical role in these scenarios. Sepp Linhart (Linhart 2002: 239) has described Japan's *sakariba* (pleasure districts) as 'zones of evaporation' where the obligation to subordinate inner feelings is temporarily suspended through the mechanism of *bureikō* (temporarily putting aside rank and status during a party). In theory, the drunk employee's accusations and complaints are tolerated during *bureikō* and seemingly forgotten when he and his superiors return to the world of sobriety and work. Yet Brian Moeran suggests that the alcoholic amnesia assumed to follow *bureikō* is a complicit fiction, and that what is said during a drinking session is remembered. It is for this reason exactly that the *nomikai* is of such importance, because it offered an opportunity to shift from *tatemae* to *honne*, from public to private language (Moeran 1989: 18), that remain on the record once the *nomikai* and resulting hangovers have ended.

There was no explicit hierarchy during the first six months at Cheznew (until the installation of Matsuhiko as House Manager), but there were, as I discuss here and in other chapters, antipathies and affinities amongst housemates. Alcohol-fuelled sex talk momentarily smoothed these tensions and delivered us to a space of sanctioned salaciousness, but not because my housemates imagined that what they said would be forgotten. Even as they shifted the frame of the conversation to intimate material, housemates performed for each other, and these performances followed gendered expectations about desire. In professing their shared preoccupation with women's breasts – a stereotypical fetish – male housemates portrayed themselves as

appropriately libidinous at a time in an age where the declining birth rate has directed scrutiny toward the so-called *sōshokukei* ('herbivorous types') who reject sex and marriage³³.

Female housemates, on the other hand, conformed to the stereotype of feminine restraint when they maintained the fiction that they were immune to sexual desire by insisting that their *fecchi* concerned men's disposition and practical suitability instead of their physical features. In the time I spent alone with my female housemates or in small, women-only groups, I knew that this was not the case; just as I knew from guiding him through his more vulnerable moments that ultra-libidinous Alan was looking for something more substantial in a partner than just 'enormous breasts'.

Yamada, who as I mentioned was the one responsible for initiating most *nomikai*, took advantage of the momentary shift in discursive frame to get across his own agenda with regard to housemates he liked or disliked. Thus, these moments of 'pure candour' were performances of different types of 'true' identities and opportunities to advance preconceived ideas as if they were spontaneous outpourings of opinion or affect. They were, in this regard, structurally similar to the corporate secular ritual of *bureiko*, as described, and emphasised the corporate, more than the familial, structure of social relations within the home.

³³ I did not realise how sensitive a topic this was until I casually remarked that Ueno seemed to me like a stereotypical *sōshokukei*, a term I mistakenly believed to be value-neutral, because of his monkish lifestyle and androgynous fashion sense. Ueno nodded wordlessly and rushed out of the room in humiliation.

Conclusions

Social psychologists Joanna Schug, Masaki Yuki, and William Maddux have identified limited opportunities in Japanese society to create new and terminate old relationships, a phenomenon they term 'low social mobility' (Schug, Masaki, and Maddux 2010: 1471-1472). They elaborate that, unlike in other cultural settings where adults continuously cultivate and abandon relationships, Japanese tend to form 'corporate bonds' with their school or work cohorts that last, in normal circumstances, entire lives. These 'corporate bonds' form the core of an individual's social life, as there is little room to form new friendships outside of these institutional settings. However, in the context of changing understandings of marriage, specifically the increasing acceptance of Western ideologies that prioritise romantic attraction over other indexes of compatibility, many young Japanese are seeking out opportunities to find mates outside of school and work. The sharehouse, which puts young people of different backgrounds in intimate regular contact, offers a special opportunity to expand one's chances to meet a suitable partner.

Contrary to my expectations, however, open romantic relationships between Cheznew housemates were rare. Motivated in part by the strong cultural taboo against *meiwaku*, one young couple conducted their courtship with extreme discretion and in partial secrecy, with housemates collaborating in the fiction of their 'friendship'; a second couple emerged when the other

housemates rallied forces, making their relationship a group effort instead of a tolerated breach of etiquette. Meanwhile, most housemates carried out their sexual adventures in spaces outside the home.

In every case, the housemates involved defused the potential disruption a romantic affair might pose to other housemates' comfort. To protect against the social presumption of *meiwaku*, housemates observed conventional understandings about the place (or the lack of a place) for intimacy within the home, which was demonstrated by the spatial sequestration of intimacy in 20th-century Japan to love hotels. However, it appears that, despite their recourse to familial idioms like fictional siblingship, housemates' resistance to conjugal intimacy was rooted only partially in associations with the family home. To a greater extent, they were concerned to preserve appropriate social distance, as well as their public personae, within the quasi-corporate social structure emerging within the home.

捨てる

Chapter 6: Waste

You could say it is 'FULL SERVICE'. You can live independently, but you have everything you need at home, and you can meet people naturally, organically. Entertainment, friendship... you barely have to leave the house!

–excerpt from interview with Tsujimoto Hiroyuki, lead engineer and project manager for Anteroom Osaka

As we have seen, one of the challenges to the acceptance of sharehouses is that they interfere with or pervert 'traditional' institutions like the family. The relevance of the local community, an institution of perhaps equal social importance in Japanese social organization, may also be impinged on when young residents relocate their community orientation to within the home, eschewing involvement in other networks of exchange and mutual support. The theme of community, and the question of the sharehouse's role in Japan's changing society, binds together these final two chapters. The first half of the present chapter explores domestic politics through the changing protocols for garbage disposal. Like the two preceding chapters, it considers what these utterly mundane practices suggest about changing understandings of space and social roles within the home. The second half of the chapter follows the trajectory of garbage from the sharehouse kitchen as a material and metaphorical link between inside and outside, the sharehouse and the local community.

March. From my arrival on the first of March until the early summer, there was no protocol for the segregation of garbage. Our kitchen was outfitted with two industrial-sized rubber bins into which we threw all waste, unsorted by type (contrary to the requirement of local government). When I moved into the house in March, Ms. Umeda demonstrated to me to haul large-scale bags of waste to a series of undifferentiated plastic milk crates at the end of the driveway by the road, which were covered with a netting to protect against ravages by local cats. With this protected depository away from the kitchen, we enjoyed the luxury of taking waste out whenever we chose and simply leaving it for the city to pick up on the appropriate day. Because we had so much space for rubbish to accumulate, we were not driven by necessity to observe the strict, intricate rhythm of the rubbish pickup schedule.

Within the house, the absence of a rota for waste disposal meant that the task of emptying the giant barrels befell whoever became troubled enough by the degree of accumulation to volunteer; in the beginning, the task reliably fell to me. The management company provided weekly cleaning service of the common areas, which included trash removal 'as needed'; but we often found ourselves filling the tiny garbage can provided several days before the cleaner's visit. Due in equal parts to the substantial packaging of food goods in Japan and my housemates' haphazard food consumption, the handful of early residents generated a disproportionately large quantity of waste, all of which was tossed indiscriminately into or on top of the garbage bins in the kitchen.

In March, I was one of only two female residents. The other, 24-year-old Jenny, had come from her native Hong Kong to Japan on a 'working holiday' visa. Despite having quickly taught herself how to navigate the local bureaucracy and establish a temporary life for herself, she struggled with some cultural aspects of life in Japan and preferred to spend her time with other Chinese speakers. In fact, her tenure was extremely brief; she moved into a dormitory for Chinese, Taiwanese, and Hong Kong expats within the month. Like the majority of my housemates, Jenny had no prior experience living outside the family home. Extremely gregarious, Jenny had arrived in Naniwa a month before I did, but moved to Cheznew shortly after I did from a 'less fancy' sharehouse fifteen minutes away. As my guide to life in Japan as a foreigner, Jenny helped me through obtaining my foreigner resident registration card and showed me all the best places to have a cheap lunch or buy makeup. Cooking and cleaning, on the other hand, were coming to her slowly and with much difficulty. She made it clear that she had moved away from her family in Hong Kong to avoid cleaning up after other people: 'I don't want to clean up after other people. I barely eat anything, and the boys come in and eat so much!' she explained to me as she watched me dutifully tamping the overflowing contents of a bin in preparation to haul it outside. 'They're not my family. Why should I take out their garbage?'

Each of the three younger male residents had picked up the basics of independent living, like how to operate the electric rice cooker and washing machine, from their mothers in preparation for moving into the sharehouse. However, they did not contribute their efforts beyond individual self-care, and

there was no coordinated effort to keep the home tidy. They were untroubled by the steady accumulation of garbage because, as 22-year-old talent company clerk Takahashi explained, 'the cleaner will take it out when she comes next week'.

Middle-aged bachelor Yamada was the exception, but his nights in the sharehouse were irregular and intermittent enough that I regularly capitulated to the rising odour of garbage and took it out before he returned to the house.

Like Takahashi, 25-year-old Hong Kongese government worker Han claimed he did not know when or how the garbage was to be disposed of. Ms. Umeda assured me, as she sat watching morning television on one of her quite regular impromptu site visits, that she explained the process for rubbish disposal to each new resident when they came to sign the contracts and move in. 'Anyway', she explained as she sipped her coffee, 'things will be neater when more girls are in the house'.

Ms. Umeda was mistaken. When seven new residents, five of them female, moved in at the end of March, only two (Haruko and Yume) had previous experience living outside the family home – like Jenny, these two had no intention to assume housework responsibilities for strangers. The house was not any neater for their presence of the new housemates; quite the contrary. The garbage bags continued to swell despite the influx of young women, disputing Ms. Umeda's gendered expectations about household management and hygiene standards.



Figure 17: Looking east from Cheznew's third-storey bathroom: garbage area and neighbours' eel shop.

The upsurge in kitchen waste generated by the sudden and dramatic increase in residents coincided with the seasonal thaw, and there were nightly calls to be vigilant against a cockroach infestation. These were usually in the form of cockroach sightings – who had seen the cockroach, where in the house it was witnessed, and how big it was. The size of the cockroach was usually exaggerated beyond physical possibility, in part for comic effect, but we would all agree that it was scary. Various housemates attempted cockroach countermeasures: especially Yume, for whom repelling cockroaches had become something of an obsession when she lived alone. These countermeasures ran the gamut from instructional posters (see Chapter 5) to the carcinogenic ‘mosquito

coils' that release smoke noxious to both insect and human when burnt; but did not include regular, coordinated garbage disposal.

The majority of housemates at Cheznew – both male and female - had been raised in two-parent, middle class households, with housewife mothers managing the home; but the influence this template for domestic labour had on them was divided neatly along the gender line. Although both genders had been raised without responsibility for the housework, conversations with male housemates like Takahashi and Han above suggested that the thought of contributing to the cleanliness of the house had not occurred to them. Female housemates like Jenny, on the other hand, actively rejected the naturalised attributions of cleanliness and the expectation of her altruism and uncompensated household labour.

May. In anticipation of the imminent cockroach infestation, the management company set in motion a new policy to prevent the accumulation of waste in the kitchen. I returned home one afternoon to find the industrial-sized rubbish bins hidden behind the crockery cupboard and instructions from management Ms. Umeda on a newly-installed dry-erase board: henceforth we were to dispose of our rubbish individually and immediately, without any garbage to accumulate for any amount of time. We restored the bins to their previous position, but Ms. Umeda confiscated them on her next visit, thus ending our insurgency.

At this time, I spent most of my evenings in the kitchen and living room, observing housemates' dinner preparations as I undertook my own. It was ten o'clock one evening in mid-May, and the housemates who worked in Osaka and returned later from work than the others were enacting their nightly ritual, boisterously preparing their dinners side-by-side on the industrial kitchen table. This *clique* included Haruko, the would-be fashion designer; the cameraman and eventual House Manager, Matsuhiko; the interior designer Ueno; the programmer Kenichi; the part-time convenience store clerk, Hina; and Tomoko, who drove her motorbike back and forth to her job at the Toyota factory. They had arranged themselves more or less evenly around the expansive food preparation bench and as usual were engaged in chopping, peeling, and sautéing. Beside each of them was a small plastic carrier bag bearing the logo of our local discount supermarket, and within it the unwanted traces of a one-person meal: papery husks from a clove or two of garlic, the tough stalks of spinach, an empty tin of tomatoes, the bloody Styrofoam tray from a package of meat, the waxy peel of an apple. When they finished cooking, I watched each of them tie off the mostly-empty bag and leave it beneath the worktop while they carried their dinner to the living room to eat. After dinner, each would carry his parcel the 100 meters or so to the end of the parking lot and deposit it in the milk crates as required by the new regime. I knew that if they became distracted and forgot to dispose of their little bag, they would find it there in the morning, possibly with a gently worded note about cockroaches.

When we were finished with dinner and gathered in the kitchen to collect our waste, I exclaimed: 'I have a bag with two eggshells and empty packaging! Look at how much waste; bags in bags.' Kenichi dismissed me with a laugh, as usual, while the others smirked. Matsuhiko explained with his slightly paternal good humour that it was very wasteful, but we had to be careful about cockroaches, after all. It was my first summer in Osaka, he explained, and I could not imagine how many cockroaches there would be. Haruko conceded that it was all very inconvenient, but warned me against flouting the management company's rules because, she said, they could be very strict. Hina-chan explained with her usual pithiness (and equanimity) that, 'Yes, of course it's irritating! But, on the other hand, what can we do? There's really nothing to be done for it (*hontō ni shikatta ga nai*)'.

If there was no great rebellion, neither was there any spontaneous cooperation. Nobody volunteered to carry another person's rubbish out in his or her little bag. I soon learned, when I cheekily slipped a grapefruit peel into Haruko's baggie of vegetable ends, that tossing micro-rubbish into someone else's waste sac was a serious violation of some new but deeply felt sense of privacy, a new sense of the intimacy of waste.

Under this system, the private and personal nature of rubbish became apparent. As I have suggested, in Japan the extreme visibility of garbage disposal is an activity endowed with social meanings and subject to regimes of mutual surveillance that are not only concerned with 'hygiene' in the strict sense but to

ideas about social propriety and participation³⁴. The translucent and transparent bags required by most municipalities means that neighbours are afforded visual access to each other's habits and lifestyles. Thus, however inconvenient or wasteful the management company's new garbage protocol was, it also symbolised freedom from cultural norms of quasi-voluntary group participation and compulsory sociability. Even those residents like Hina, who were troubled by the unnecessary waste and exertion required by this new rule, were unwilling to ignore it, evoking the familiar idiom of inevitability and compulsion, *shikata ga nai*.³⁵

Thus, the prohibition against rubbish bins in Cheznew announced a new regime of privatisation, as each housemate dutifully deposited the remainders of his evening meal in a bag and carried it out to the end of the drive. On each semi-weekly rubbish pickup day, the municipal waste collectors would arrive to find, on average, 150 to 200 individual carrier bags, usually less than a quarter full, and often containing as little as a single eggshell.³⁶ Housemates agreed that the

³⁴ Peter Wynn Kirby highlights the various metaphorical associations of waste with human morality (Wynn Kirby 2011: 18-20), like the persecuted *burakumin* (formerly *eta*) who were historically relegated to sub-human status by virtue of their vocational involvement with contaminating waste products, specifically animal and human waste. Anne Allison write about the use of 'garbage' as an idiom for marginalised and unwanted populations like the elderly and victims of nuclear fallout (2014: 149, 156), a theme reprised by Hasegawa in her aptly titled (2012) ethnography of Japanese homeless, *We Are Not Garbage!*

³⁵ *Shikata ga nai* is a common expression conveying resignation to the way things are and encouraging solace in this acceptance. Gordon Mathews writes that *shikata ga nai* functions 'as an explanatory device available for the allocation of responsibility for unfortunate events, not as ingrained defeatism that cuts off the possibility of change' (Mathews 2004: 93).

³⁶ Of course, from the beginning each housemate was individually responsible for the disposal of 'room waste' and items related to personal hygiene. When

situation was absurd, ecologically irresponsible, and onerous, but they did not articulate these objections to management. This second phase was a drastic correction of the first, with extreme individualism as an antidote to the social and practical ambiguities of the earlier model that failed to replicate the orderly management of family home based on women's voluntary labour. Here it became clear that the sharehouse was shared in the sense of providing a common living space, but in little else.

September. The third phase in our evolving relationship with waste and with each other began at the end of six months. It was the beginning of September and the house had been at or near full capacity since the beginning of the summer. This revenue enabled the management company to designate a House Manager from among existing housemates, compensating his service with free rent. Kobayashi, the owner of the sharehouse, heeded his friend Yamada's recommendation and offered the position to 35-year-old Matsuhiko.

Matsuhiko was a prudent choice, as he enjoyed the respect and popularity of most of the house. There were murmurs, especially by those like Yume who felt excluded from the evening cooking clique, that he was a *happō bijin* (a flatterer and friend to everyone), but housemates found him charming and amicable and were enchanted by his bohemian affect and quirky humour. When not working as a part-time commercial photographer or drum practice, he was typically to be

feminine hygiene products were found discarded in the tiny waste disposal bins in the women-only toilet stalls on the first floor, a hand-lettered sign promptly appeared in each one instructing, in an officious tone, 'BY ALL MEANS, PLEASE DEAL WITH NAPKINS ON YOUR OWN!'

found in the common area rolling little cigarettes, preparing pasta dishes, and flirting with a receptive Haruko.

In fact, very few sharehouses I surveyed did not have a House Manager, although they did not necessarily live onsite. Many companies opt to employ a non-resident who could moderate disputes amongst housemates and represent the interests of the management company with greater neutrality and authority.

Hitsuji Real Estate Company explains the House Manager's function as follows:

The fact is that as sharehouse residents quickly multiply, it is important to have installed a structure capable of dealing with issues skilfully. This is when a House Manager is interposed. *That is to say that, just like in an apartment building, an impartial third party comes to take on the responsibility and participates in administration, and can understand and resolve a multitude of issues like the foregoing [problems with facilities, arguments, and other 'trouble in daily life'] with surprising ease* (Hitsuji 2010: 110, emphasis in original).

Matsuhiko's installation as House Manager made him responsible for certain maintenance tasks including rubbish disposal; it also bestowed an ill-defined authority to enforce the equally ill-defined and evolving house policies. This transition to a more rationalised organisational scheme within the home also entailed the elaboration of an unambiguous hierarchy through the delegation of roles and responsibilities to several housemates on the basis of Yamada's recommendations. Kenichi, the 30-year-old computer programmer, was Matsuhiko's second-in-command; and behind him was Haruko, the would-be fashion designer then working as Yamada's secretary. This new resident management structure indicated a retreat from some of the promises, explicit

and implicit in sharehouse marketing, that the sharehouse provides a sanctuary from the Japan's embedded hierarchical social logic (Nakane 1971).

The transition to a more rationalised corporate sharehouse had implications for various aspects of daily life, including procedural innovations that limited individuals' autonomy in shared spaces. Although the resident management roles established in September mostly involved maintaining the cleanliness of the facilities, they were also, in theory, tasked with enforcing landlord Kobayashi's new protocols about visitors. These included a more careful monitoring of visitors through the mandatory submission of a written form with the guest's full name, date and time of the visit. This form was to be submitted at least a day in advance to Matsuhiko, who was empowered to allow or refuse the request.

Contrary to my expectations, housemates did not resist these developments, nor did any widespread disapproval of the new house 'officers' manifest itself. In Matsuhiko's case, this may have been attributed to his popularity and diplomatic manner. The more controversial appointment of Kenichi prompted some complaints and wry jokes behind his back, but there was never any open hostility or resistance to his enthusiastic rule enforcement. Indeed, the housemates – rather than resisting the sudden appointment of their peers to positions of authority – appeared relieved at the transparency of the new power structure and gleefully referred to Matsuhiko as 'Mr. Matsuhiko HM' (Mr. Matsuhiko, House Manager').



Figure 18: House Manager Matsuhiko and Haruko at dinnertime.

Some housemates did express their disappointment at other aspects of management's retrenchment, although only quietly and never to management. Hina-chan complained to me that 'there are so many rules now, everything is controlled! It is like a nursery school!' Yume, the web designer who had, from the beginning, struggled with the intensely centrifugal sociability of the house, was the most vociferous in her criticisms of management and the most resentful of what she perceived as Yamada's cronyism, but she only confided her dissatisfaction to me outside of the house. Nonetheless, kitchen hygiene was indisputably improved. Ms. Umeda quietly restored our bins and we resumed collective rubbish disposal. The consensus was that order trumped freedom in

the house; as 19-year-old retail worker Kiyoshi put it, 'at least, now, things are more orderly'.

As we have seen, Cheznew underwent a series of phases with regard to waste management and disposal that corresponded to different ideas about appropriate social relations and power structures within the house. My housemates' equivocal responses to these dramatic changes convey their ambivalence at being caught between the comfort of domestic habit and the exhilaration of social experimentation. The newest policy innovations demonstrated that a managed sharehouse is after all a business, and living with non-kin others requires some role demarcation lest cosiness give way to chaos. These interventions by the management company restored some elements of Japanese corporatism from which the idealised image of sharehouse living proposes to serve as a departure. Specifically, it seems the housemates desired a clearly demarcated hierarchy amongst themselves, in reference to which residents might arrange their interactions. In this way, sharehouse living became rationalised and managed in a way that was comfortable and familiar to the housemates, *despite* their initially having opted for sharehouse living as a 'new experience' full of transformative potential in the absence of stifling roles.

'Public' policy: compliance and community membership

While shifting waste disposal practices within the house signalled changing ideas about the roles and relationships amongst housemates, the fact that we never received any complaints or formal sanctions for failing to comply with elaborate

and explicit municipal protocols indicates our atypical relationship with the neighbouring community. While dynamics within the home shifted quickly and repeatedly, our relationship with the local community changed very little: we were never considered a legitimate household, so we were never held accountable to the standards for membership and recognition in the community.

In Japan, waste sorting and disposal policies make non-compliance visible and therefore socially uncomfortable: for example, the compulsory use of translucent or transparent bags to demonstrate compliance with the prescribed and somewhat baroque sorting practices. The website for Naniwa City features a series of downloadable PDF files explaining the specifics of how to dispose of, for example, the different parts of a knife, or skewers used to cook meat (Figure 19). There are multiple charts dividing household goods into appropriate categories for disposal: the appropriate designation for everything from surfboards to cooking oil is provided, along with information about recent changes. There are, further, a series of short films ranging between 28 seconds and several minutes, demonstrating how to process various recyclables for collection. Yet, despite the extreme stringency and specificity of instruction with regard to segregation and disposal, the household is not the end of the line for waste segregation in Japan. In our neighbourhood, a small facility beneath the elevated railway and across from the local middle school employs local people with developmental and

cognitive disabilities to sort garbage before dispatching it to the incinerator or recycling facility³⁷

While Japanese municipal authorities require the use of transparent bags to help them in recognising and policing infractions, at Cheznew we used these inconsistently, and during the summer months, when we disposed of micro-rubbish in plastic shopping bags, hardly at all. Despite the visibility of the property, the volume of waste we generated, and the egregiousness of our violations, however, the municipal authority never contacted us regarding our non-compliance.

To some extent, this is because local authorities are in general more tolerant of waste protocol breaches than is typically believed, in part due to the safeguards like the waste sorting facility beneath the elevated highway in Minami – facilities that make household sorting redundant and essentially performative. According to Peter Wynn Kirby, the Japanese have proven ambivalent about ecological practices, as evidenced by their reluctant and inconsistent adoption of sharing and other resource-conservation practices. He identifies a gap between Japan's famed reverence for nature, on the one hand; and actual practices, including a reliance on nuclear energy, burning rubbish or depositing it in landfills, and a

³⁷ This is a typical example of Japanese-style social welfare, serving a public good but also giving purpose and financial support to members of society who are functionally ineligible for employment in the private sector.

堺市 SAKAI CITY 平成21年10月1日収集分から適用

家庭用 資源とごみの出し方便利帳

生活ごみ 	週2回 → 毎週 ○ ○ 曜日
缶・びん 	月2回 → 毎月 ○ ○ 回目 ○ 曜日
プラスチック製容器包装 	週1回 → 毎週 ○ 曜日
ペットボトル 	月2回 → 毎月 ○ ○ 回目 ○ 曜日
小型金属 (家電製品を除く) 	月1回 → 毎月 ○ 回目 ○ 曜日
粗大ごみ(有料)・不燃小物類(無料) → 電話申込制 ＜申込先＞粗大ごみ受付センター フリーダイヤル 0120-00-8400 一般相談 06-6485-5048	

別紙の町名別収集曜日一覧を参照し記入してください。

保存版 資源とごみは決められた日に出しましょう。

生活ごみ P1
 缶・びん P2
 プラスチック製容器包装 P3-P4
 ペットボトル P5
 小型金属 P6
 粗大ごみ・不燃小物類 P7
 市で収集物/できない物 P8
 粗大ごみ(有料)・不燃小物類(無料) P9-P10
 ごみの分別区分 P11-P14

Figure 19: First page of Naniwa City's 14-page 'Household guide to garbage disposal and recycling (please fill out with your neighbourhood's set pick-up days). Household garbage (p. 1), twice a week; glass and metal containers limited to food, drinks, condiments, and alcohol (p. 2), twice a month; plastic packaging, (p. 3-4), once a week (cleaned; when in doubt, include with household garbage); plastic bottles (p. 5), twice a month (please rinse inside); small metal, excluding appliances (p. 6), once a month; oversized items (with disposal fee) and small-sized incombustibles (no disposal fee) (p. 7) by arrangement; special garbage and garbage the city cannot collect (p. 8); guide to handling charges and collection dates for oversized items (p. 9-10); guide to garbage sorting (p. 11-14). Please put your garbage and recyclables out on the appropriate day'.

resistance to recycling. Among individual households, compliance is variable and individuals find various ways to circumvent protocols. In his field sites in the pseudonymic Azuma Ward outside Tokyo, Peter Winn Kirby writes:

The officially recommended plastic bags for waste storage and collection were translucent but only partially transparent... Since the contents of these bags were not easy to verify from the exterior, the monitors for each waste cluster would rarely if ever take the trouble to inspect what was actually inside the bags...There was a range of active compliance,

then, with waste protocols... it was all too easy for residents to feel that compliance in separating contents was more voluntary than compulsory. (Winn Kirby 2010: 175-6).

Thus, compliance with waste disposal protocols may be seen as a social performance as much as a legal obligation. The sanctions for non-compliance in Minami were unofficial, applied unevenly according to expectations based on identity and the degree of membership recognised by the city and community. Although most households in our neighbourhood boasted a dedicated rubbish disposal area like ours, we were amongst a very few that did not comply with municipal waste disposal protocols. Owing more to the visibility of these areas than the threat of scavenging cats, surrounding households waited to haul out their trash, as they are instructed to by the municipal government, until the early morning of the designated pick-up day.

Our *de facto* exemption from the obligation to observe local protocols – the lack of indictments, formal or informal, for our persistent failures to segregate rubbish or often to use transparent rubbish bags (which would only demonstrate that we had not sorted anything) – suggest that the city and local community had already disavowed the possibility of the sharehouse's full integration as a legitimate household capable of being held to local standards. This tolerance for noncompliance was only observable amongst other non-paradigmatic households, like the widower with an obvious alcohol addiction who discarded one-cup sake bottles arbitrarily in whatever container he had to hand and left it at the kerb, as we had, immediately after use rather than waiting for the appointed pickup day.

Although neighbours would occasionally leave a gently reprimanding note for him – ‘glass bottles are Wednesday!’ – for the most part they tolerated his lack of compliance, recognising and confirming his exclusion from full social membership and its attendant responsibilities.

Waste and the visibility of women’s work

Ms. Umeda’s claim that more female residents would result in a cleaner home reflects accepted naturalised assumptions about gender and the way these expectations are encoded in the division of labour in the home. The management company’s presumption that female housemates would assume responsibility for cleaning, and specifically waste disposal, demonstrates the important role women play in the orchestration of the family and the community in Japan. The paradigmatic household is composed of a male breadwinner but also, perhaps more critically, a dedicated housewife who functions materially and symbolically to mediate the relationship between household and neighbourhood. Inge Daniels describes how the conspicuousness of women’s labour in garbage disposal is the mechanism by which she represents her family’s not only compliance and cleanliness, but also propriety and participation:

Garbage disposal [unlike drying laundry, another conspicuously visible ‘wifely duty’] is a boundary crossing public performance that continues to play an important role in creating good neighbourly relations. ...Every town has its own set of rules concerning the time the garbage should be placed outside, what kind of bag should be used, what particular category of garbage consists of and how many items need to be prepared for collection. Garbage is... collected... at dedicated communal pick-up spots. Moreover, because many towns produce official garbage bags made of see-through plastic and people are advised to write their name on each bag, garbage is eas[ily] traceable to its owner. This system allows for a woman’s domestic

credentials, and by extension her family's reputation, to be scrutinised by her neighbours (Daniels 2010: 78-79).

If the housewife's labour is uncompensated, it is by no means invisible.³⁸

Through the presentation of the household through conspicuous tasks like rubbish disposal (and grocery shopping, and the hanging of laundry outdoors) housewives act in important ways as the emblems of their households. Through her orchestration and management of conspicuous practices of consumption and disposal, it is the wife, not the husband, who acts as the face of the household within the community and engineer of their collective self-presentation.³⁹ Amy Borovoy explains the importance of this role for Japanese women: 'The work of homemaking, including garbage disposal and recycling, managing the family budget, and purchasing household products that were ecologically sound, linked them to broader social concerns' (Borovoy 2005: 7). Thus, according to Borovoy, despite the 'radically different social spheres' inhabited by men and women, the traditional 'women's work' in the home was not isolating but empowering because, 'historically, the family has been the basis of women's social participation' (Borovoy 2005: 7).

³⁸ Indeed, as Miller's London council estate tenants demonstrated, the effects of popular feminism there had had exercised little effect on male participation in housework and had resulted instead of a 'neo-traditionalism' that replaced the traditional parallel male/public: female/private with a 'formal symbolic complementarity of gendered spheres within the home' (Miller 1988: 367).

³⁹ Joy Hendry insists that presentation is not limited to the physical enfolding of material objects but extends to include consciousness of aesthetic refinement in language and behaviour. 'To be able to wrap things properly', she writes, 'becomes a measure of refinement and civilisation which is applied within Japanese society but also by implication since Japan is supposed to be so advanced in this respect, as a way of giving Japan an edge over the rest of the world in cultural achievement' (1995: 26). Glimpsed through the transparent prism of the government-issued rubbish bins, properly wrapped household waste indicates a woman's, and by extension her family's, cultural capital.

The role of women in maintaining and representing the household is an illustrative example of the way the sharehouse diverges from the family home, with the consequence that it disrupts the normal order of the community.

Although sharehouse advocate and social theorist Hiroyuki Kubota often depicts the sharehouse as an escape from roles and responsibilities of the family home, he assumes that women are socialised to demand a cleaner environment and female housemates will naturally assume more responsibility for daily household maintenance:

Even if not reflected in direct forms like ‘men move heavy things; women should do the housework,’ it seems that it is difficult for some to escape internalised and embodied gender roles in the sharespace. ...One surmises that ... differences in the way boys and girls are raised are related in a complex way to gendered differences in proper commitment [to domestic hygiene] (Kubota 2009: 90).

Contrary to Kubota, however, female sharehouse advocate Kyoko Nishikawa emphasises that the sharehouse is an opportunity to escape the gendered division of labour. She advises female residents to make their expectations clear from the start, by announcing: ‘Please keep our things in good condition. As we’re not a married couple or lovers, please take care not to presume upon me’ (Nishikawa 2012: 54).

At Cheznew, the accumulation of bags containing single-serving rubbish advertised the lack of an expert housewife at the helm and likely inspired neighbours to speculate on the cleanliness of the house’s interior. Female residents’ refusal to assume the mantle of responsibility for our kitchen waste

was more in keeping with Nishikawa's than with Kubota's expectations: 'contrary to the expectation that girls are unilaterally responsible for housework, surprisingly it is usually the men who work harder' (Nishikawa 2012: 53). In fact, the only housemate who voluntarily undertook any household chores was the fastidious Kenichi, who vacuumed the common areas on Saturdays (often in his swimming trunks, to the girls' visible amusement).

The mountain of rubbish accumulating through the week was a visual expression of our failure to conform to the accepted composition of a household and its role in the community. As I have demonstrated, my female housemates were not in the least concerned to represent the sharehouse through uncompensated labour. When they undertook any chores associated with the management of the home and family, they did so in playfully subversive ways, like preparing *bentō* for the men they preferred, and in conspicuous disregard for the carefully calibrated model of effort and capital on which the single-earner nuclear household paradigm operated. So, for two months our rubbish accumulated in the milk crates at the end of the driveway without any coordination with the municipal calendar, and we continued to be marginalised within and closed off from the rest of the neighbourhood.

'How they dispose of rubbish...': waste, compliance, and community

Cultural theorist Atsushi Miura devotes a chapter of his optimistically titled *For the Sake of Japan's Future, Let's Have the Talk about 'Sharing'* to the sharehouse's



Figure 20: Kenichi poses with the vacuum cleaner.

potential to soften Japan's population and financial decline. This bestselling paperback, part polemic against Japan's excessive materialism and part utopian vision for its revitalisation through the wholesale application of a more

communitarian ethos, encapsulates many contemporary anxieties about the loss of traditional Japanese 'village society' (*mura shakai*), as I discuss at greater length in the following chapter. He describes the experiences of a man who opened his four-bedroom house as a sharehouse after his eldest daughter returned from study abroad, and how he was able to foster cooperation between these new residents and neighbours:

[At first] the residents did not blend into the neighbourhood, and frictions about things like how they disposed of garbage and so forth could have emerged readily. But precisely because he was a live-in landlord, and precisely because the residents were the type of people who were eager to live in a sharehouse, the neighbours would apprise them of local events and so forth through the landlord, and they blended in easily (Miura 2012: 189).

The elliptical 'and so forth' after 'how they disposed of garbage' (*gomi no dashikata nado*) operates metonymically for a suite of grievances that concern, among other things, issues of conformity, membership, participation, and identity. The meaning of this elision would be clear to the Japanese reader because a failure to separate rubbish properly is a common complaint against foreigners, particularly the visible *nikkei* Brazilian population (Brody 2002: 69-70). A failure to properly separate waste emblematises cultural difference and, in many cases, articulate more sensitive objections about immigration and cultural purity. The obverse benefit of this exclusion from full membership in the community is the exclusion from full responsibilities of the household to the community on the basis that, as non-Japanese, they cannot be expected to understand disposal protocols.⁴⁰ Although the

⁴⁰ One colleague of mine was commended as she prepared to leave the apartment she had occupied for a full year in Osaka to return to England, 'you

majority of my housemates were Japanese and understood the garbage protocols they ignored, the association of the sharehouse with foreigners was enough to exclude us from normal membership in the community.

One July afternoon, Alan and I were, very unusually, the only housemates at home in Cheznew. The doorbell rang and we opened it to find a tiny elderly woman whom I did not recognise as our neighbour, Ms. Wada, who owned the eel shop next door with her husband. She was clearly rattled to encounter the two of us behind the big wooden door. The three of us rehearsed conventional salutations, and she seemed relieved that we were both competent in Japanese. Emboldened, she began to ask us why we had come to Japan; what we liked and disliked; and whether we were married: all questions we had become accustomed to answering graciously and playfully. As she turned to leave, she abruptly recalled the reason for her visit: to warn the house about the incoming typhoon. 'Please be careful', she instructed us, and we promised her we would. She stopped again, several steps from the front door, to confide, 'When I heard there would be foreigners here, I didn't like it. But actually, now I think you're okay'.

The presence of foreigners may not have been Ms. Wada's primary, at least not her only, concern about the sharehouse. Living with non-relatives is often associated with foreigners and foreignness because, as I have discussed at length,

were always a good neighbour! You did the garbage correctly!' A less good neighbour, I availed myself of the rubbish collectors' indulgence more than once by disposing 'big-size waste' without the required sticker to indicate I had made the appropriate arrangements with the local bureaucratic office.

the model of family co-residence continues to dominate Japanese ideas about the composition of the household. For this reason, the 'foreignness' of the sharehouse operates synecdochically for a suite of perceived transgressions against Japanese domestic ideals. For Japanese of Mrs. Wada's generation, foreigners' materialism and individualism is viewed in contrast to the idealised Japanese village society characterised by selflessness, social cohesion, and personal restraint (Ben Ari 1995: 76-77).

Ms. Wada's xenophobia was paper-thin, however. It was likely a means to express less easily articulable anxieties about deteriorating communities, the aging society, the low birth rate, and the traditional transmission and exchange of various types of capital. While our elderly neighbours often expressed discomfort with us as foreigners, underlying this comment was a complex subtext of contemporary concerns about the fate of sociality, community, and tradition.

Japanese ideas about 'community' and 'connection' are embedded in localised patterns of exchange through the circulation of people, objects and capital. As the lead engineer for Anteroom Osaka and Anteroom Kyoto articulated in the epigraph to this chapter, the sharehouse relocates the primary site of socialisation from the community into the home. Because the sharehouse satisfies the social needs of its residents, it threatens to attenuate the traditional relationship between the household and the community.

Minami: a portrait of a neighbourhood in decline

At Cheznew, our relationship with the neighbourhood was complicated by the fact that our community was particularly sensitive to anxieties about the loss of local identity and survival. The reluctance of Minami's aging population to accept newcomers in the very present and visible disintegration of their tiny, traditional neighbourhood came clear to me in interactions with our immediate neighbours like Mrs. Wada. The long-term, mostly elderly, local residents of Naniwa with whom I interacted in the course of my daily errands and with most of whom eventually I developed cordial friendships, initially expressed deep scepticism about the sharehouse and its suitability to the neighbourhood. For most of the time we had very little contact with our neighbours, despite the close proximity of their buildings to ours, and these mostly consisted of noise complaints.

Naniwa is emblematic of an embattled Japan that now is seen to have conceded some of the nation's resplendent cultural history in favour of aggressive industrial growth. Naniwa, which remains an industrial hub, has not fared well in the shifting economic landscape of the 20th and early 21st centuries as it continues to rely heavily on industrial manufacturing. Formerly an independent city, it is now conspicuously diminished after the ravages of the last century and a half. Local people, particularly those seeking to re-establish the city's political independence, lament the extent to which the city has been encroached and compromised in the name of economic development and social progress. The

presence of foreigners and foreign ways of living are seen to threaten the 'traditional way of life' lifetime residents and middle-aged newcomers want to protect.

Cheznew lies in the Minami neighbourhood of Naniwa, where I spent the entirety of my nineteen months' fieldwork. Located on reclaimed land jutting into water contaminated by industrial waste between an industrial hub to the south and a small commercial hub to the north, Minami feels neither-here-nor-there, a quiet place to sleep. It is in fact extremely sleepy at most times, in part due to the advanced age of its residents. The landscape is dominated by businesses catering to the needs of the elderly, including mobility aids stores, osteopaths, pharmacies advertising various kinds of relief for bone and joint pain; tiny *izakaya*; and karaoke shops where older residents go to sing *enka*⁴¹.

Most hauntingly, my time in Minami saw the proliferation of vacant lots, interspersed like missing teeth amid rows of private homes. In most cases they were the former homes of the recently deceased whose children, if any, abandoned Minami for the glamour and opportunity of city life.

Minami is an eloquent testament to the realities of an ageing Japan. It also illustrates some of the tensions that emerge out of the country's demographic dilemma: precipitous population decline and an inability to regenerate on its

⁴¹ *Enka* is a genre of music with evocative, nostalgic lyrics popularised in the 1950s and immensely popular amongst Japan's elderly.

own. Anxieties about the future, and the loss of an idealised traditional past, are especially difficult for communities like this.



Figure 21: A neighbourhood chiropractor/acupuncturist advertises treatments for rainy season knee and hip pain

Yet, although the history of 20th-century Naniwa is a story of de-industrialisation and decline, enthusiastic local historians narrate local history as one of uncompromised authenticity, resistance to intrusion, temporary dereliction, and recuperable grandeur. Despite this fierce, almost defiantly nostalgic sense of place (which remains the city's greatest charm for me) the evidence of marginalisation and decrepitude are felt on a collective and individual level, as its residents age and pass away without anyone to succeed them.



Figure 22: One of Minami's many vacant lots; evidence of a fire early in my fieldwork.

Anteroom Osaka, Ikeda City

When I met Tsujimoto Hiroyuki, an accomplished designer with a strong sense of social responsibility, it was to discuss the sprawling 48-room Anteroom, which he had completed the previous year. As he describes it, the vision for Anteroom Osaka is explicitly utopian. Its extensive facilities include two 'café areas', a library, and a common space where regular members' meetings take place, in addition to displays of housemates' artwork and monthly educational workshop events. As he explained, a large-scale sharehouse like Anteroom should function

as a 'workshop for living', with all residents' needs met onsite; but the drawback of this self-containment is that it potentially obstructs engagement between residents and the local community.

Anteroom was conceived, planned, and engineered as an experimental solution to contemporary dilemmas like the destruction of local neighbourhoods and the social isolation of the elderly by fostering intergenerational exchange. The project occupies a four-story building – a structure owned by communications giant NTT that previously housed its operators connecting telephone calls with giant manual machines. Converting the industrial property into a sharehouse was a corporate strategy to make productive use of vacant space as well as an ambitious, though small-scale, social engineering project.

The building is adjacent to a dilapidated *shōtengai* (shopping arcade) in Ikeda, a northern exurb of Osaka. Like most *shōtengai*, that are traditional hubs for local social and economic exchange, this arcade is composed of small entrepreneur-owned specialty shops and artisanal enterprises. Geographer and specialist in the evolution of Japanese urban spaces Andre Sorenson explains that *shōtengai* are a frequent casualty of rapid and dramatic demographic change:

The spectre of large-scale decline and abandonment of urban housing and shops may seem remote for those familiar primarily with the cores of the major metropolitan areas... In many older industrial inner areas ...where the outflow of younger population has been longstanding, the problem is very visible. The old shopping streets (*shōtengai*) of such districts have faced challenges of decline for decades, with a reduced customer base, empty shops, and ageing shop owners without successors (Sorenson 2002: 232).

The distress caused by the decline of the *shōtengai* is not of strictly economic concern; in addition to arousing the moral and aesthetic objections to the shift from small-scale to large-scale businesses familiar in the west, in Japan it arouses more anxieties about the end of (re-)productivity and circulation. Most interests in the *shōtengai* are

small-scale family owned and operated establishments, run by elderly proprietors...it is common for such stores to remain vacant for long periods when they finally close, if no successors are interested in taking on the family business. Many such families are reluctant to sell the property, even if unable to continue the enterprise, so the stores stay vacant and contribute to the decline of the district (Sorenson 2002: 232).

In symbolic terms, the loss of *shōtengai* that were at the centre of economic life in local communities arouses anxieties about the dissolution of traditional forms of community identity and sociality enacted in localised flows of exchange.

Anteroom Osaka, the aim of which is to infuse new human capital back into this derelict exurb, is both a for-profit sharehouse business and an urban renewal project planned and underwritten by a corporate entity. The physical structure and proximity encourage the mostly younger residents to patronise the mostly older owners' shops in the *shōtengai*. The management encourages further intergenerational interaction by including evening events with these older locals in a monthly program, especially workshops in traditional arts and craft specialties. It is a considered solution to growing difficulties afflicting Japanese neighbourhoods: the lack of social ties between generations and anomic tendencies amongst both older and younger cohorts⁴².

⁴² Stephen Robertson has presented work, currently in progress, about a *shōtengai* in the small rural village of Suwa in Niigata Prefecture where the owners of these shops, in an effort to avoid closing the *shōtengai*, have begun to

Since it opened in 2012, Anteroom's monthly events, though not mandatory, are well attended, and residents have developed the kind of interpersonal networks with ageing neighbours. The potentially occlusive effects of the sharehouse – based in the hermetic enclosure and social self-sufficiency Tsujimoto describes – are overcome through a strategy to engender intergenerational collaboration and the transmission of skills and property.

Expo House, Kyoto

When I first visited Jurack III, one of the 11 properties that compose 'Expo House' in Kyoto, it was to participate in a World Cup football viewing party. Then 30-year-old owner Komori Yusuke graciously met me on a main street to orient me through the narrow back streets to the house. As we wove our way through this traditional neighbourhood of *machiya* and *minka*, (one- and two-storey wooden homes) Komori exchanged pleasantries with his neighbours. We stopped for ten minutes or so to chat with a gregarious older woman watering her tiny roadside garden. After exchanging pleasantries, she asked Komori what event he had scheduled for the evening, then wished us fun watching the match.

The crowd of Japanese and internationals who gathered that evening for the Japan/Australia match included current and former residents, as well as a number of their invited friends. Although the 23 young people gathered around

issue very cheap leases to young entrepreneurs in a strategy Robertson describes with the kinship idiom of legacy and inheritance.

the big-screen television became increasingly boisterous as the evening wore on, none of the neighbours of the traditional wood-framed Jurack III complained.

In an interview several weeks later, I asked Komori about his challenges integrating Expo House into the local community. He responded only, 'there weren't any'. His neighbours' warm reception can be attributed in part to Komori's charisma, and the fact that he grew up in this cosy neighbourhood. After completing his degree at Asia Pacific University in Kyūshū, he returned to the neighbourhood where he grew up. He bought his first property and renovated it with his father, a contractor with a specialty in Japanese vernacular/artisanal architecture. He explained that he had made special efforts to liaise between the houses and the local community, distributing business cards to the neighbours and asking them kindly to contact him with any grievances against the house and its residents.

In contrast, much of our contact with the Minami community consisted of noise complaints to Mr. Yamada. In an attempt to foster the confidence and goodwill of our neighbours, owner Kobayashi had offered his friend Yamada as the neighbourhood liaison and sent him door-to-door on a diplomatic mission prior to the opening of the sharehouse to reassure the locals that our presence would not be disruptive. As a middle-aged businessman living part-time with a mixed group of internationals ten to twenty years his junior, however, he did not inspire our neighbours' confidence.

Perhaps more importantly, Expo House's Komori emphasised the importance of participating in local 'place-making' rituals on behalf of and as ambassador for his sharehouses. He was especially involved in the local festival, participating in and encouraging his residents' participation in shrine building (*mikoshi*), and making donations on behalf of the houses to these efforts. Contributing a donation to the local festival is an important and conspicuous expression of community involvement in Japan, and donations are rewarded public notoriety. Names of businesses and individuals who contribute to the local shrine's fundraising efforts are calligraphed onto lanterns displayed prominently in public places; in Minami, it was in front of the train station. Komori's donations of money and time to this important and visible local celebration signified his houses' membership and involvement in the local community.

When the local delegates of the *matsuri* committee came soliciting donations at Cheznew, I was (to their visible chagrin) the one to answer the doorbell. The elderly representative of the local shrine repeatedly asked me to speak with the 'head of household' while two tough-looking young guys in work trousers and bleached hair sniggered nervously behind him. We had no such person and our closest approximation, Yamada, was in Osaka and unreachable. I asked Sachiko and Kiyoshi, the only housemates I could find, whether we should front some money on behalf of the house and take a collection later. In their late teens and earning barely enough to cover their rent, they were not prepared to advance money on behalf of the entire house. Completely unfamiliar with the protocol and fearful of offering an inappropriate amount as a donation, I thought it better

to have the delegation contact someone familiar with protocol. Returning to the front door, I tried to explain: 'it's just that this is a *sharehouse*...' I searched the bulletin board frantically for Ms. Umeda's business card, and there was a collective sense of relief when I unpinned it and handed it to the delegation's representative, putting an end to this awkward exchange for which none of us had come prepared. If any single moment made clear to me the misalliance of Cheznew with traditional conceptions of the household in its relationship with the local community, it was this.



Figure 23: Summer festival lanterns by the train station publicise the names of the families and businesses who donated to the summer festival

Conclusions

This chapter begins with garbage and ends with community. The unifying theme, which emerges and recedes in the foregoing narrative, is the tensions between traditional templates for social interaction, on the one hand; and the sharehouse, on the other. At this early stage in the history of sharehouses, social relationships both within the sharehouse and between the sharehouse and the local community remain ambiguous and open to interpretation. To illustrate, I began with the shifting relationships amongst members of the sharehouse with regard to household management, including the disposal of garbage. Cheznew's shifting protocols for the segregation and disposal of garbage in the first six months of its existence demonstrated shifting understandings of the appropriate responsibilities of its residents, in particular between men and women. The house was redefined in its early stages as quasi-family home; a congregation of essentially independent one-person households; and finally, a rationalised corporate structure with an explicit internal hierarchy.

As I describe in the second half of this chapter, the sharehouse does not easily integrate into the traditional local community, where membership is at the level of the household. Despite recent dramatic changes in the actual composition of Japanese households, the paradigmatic Japanese home consists of a wage-earning male head of household and a housewife, whose complementary roles within and outside the house also structure their involvement in rituals of place-making and participation in the community.

One central question that remains is whether the sharehouse can be integrated into, or whether it necessarily supersedes, the local community as the locus of social belonging. The social architecture of the sharehouse threatens to disrupt the traditional community by substituting new relationships not legitimated by blood, marriage, or long-term engagement based on proximity and exchange. As we have seen, a sharehouse's relationship with neighbourhood is not predetermined. In Anteroom Osaka, a corporate sponsor developed an innovative response to social problems; at Expo House, the character of the proprietor and his considered strategy of goodwill and investment in the local community were sufficient to gain his neighbours' acceptance. Sharehouses like Anteroom and Expo successfully integrated into their local communities, while Cheznew became increasingly isolated and self-contained, disregarding the most important symbolic protocols of community compliance and membership. However, creating ties between the sharehouse and the existing community requires effort – both material and symbolic – that in traditional contexts falls under the rubric of women's voluntary labour. In the sharehouse, a central virtue of which is the escape it offers from traditional gender roles, community acceptance and integration cannot be taken for granted. They require conscious effort by conscientious representatives of the home, including symbolic compliance with local traditions and protocols.

村社会

Chapter 7: Village Society

I came to try out a new life, but I return home a single woman.

-Housemate Fumiko, posting on social media about leaving Cheznew

Despite the sharehouse's appeals to individual aspiration and the promise of liberation from social and cultural obligations (see Chapters 2 and 3), it also invites fantasies about togetherness and the restoration of a lapsed *gemeinschaft* in the form of the '21st century village society'. Yet, as I argue in this chapter, the 'community' offered by the sharehouse is provisional, exclusionary, and transactional. It is an artefact of the neoliberal age, where a sense of community is available for purchase. That compromised, commoditised 'community' lacks both the demands and the benefits of mutual obligation that characterised the historical village society. One indication is the exclusion, until recently, of many demographic segments of Japanese society, including older people, single mothers, and families.

In recent years, entrepreneurs have begun marketing *niche* properties to these demographics. However, as I discuss in this chapter, these properties are a minority of the sharehouse market. One barrier to their success is, as I have discussed in previous chapters, the persistence of 20th century ideologies about the composition of the household as limited to family members. Perhaps more significant, however, is that the 'mainstream' sharehouse exclusively targets young, single, urbanites. Its frequent appeals to Japanese longing for a sense of

community through the rhetoric of the 'new village society' disguises a fundamentally exclusionary sharehouse culture. The idea of 'community' is invoked, but the community within a sharehouse is unburdened by mutual responsibility and continuity, the hallmarks of authentic community.

Intergenerational interaction at Cheznew

When I moved in, Cheznew was less selective than other sharehouses because it was a new property in a less desirable area. The owner, Kobayashi, was willing to entertain applications from foreigners and older Japanese to fill its empty rooms. During my stay at Cheznew, it housed two older single women, Ms. Honda (then 60) and Fumiko (then 45). In addition, of course, 45-year-old bachelor Yamada was an important but intermittent presence in the house⁴³. Though none of these older residents fit the legal definition of 'elderly' reserved for individuals over the age of 65, they were significantly older than the majority of housemates, which had consequences for the way they were perceived and treated.

Honda-san, the oldest in the house, was extremely thin and a heavy smoker; indeed, the only times we saw her were when she quietly slipped behind the sliding kitchen door to the parking lot for one of the long, slender cigarettes

⁴³ I have already discussed Yamada's role in the house, as a part-time resident and school friend of Cheznew's owner, Kobayashi. Honda and Fumiko, on the other hand, were full-time residents.

marketed to women of her generation as glamorous. She came home early and ate alone, typically preparing herself a small plate in the kitchen and rushing back to privacy. She was faultlessly cheerful, but she had little in common with housemates who were thirty years her junior; she would attend our events, but only for ten or fifteen minutes of embarrassed small talk before retreating to her room.

Honda's single moment of belonging came when I was invited to a *yukata* festival in the centre of town, and the female housemates pitched in to help me dress in a used *yukata* set gifted to me by an elderly friend. Finding that the set was missing the cord to secure the *yukata* around my waist beneath the *obi*, Honda excitedly offered to look through her storage locker behind the house, the existence of which nobody had known about. My younger housemates searched the internet for tutorials on how to tie the *obi*, giggling that they had been raised with the self-tying kind and playfully reprimanding themselves for this lapse in their traditional cultural literacy. When Honda returned with the cord, she presented it to us and excitedly demonstrated how to secure the *obi*, teaching the younger women the way she had done it growing up. Despite occasional moments of bonding like this one, however, Honda was largely a mystery to the younger housemates, who struggled to find common ground with her.

Thus, Honda's life at Cheznew was mostly one of isolation. She had never been married, but had lived with her parents until their deaths, leaving her alone in her 50s. She had sold their house for very little money, bringing what she could

not sell or otherwise part with to Cheznew. I was allowed a brief peek into the world she inhabited one day when she left her sliding door open as she sneaked out for a cigarette. Behind the sliding door, she had arranged a tiny sitting room decorated with a Hello Kitty tea set, an antique table, and frilly pink curtains. A modular shelving unit unlike the ones provided by the management overflowed with linens and tchotchkes. Although, like the other housemates, she never invited anyone to her room, she had pushed her futon to one side of the room to accommodate this little living area filled with remnants of her family home.

45-year-old bachelor Yamada was keen to distance himself in the eyes of the younger residents from Honda, whom he viewed with benevolent condescension. He often implied to me privately that she had a cognitive disability, perhaps early-onset dementia, although she continued to work as a bookkeeper for the small family-owned enterprise that had employed her for decades. In her presence, however, Yamada humoured and indulged her like an elderly aunt, despite their proximity in age. He was careful to refer to her with honorific language. At parties, he was always careful to serve before the others, often in mock flirtation. Honda, for her part, blushed and bated for an instant in the attention. Following Yamada's lead, the younger housemates treated her with the respect and deference appropriate to a woman of her age, referring to her as *obasan* ('auntie'), though they did not extend themselves to spend time with her.

To the same extent that Yamada tolerated Honda, he disdained 45-year-old Fumiko. As she returned from her shower, he would stage whisper denunciations that her revealing bathrobe was 'slovenly' (*darashinonai*) and

revealed her 'low level' (*hikui reberu*) background. Indeed, Fumiko had not enjoyed the privileges that many of our housemates, including Yamada, had enjoyed. Prior to her arrival at Cheznew, she had spent her life in an exurb of Tokyo in a working-class household. She had become pregnant in her early twenties and raised her daughter in her childhood home, tethered to her parents until her daughter reached adulthood. Her daughter's recent emancipation was also her own, as she was able for the first time to strike out on her own in a different region of the country.

During the six months Fumiko lived in the sharehouse, she was registered with various *hakken* (temporary employment) agencies, so she woke up each morning hoping to be assigned a day's work or, when possible, to 'skill up' by taking computerised training seminars at the *hakken* offices. More often than not, however, no assignment came, and Fumiko would spend the day, when the majority of housemates were at work, watching television alone. Over time, she became defensive, and often hostile, when housemates, returning from work, tried to engage her in small talk. Ultimately, Fumiko was unable support her life as a single woman on her inconsistent and hard-earned pay. She returned to her parents' home, posting on social media: 'I went to try out a new life, but I return home a single woman'.

Fumiko's departure from the house went otherwise unremarked. The younger housemates, who had entered the house in search of an alternative to the 'traditional lifecourse' of marriage and a traditional career, had been uneasy

around Fumiko, whose own single life was far from what they envisioned for themselves. Although most of the young male housemates were less vocal than Yamada about her habits in the house, they averted their eyes from her immodest outfits. For young women postponing marriage, Fumiko was a warning about the challenges of growing old without the stability of married life and in the absence of a social safety net. When asked how they felt about Fumiko's decision to come to Cheznew, they applauded her for venturing out on her own after a life in her childhood home: Sachiko said it was 'amazing' (*sugoi*); Akari added that she was 'brave' (*yūki ga aru*). When I asked whether they would want to live in a sharehouse at her age, however, their tone changed as they expressed their reservations. Sachiko said that it seemed lonely and difficult (*sabishikute tsurai*) to be on her own at her age, and Akari and Hina agreed. After a pause, Akari added 'it's a little bit... pitiful' (*kawaisō*).

Months after she left, I sat in the offices of Hitsuji Real Estate in Shibuya, Tokyo, interviewing its president about the future of shared housing in Japan. I recounted Fumiko's story, including her regretful missive that she had sought a new life in our sharehouse but had only struggled to pay her rent and to find acceptance. He laughed drily and asked, 'She wanted a new life, so she went to Naniwa?'

Sharehouses and the ageing society

As is well known, contemporary Japan is burdened with a ‘rapidly ageing society’, a demographic imbalance between older people who require care and young people who traditionally provided care for their parents and grandparents. Along with this demographic shift, rates of generational co-residence have declined in response to economic and social factors (Raymo and Kaneda 2003: 27-34). The implications for seniors, as Peter Backhaus claims, (Backhaus 2017: 5-10) include a rise in elderly single-person households, a dearth of care, and the rise in phenomena like *kodokushi*, dying alone.



Figure 24: Housemates Honda and Fumiko

This demographic tsunami, together with changing understandings of the family, has left millions of older Japanese alone and vulnerable. According to the Japanese Statistics Bureau's Statistical Handbook 2016, approximately one quarter of Japan's 21.52 million 'elderly households', 5.63 million, are one-person elderly households. Of these single-person households, approximately two thirds are women (MIAC 2016). This burgeoning population of isolated seniors is not merely of sentimental concern; the challenge of providing care – in a broad sense, not limited to medical services – is a public policy issue for the Japanese state, due to the health risks associated with social isolation. In response to the erosion of social welfare for the growing population of Japanese outside of the 'traditional household' by housing elderly Japanese, some have proposed that the intergenerational sharehouse might be adapted to provide support and social connectedness to isolated elders.

Under the circumstances, intergenerational shared housing might offer an avenue for intergenerational interaction (*sedaikan kōryū*) as a countermeasure against the consequences of isolation amongst older people (Thang 2001: 181-193; 2002: 156-176). Indeed, since the 1990s, architect Ikuko Koyabe has advocated the adoption of permanent government-funded collective housing based on Scandinavian models as a response to generational segregation and other demographic dilemmas, like single motherhood. The communal housing Koyabe envisions differs in important features from the current for-profit sharehouse, particularly in the intensity of sharing and the expected tenure of residents. For Koyabe, the necessary features of community

housing include: that food preparation expenses and responsibilities are shared; and that all generations, classes, and backgrounds, are equally welcome.

(Koyabe 1997: 154-5).

Recent years have seen the emergence of a handful of intergenerational sharehouses built on this more intensively communitarian model. Collective House *Seiseki* ('sacred space') outside Tokyo, is one example. While public awareness of sharehouses made *Seiseki* possible, the project, unlike the sharehouse, explicitly aims to unite different generations, not only 'people in their 20s and 30s of the same mindset' (*Tsunaga-ruzu* 2013: 128); it houses 20 adults, the oldest now in her 70s, and eight children. Unlike in the mainstream sharehouse, the residents share community meals up to 20 times a month, and responsibility for children and elderly residents is shared.

A 2016 profile in SankeiBiz, the business section of Sankei Shinbun, discusses the benefits of intergenerational facilities for seniors by re-establishing social connections with younger generations. A 59-year-old schoolteacher and *Seiseki* resident 'recalls the sense of danger after divorcing my husband when, on my days off, I didn't speak to anyone for days on end'. The owner of the NPO that established *Seiseki* explicitly links the rise in intergenerational 'communal housing' like *Seiseki* amongst widowed and divorced women and never-married men aged 50-60 to changing social conditions: 'whether they have children or not, there are many people who want a moderate connection while maintaining

their independence. The sharehouse becomes an option as the rapidly ageing society and low birth rate progresses'. (SankeiBiz 2016)

In 2015 article in the Nikkei Shinbun, the argument for shared housing as a strategy for coping with the isolation wrought by old age and its consequences is more explicitly linked to the exclusion of seniors from mainstream society, including their own families, that has resulted from rapid social change. Here, the elderly pose a 'nuisance' (*meiwaku*) to their families and neighbours, driving them into self-segregation. The author claims that nowadays, older people 'don't want the implications of their old age to pose a nuisance to their children and those around them' (Nikkei Shinbun 2015). It explains that 'when multiple generations share a house, it seems that seniors have all the more motivation and vitality. This was the birth of the sharehouse, which markets this multigenerational unity'.

However, based on her ethnographic research at 'Kotoen', an intergenerational facility in Tokyo, Leng Leng Thang questions whether intergenerational interaction ('*sedai-ka kōryū*') can effectively replicate more traditional social connections. Kotoen, like Seiseki, aims at re-establishing 'multigenerational unity' by replicating the diminishing multi-generational family (*daikazoku*) that provided social connectedness in the past. However, as Thang demonstrates, the interaction (*fureau*) between generations at Kotoen is often superficial; it does not rise to the levels of social intimacy that characterised the family, let alone to ameliorate the effects of social isolation on its elderly residents. She concludes

that the ideology of intergenerational contact on a traditional *daikazoku*

(‘extended family’) model does not reflect Japan’s present and future realities:

daikazoku ideology suggests a romanticised image of the traditional family system...[that] does not simply address a private dream; it is also a dream yearned for by the general public. However, this contradicts the present social reality, for age segregation is becoming a norm, and all indications are that it will become a more established trend in the future (Thang 2001: 171-172).

The detachment of ideologies like *daikazoku*, associated with intergenerational contact, from the realities of Japan’s present demographic predicament are at work in the sharehouse, where the ideology of inclusion and tradition collides with the reality that the sharehouse is commodified lifestyle marketed to young people. The ‘bonds’ it promises to restore are different from the traditional bonds that characterised or are thought to have characterised intergenerational relations, even the recent past. By its nature, the sharehouse is the site of elective, limited, and transitory social relationships, absent the mutual responsibility that attributed to social relationships –particularly intergenerational relationships – that emerge in the workplace and the home. This was visible in the way Fumiko and Honda-san were tolerated, perhaps humoured, by my younger housemates, without being fully integrated into the social fabric of the house. As I have demonstrated, there was no particular animosity between the generations; neither were the older residents fully embraced as ‘community members’, however. The intergenerational segregation that Thang noted at Kotoen and forecasted to increase was visible at Cheznew, where its older full-time residents were socially marginal.

Exclusion

In fact, many mainstream sharehouses still do not allow older residents (I have indicated that Cheznew was somewhat unique in accommodating residents over forty), and throughout Japan the majority of sharehouse residents are aged between 25 and 35. According to Hitsuji Real Estate's '10,000 Thanks Report', the mean age of sharehouse residents nationally rose 1.2 years between 2007 and 2012, from 27.7 to 28.9 years. (Hitsuji 2013; Figure 25). Sharehouse owners and managers are vigilant in screening residents for compatibility, which easily gives way to discrimination against older applicants. In addition, according to MLIT, more than half of sharehouse managers enforce an age limit on residents (MLIT 2013: 151).

Most of the owners and managers I interviewed claimed to screen potential candidates in some way or another, usually rather subjectively according to abstract criteria like 'a feeling'. Shared living being what it is, owners and management companies are careful to vet potential sharers prior to moving them in, as it behoves them to avoid unnecessary domestic problems which jeopardise their business. It appears that the extent of this screening varies by company and usually intensifies as the size of the property and number of residents decreases. Of course, this is an opportunity to turn away potential residents for a variety of reasons, including advanced age.

Even sharehouse owners and managers who do not publicise official policies against older residents exert considerable discretion through less formal processes. Rather than age discrimination as such, sharehouse owners exclude

potential housemates who carry with them the taint of social marginalism captured in the phrase *kawatte iru* ('abnormal'). This sense of abnormality would encompass, amongst others, single elders seeking accommodation in a sharehouse, who may seem suspicious or unusual for having failed to marry or purchase a home.⁴⁴

Watanabe-san, owner of the women-only sharehouse company Cocoon, boasted to me that he meticulously screened candidates by personally showing the houses to every applicant. If an applicant seemed unusual (*kawatte iru*) to him for any reason, including her age, he would reject her application in the name of avoiding conflict amongst his residents. As for older women pupating in one of his cocoons, he explained, 'it's no good. They can't relate to each other. I have a strict limit. Nobody over forty'.

Author: What would you say to an applicant who is too old?

Watanabe: If they're over 40 years old and aren't married and don't have a place to live already, they're abnormal (*kawatte iru*) and they'll cause problems. I would simply tell them, 'I'm sorry, but it's better for you to live alone'.

Author: What happens when an existing tenant reaches forty? If she is tidy, she gets along with her housemates, she pays her rent on time? Do you let her stay?

Watanabe: Absolutely not. I'm very strict! It's 'no good' ('*NG*') for the other housemates, and it's *NG* for them [crossing his arms in an emphatic 'X']. At that point, it is best for them to 'graduate' (*sotsugyō*)

Author: But... 'graduate' to what, exactly?

Watanabe: I don't know - to live on their own, to get married, to return to their parents' home, maybe. But not in a sharehouse.

⁴⁴ Despite the provisions in Article 14 of the Japanese Constitution, housing discrimination against the elderly is common, according to Osaka University housing economist Nakagawa Masayuki (Nakagawa 2003: 1-4).

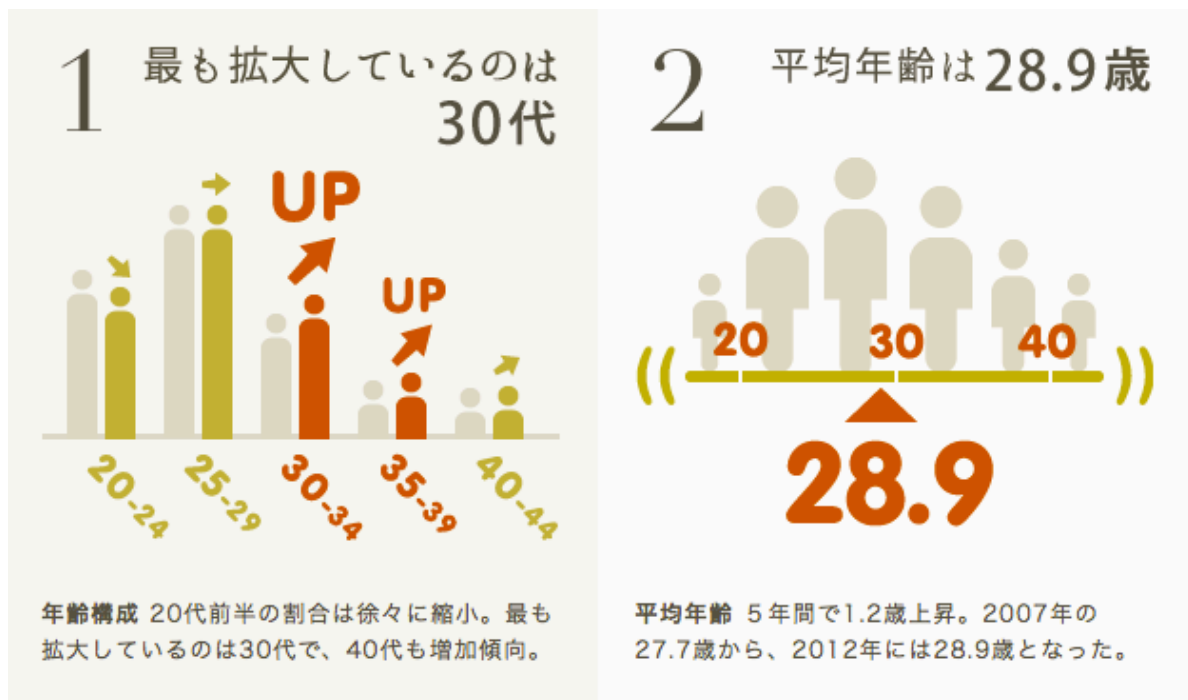


Figure 25 Excerpt from Hitsuji (2013) '100,000 Thanks Report'. Left: 'The largest-growing segment is 30-somethings'. AGE COMPOSITION: Early and late 20-somethings are gradually declining. The fastest-growing are people in their thirties, and there is also a growth tendency in 40-somethings. Right: 'The average age is 28.9'. AVERAGE AGE: has risen 1.2 years in a five-year period. It has gone from 27.7 in 2007 to 28.9 in 2012.

As Honda's and Fumiko's treatment by the younger housemates demonstrates, this sense that the sharehouse has a 'natural' constituency in young people is widely accepted by young people themselves. However, it also remains unclear whether the current generation of Japanese seniors could be convinced in significant numbers to surrender their private lives (and homes) for cooperative living. Healthcare concerns notwithstanding, the normative equivalence of home and family remains strong amongst Japanese, particularly older Japanese. Sharehouse advocates Abe and Mohara conclude that the sharehouse will realise its potential as a housing alternative for coming generations of seniors but not

the present generation, whose ideas about the propriety of living with others are too entrenched.

Anemone Platz's research amongst elderly informants in Tokyo and Kanazawa corroborates the claim that sharehouse living remains unpalatable to many elderly Japanese. Like Abe and Mohara, Platz attributes this aversion to the embedded centrality of family relationships in post-retirement housing considerations:

Despite worries that Japanese family ideologies are changing in fundamental ways, people ... have not (yet) subscribed to new ways of settling one's life disregarding family relationships. ...[T]here was no discussion of sharing living space with other than family members. Although some of my informants were perfectly aware of the existence of collectives and senior citizen's housing complexes, it was nothing they could anticipate or wanted to imagine for themselves. This is not surprising since these alternatives are in fact still relatively few and created for people who have a long experience of living alone and lack a family network. These housing forms are thus better designed for later generations of senior citizens, when we can expect a large number of elderly without any family relations at all (Platz 2012: 268).

In summary, it remains to be seen whether sharehouses could ameliorate the vulnerability and isolation of Japan's millions of single elders, the majority of whom are women. As I have discussed, sharehouses – both dedicated 'elder-only' and intergenerational facilities – have garnered attention in the press as a potential alternative to life in a 'single-person household' or burdening one's children or neighbours with the nuisance (*meiwaku*) associated with old age. In practice, however, as Leng Leng Thang claims, the social distance between older and younger Japanese is expanding, and it is not clear whether or why young people - driven to the sharehouse with promises of emancipation from

traditional (chiefly familial) responsibilities –would want to assume this ‘burden’. My observations at Cheznew suggest that even the decade or so separating middle-aged women Fumiko and Honda from the rest of the housemates posed a considerable, and ultimately insurmountable, obstacle to their full integration into the home. If, as I discuss below, sharehouses are marketed on the promise to re-establish social ‘bonds’ and ‘belonging’ (*tsunagaru/enishi/kizuna*), that promise went unfulfilled for many of my housemates, especially those outside the demographic majority.

Sharehouses in the age of the declining birth rate

Relations between Fumiko and her younger housemates were strained; in addition to being put off by her age and lack of refinement, the younger housemates found it difficult to relate to Fumiko’s experiences and circumstances as a single mother. Mr. Yamada was the same age as Fumiko, but they were perceived very differently: his room served as a *pied-a-terre* when he wanted a night or weekend away from his home in the city, while Fumiko could scarcely pay her rent. More importantly, although Yamada was divorced with a single child and living with a new fiancée (and the following year he would marry yet another woman); Fumiko was a never-married single mother. Thus, while Yamada’s life was not aspirational, Fumiko was a darkly cautionary figure in a cultural context where only 2% of children are born out of wedlock (Hertog 2009: 2).

As we have seen, Fumiko did not choose single motherhood. Rather, she raised her daughter without support from the father in the era before the government began 'scrambl[ing] to create a social safety net' (Kingston 2004: 264). For women of Fumiko's generation, single motherhood meant social as well as economic marginalisation: 'being a single mother in Japan was not just associated with a struggle to make ends meet, but was also considered a departure from the stability and affluence of the normative ideal of the middle-class housewife' (Ezawa 2016: xiv). While Kingston and Ezawa emphasise the government's changing economic policies with regard to single motherhood in an era of public alarm over the declining birthrate, social acceptance continues to lag. As the World Values Survey demonstrates, Japan maintains a persistent stigma against single motherhood:

Japanese people are still less likely to approve of a woman who 'wants to have a child as a single parent but... doesn't want to have a stable relationship with a man' than Westerners. In 2005, around 22 per cent of Japanese people approved of such a woman, compared with 36 per cent of Italians, 35 per cent of Germans, 63 per cent of French, 33 per cent of Britons, 79 per cent of Spaniards, and 49 per cent of Swedes (Hertog 2011: 95).

Despite its claims to offer an alternative and experimental living environment, sharehouse owners, managers, marketers, and residents employ tactics catalogued throughout this thesis to enhance the 'propriety' of sharehouse living. As I have demonstrated, the worldview many of my young housemates shared was, in many ways, surprisingly conventional (if not conservative). Their assessment of Fumiko as 'pitiable' and 'low level' (the characterisation endorsed by Yamada) was certainly linked to the stigma she carried as a single mother.

However, in 2014, Hitsuji Real Estate debuted its new 'Hitsuji for Families' website portal, featuring 'family-friendly' sharehouses aimed primarily at 'single parents', and offering advice to parents of young children who are interested in shared housing as a means of cooperative childrearing and resource-sharing. This is a first step toward expanding the sharehouse model to accommodate collective living to demographics other than young singles, and, if successful, could realise one of its more radical and socially relevant potentialities. Theoretically, if the sharehouse could be usefully adapted to include more coordinated long-term partnerships amongst women and men to share resources and responsibilities, motherhood (including single motherhood) could become more compatible with career advancement.

As of this writing, the 'Hitsuji For Family' portal lists dozens of properties suitable for 'families'. The majority of these are intended for single parents, however, which in nearly every case means single mothers. Beyond advertising rhetoric, most of the properties listed as 'family-friendly' are distinguished from the typical sharehouse only in that they have policies permitting children and offer no concrete forms of parental support.⁴⁵ Instead, they rely on a familiar discursive patchwork of 'community' and 'self', emancipation and social connection, as glimpsed in a representative profile of 'Stylio With Daikanyama' in Tokyo's Shibuya neighbourhood:

⁴⁵ 'Mother-only' Hagu-mu Manor, advertised as 'an environment where mothers can easily work and become financially independent', offers a free meal four times a month to its residents, busy working mothers and their children. This is the most concrete incentive offered to aid single parents, aside from the provision in many properties of child-friendly spaces like an open kitchen (to observe children playing as you prepare dinner) or a dedicated nursing room.

For my children. For myself. And for all of us. There aren't many single parents who have to raise their children alone while they work a full-time job. For those single parents, we are offering this safe place for a flexible 'parenting lifestyle' full of creativity... We are aiming to create a space where... [R]esidents and local people can light-heartedly support each other... It's an environment where you can without hesitation ask someone to babysit or to help you with hurdles in your life. (Hitsuji: 'Stylio With Daikanyama').

Thus, while 'Hitsuji for Families' constitutes a gesture of acceptance of single 'parents', it is a gesture without substance. Like the intergenerational sharehouse, it indicates a potentiality as yet mostly unfulfilled.

Sharehouses as the 'new village society'

In 2011, the year of the 'triple disaster' that punctuated Japanese anxieties about the country's ecological and economic precarity, the Kanji Aptitude Testing Association named *kizuna* ('bonds') as the winner of its annual 'kanji of the year' survey. Anne Allison notes that:

belonging became the new buzzword: belonging to one another, to Japan, to a homeland transformed by mud and radiation. References to connectedness (*tsunagari*) and bonds (*kizuna*) gushed everywhere... But, for all the euphoria (and nationalism) surrounding togetherness, it was also very much of the moment.... (Allison 2014: 198).

Kizuna 'gushed' into sharehouse marketing, along with associated tropes of *enishi* and *tsunagari* ('attachment'; 'connection'). In the introduction to her *Sharehouse Advice for Adults*, Kyoko Nishikawa argues that:

... when it comes down to it, it's 'bonds' (*kizuna*) that are more important than country or local body. The great disaster became an impetus for considering the 'things we don't want to lose'. On the day of the tragedy... for the vast majority of people what was most strongly felt was that 'for

myself, the most important thing is bonds with others'. ...Nonetheless, nowadays to what extent do we really have 'real bonds, strong bonds' with people? This fellowship with the community is already disappearing. (Nishikawa 2012: 29-30).

Here, Nishikawa links social isolation with the experience of vulnerability at the hands of a 'natural' disaster, and suggests that the experience of the disaster made the realities of social exclusion more visible and visceral. More importantly, by prioritising 'social bonds' over 'country and local body', the author effectively erases the complex socio-political and economic causes of 'precarity', reducing them to a lapsed ethos of communitarianism. Here, the emancipation of 'bonds' from existing national and local bodies suggests that these bonds can and should be constructed independently of investment or coordination at a level beyond the interpersonal.

Sharehouse marketing suggest that these lost 'bonds' can be recovered in the sharehouse. In their insistence that the sharehouse can replicate traditional and organic forms of social interaction, they often rely on the trope of the 'new village society' (*neomurashakai*) or '21st century village society' (*21 seiki murashakai*). For example, the authors of *Sharehouse: Why We Live with Others* explain that 'by gathering in the same space and sharing ideas and objects [we] mutually support each other in daily life. This style of living has been called... the "21st century village society"' (Abe and Mohara 2012: 154).

The rhetoric of the sharehouse as the 'new village' extends the possibility of a place of belonging (or *ibasho*) to those who have experienced exclusion from

other social institutions – flexibilised young people from a secure workplace, or the elderly from the care of their families, for example. However, as we have seen, there are limits to its inclusiveness. Many sharehouses quietly discriminate against older residents during the application process; and the two older female housemates at Cheznew were, as I have explained, tolerated but not extended the type of ‘social bonds’ associated with the ‘village’. This is because the target constituency for sharehouse residence remains young, urban, and independent, as the advertising copy by real estate giant Chintai demonstrates:

[T]he ‘sharehouse’ is the product of that very human desire amongst the *young men and women living in apartment buildings* just to greet their neighbours - ‘I want to live connected to others while maintaining an appropriate sense of social distance’ - that is not satisfied in the desert of Tokyo. It seems this is the city dweller’s feeling of ‘a return to the country’/‘new village society’. Because, after all, everybody desires warmth (Chintai 2014: emphasis mine).

In this way, the ‘new village’ society is premised on an exclusionary logic that erases, amongst others, the elderly. Just as the meaning of *kizuna* loses its secondary meaning as ‘tethers’ or ‘fetters’ in sharehouse marketing, in this impoverished sense of the term, ‘community’ is stripped of the inconveniences associated with accommodating and abiding the nuisance (*meiwaku*) entailed in encountering and reckoning with otherness. Community becomes both selective and elective, a demand provided by the market: ‘sharehouse living... stresses relations that bring peace by having others around... Isn’t this “interpersonal contact” something all young people, not only sharehouse residents, are seeking?’ (Abe and Mohara 2012: 107).

Despite its (partially manufactured) foreign origins (see Chapter 3), references to the 'village society' appeal to nostalgia for a Japanese tradition not yet corrupted by 'Western-style' values of individualism and competition. Osaka University cultural theorist Miura Atsushi develops this equation of social cohesion with a latent Japaneseness, as against the egoism associated with foreign, specifically 'Western', influence. Miura identifies 'social connection' amongst the 'Japanese' values surrendered at the altar of economic and geopolitical ascendancy: 'Japan's transformation into an economic superpower was none other than turning into a Western state...There was an awareness even then that we had sacrificed and destroyed much of what had been good about the old Japan' (Miura 2014: 163). He envisions shared housing as one component of the incipient 'fourth-stage consumer society' – essentially the so-called 'sharing economy' - characterised by a series of transformations in public values, 'from self-oriented to society-oriented; from egoism to altruism'... [and] 'from Western, urban, and individualistic to Japanese and regional' (Miura 2014: 129).

These appeals to a lost Japanese tradition characterised by mutual concern and responsibility recalls the *furusato-zukuri* ('creating a homeland') movement of the 1980s, which was 'infused with ...a dissatisfaction with the present on the grounds of a remembered past plenitude' (Robertson 1991: 14). Like *furusato-zukuri*, the 'village society' the sharehouse claims to replicate is, if not imagined, indefinite. It does not only reference a historical past, but articulates a critique of the present and a vision for the future. As Eyal Ben-Ari explains, in *furusato-*

zukuri (as in the rhetoric of the ‘new village society’), ‘the idealised characteristics and practices of the “village of the past” are used as prescriptions for social relationships in the present’ (Ben-Ari 1995: 81). Perhaps more forcefully, Robertson locates the quest for an imagined past with the present sense of insecurity and loss: ‘*furusato* facilitates the collective re-membling of a nation dis-membered by defeat in war and, more recently, by the uncertainties of an international, late-capitalist economy, which have rendered the “future” a vexing problem’ (Robertson 1991: 37).

While references to the ‘village society’ operate on the same nostalgic register as *furusato-zukuri*, the social conditions it proposes to restore are often more recent and less pastoral. In the following passage, for example, the ‘village’ is identified explicitly with the conditions of the 20th century workplace that fed Japan’s explosive economic growth:

...until recently, in accordance with ‘lifetime employment,’ the whole of society became bound together with economic development through its unity as a ‘village’. However, through corporations beginning to adopt Western-style systems of ‘achievement-ism’ and so forth, this ‘society as village’ corrodes. This is because unfortunately the workplace becomes not the ‘place one always feels trust’ or the ‘place where one feels belonging’ but the place with a high sense of tension where competition is always lurking.... (Abe and Mohara 2012: 113).

Here, the ‘village’ refers to a stable job and workplace, trappings of the ‘ordinary lifestyle’ (*hitonami no seikatsu*) that, according to Anne Allison, has now become a privilege of a diminishing minority...’ (Allison 2014: 33).’ Social belonging refers to recognition and inclusion as a paradigmatic (that is, working) member of society and active participant in the country’s economic growth.

According to the workplace-as-village paradigm, the workplace was the both the symbolic and physical site of 'belonging' and social membership, but the exigencies of the contemporary labour market have eroded this sense of emplacement through the constant threat of forcible transfer. In an online article entitled 'Sharehouses as the Village Society of the 21st Century', a sharehouse resident in his thirties argues that the sharehouse replaces the regional ties afforded by more secure terms of employment, but only in the short term:

The present generation of young people... tend to have difficulty forging a community out of regional ties. [Once] they move to the city for work, they're constantly threatened with a transfer ordered by their employer, and they can't even be sure whether they'll even be seeing the same cherry blossoms the following spring... As for the sharehouse, however, you can communicate easily with others without having to fire yourself up to go out. At several floors rather than an entire region, it functions as a scaled-down community. In many sharehouses, due to relocation and life stages, there are frequent changes and there are few long-term housemates. We could call it a loose community, unfettered by regional ties. Perhaps this tendency is what we should call the '21st century village society' ('Sharehouses Are the 21st Century Village Society': 2015).

Here, even the young worker's experience of the natural world suffers, as emphasised through the highly evocative image of cherry blossom viewing, a recognisable symbol of Japanese nationalism and tradition (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 1-58) that operates on the same nostalgic register as *furusato*. However, unlike the *furusato* project, the fantasy return envisioned here by the sharehouse as the 'new village' is untethered from regional or long-standing interpersonal ties. The 'loose' community of the sharehouse provides a sense of human

connection without threatening the logic of a flexibilised labour market that insists on the mobility of its workers.

In this way, the 'sharehouse as village' represents a pragmatic utopia that accommodates the new status quo of generalised insecurity. It does not reinstate the institutions, like lifetime employment, that provided security in the past – not only job security, but the existential security of full social membership that characterised the middle-class lifestyle, *hitonami no seikatsu*, that was available to a majority of adults in the period of economic growth. Instead, the sharehouse follows the neoliberal logic of 'reflexive modernity': individual choices appear to substitute for the traditional structures of social organisation that are dissolved by labour market processes, including labour mobility. As Ulrich Beck explains,

The process of individualisation... is also characteristic of the 'free wage labourer' in modern capitalism, of the dynamics of labour market processes, labour mobility, education and changing occupation. The entry into the labour market dissolves such bindings and is connected over and over again with 'liberations' in a double sense from traditional networks and the constraints of the labour market. Family, neighbourhood, even friendship, as well as ties to a regional culture and landscape, contradict the individual mobility and the mobile individual required by the labour market. ...class biographies, which are somehow ascribed, become transformed into reflexive biographies which depend on the decisions of the actor (Beck 1992: 88).

Sharehouses, risk, and the new modernity

Although the 'village' envisioned by this marketing rhetoric refers to values associated with Japan's past, the demand for 'community' is a response to

conditions occurring everywhere in response to modern neoliberal capitalism's demand for greater worker mobility. As we have seen above, relationships between employer and employee, which recognised and accommodated the latter's human desires for stability and security, are liquidated in the interest of economic efficiency. An ethos of personal responsibility, disguised as individual freedom, supplants the institutional arrangements that provided support and stasis; divestment from these sources of security, including human relationships, appears instead as emancipation from the fetters of social obligation. Of course, this appearance of freedom veils the dependence on 'secondary agencies and institutions'. As Beck describes,

The place of traditional ties and social forms (social class, nuclear family) is taken by secondary agencies and institutions, which stamp the biography of the individual and make the person dependent upon fashions, social policy, economic cycles and markets, contrary to the image of individual control which establishes itself in consciousness (Beck 1992: 131, in Warde 1994: 879).

Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman designates this state of affairs 'liquid modernity', to reflect the impermanence of relations – interpersonal and economic – in late capitalism. Bauman identifies the communitarian impulse, which the sharehouse-as-village hopes to exploit, as a response to this 'liquidity' of social relations.

Sociologically speaking, communitarianism is an all-too-expectable reaction to the accelerating 'liquefaction' of modern life, a reaction first and foremost to the one aspect of life felt perhaps as the most vexing and annoying among its numerous painful consequences – the deepening imbalance between individual freedom and security. Supplies of security provisions shrink fast, while the volume of individual responsibilities (assigned if not exercised in practice) grows on a scale unprecedented for the post-war generation. A most salient aspect of the vanishing act performed by old securities is the new fragility of human bonds. The

brittleness and transience of bonds may be an unavoidable price for individuals' *right* to pursue their individual goals... (Bauman 2000: 170).

As we have seen, the sharehouse-as-village rhetoric directly references this loss or diminishment of 'human bonds' (*kizuna*); it proposes to reconstruct these bonds in accordance with individual desire and demand. This is because, as Bauman demonstrates, the contemporary understanding of 'community' (emblematised by the 'new village') is less a counterpart to, than an aspect of, the process of individualisation. Specifically, 'the "community" of the communitarian gospel is not the pre-established and securely grounded *Gemeinschaft* known from social theory... but a cryptonym for the zealously sought yet elusive 'identity' (Bauman 2000: 171). This insight - that what appear to be two complementary, if not contradictory, phenomena are aspects of the same processes - sheds light on the 'paradox' of sharehouse marketing, its parallel emphases on individual emancipation and the restoration of social bonds.

As Bauman explains, a concern for 'community' (the so-called 'communitarian gospel') emerges in response to a lack of security and a mounting sense of precarity. Its use is, to quote Eric Hobsbawm, 'never ...used more indiscriminately and emptily than in decades when communities in the sociological sense became hard to find in real life' (Hobsbawm 1994: 428, in Bauman 2000:171). The search for 'community' is, for Bauman and Hobsbawm, in reality a search for identity, in the sense of a stable place of social belonging. I would like to suggest that the sharehouse-as-village typifies this 'communitarian gospel' as a camouflage for 'identity'. As I have demonstrated, it

is offered in response to the loss of social belonging or social *place* (in the various senses of the term) due to the erosion of traditional social arrangements that located the individual in more or less patterned and stable relationships. These included, foremost, the workplace, the family home, and the regional community, all of which have undergone rapid change in recent decades (the latter two, in large part, due to the first). Bauman writes that 'Philippe Cohen lists unemployment (nine of ten new vacancies are strictly temporary and short-term), uncertain old age prospects and the hazards of urban life as the main sources of diffuse anxiety about the present, the next day and the more distant future' (Bauman 2000: 171).

Japanese language condenses this sense of a 'place of belonging' in the single term *ibasho*, which Anne Allison tidily defines as a 'place where one feels comfortable and at home' (Allison 2014: 174). According to Allison, contemporary references to *ibasho* are typically in the negative, indicating a widespread sense of social displacement:

a referent to less the presence than absence of human connection and security in a relationless society... a state of not-ness: not feeling quite right, not sufficiently secure, noticeably not human. A slippage from a time when things were (remembered or fantasized to be) better. When home meant social security... Which makes 'home' today seem, well, not (*ibasho ga nai*) [Allison 2014: 174-175]⁴⁶.

⁴⁶ The result is a general sense of exclusion or lack of belonging, 'an existential or social sense of homelessness ... a breakdown of everyday security, the loss of whereabouts (*ibasho*), the "refugeeisation" of groundedness itself' (Allison 2014: 78).

By providing a figurative (and a literal, if temporary) home, the sharehouse offers an *ibasho* entirely compatible with the individualistic and neoliberal logic of late capitalism, where 'social bonds' are commoditised. It promises that 'social place', like anything else, is available for purchase – or, more accurately, for rent. Nor is this re-placement in conflict with the projects of self-making discussed in earlier chapters; as we have seen, 'belonging' is, at its core, knowing where/that one fits in with others. Under the conditions of late modernity, as relationships with significant others – colleagues, family members, neighbours - become attenuated, the market substitutes relationships with objects. Unlike people and institutions, our relationships with commodities are freely chosen, constrained only by economic wherewithal. In this process, 'market-governed freedom of individual choice becomes a framework of individual self-expression' (Giddens 1991: 197). Giddens elaborates that:

to a greater or lesser degree, the project of the self becomes translated into one of the possession of desired goods and the pursuit of artificially framed styles of life. ... The consumption of ever-novel goods becomes in some part a substitute for the genuine development of self (Giddens 1991: 198).

Increasingly, according to Miura Atsushi, whose theory of 'fourth-stage consumer capitalism' we encountered above, the commodities young Japanese purchase – and by which they define themselves – are experiential, like the sharehouse, rather than material, as in home ownership. While Miura attributes this shift in consumption patterns chiefly to a shift in values, it is important to reiterate that my housemates' access to those commodities that denoted full social membership in earlier, especially the most recent, stages of capitalism, has been constrained by structural changes. The diminished materialism of the so-

called 'enlightenment generation' (*satori sedai*) is a reaction to their diminished capacity to enjoy the varieties of material goods that signalled the achievement of paradigmatic social membership for their fathers and grandfathers.

Finally, the logic of neoliberal capitalism is predicated on individual choice (and mobility), unburdened by the traditional constraints that attended the ascription of different social identities. However, the substitution of consumer choice – like living in the sharehouse – for other forms of identity-construction, does not eliminate processes of inclusion and exclusion. This is clear in the demarcation of the mainstream sharehouse 'community' as young, urban, and mobile. Behind the rhetoric of inclusivity is a gate-keeping process that amplifies members' sense of belonging by delimiting the scope of membership. As Bauman puts it, 'That communal world is complete in so far as all the rest is irrelevant; more exactly, hostile... The inner harmony of the communal world shines and glitters against the background of the obscure and tangled jungle which starts on the other side of the turnpike' ... (Bauman 2000: 172).⁴⁷ The 'securely grounded' *gemeinschaft* of 20th century Japan was regional, predicated on a sameness of experience and purpose literally 'grounded' in place. The sharehouse, whose membership is expected to be in constant flux, can only approximate this organic sense of sameness through a rejection of social difference, the expulsion of abnormality (*kawatte iru*). At Cheznew, full membership was theoretically open

⁴⁷ The proliferation of niche or themed sharehouses, which establish a community on the basis of shared interests and hobbies, is a natural expression of the exclusionary logic of the sharehouse 'community'. The specifically delimited 'community' responds to young people's demand for 'interpersonal contact' without the usual perils of communing with strangers.

to all comers, as indicated by the management's willingness to rent to older residents, a decision governed by economic rather than humanitarian concerns. Nonetheless, neither Honda nor Fumiko was able to overcome her *kawatte iru* identification to find her place of belonging.

Conclusions

In her discussion of the widespread precarity felt by contemporary Japanese, Anne Allison concludes that Japan needs

more attention paid... to sustaining one another in life rather than allocating responsibility to the self ('self-sustainability') and dismissing, or discounting, those who can't make it... This would lead to a new 'we', a radical reconfiguring of home, a rekindling of hope, and a reterritorialization of the social (Allison 2014: 179).

This is precisely what sharehouse marketing proposes, most visibly in the rhetoric of the 'new village society'. In its essence, the sharehouse is a response to the exclusion, voluntary or otherwise, of young people from home ownership and what was considered an 'ordinary' home life as part of a married couple. For young people, the sharehouse becomes an opportunity to reconsider the meaning of 'home' as a place of belonging, merging – as Allison does – the literal and figurative senses of that word. As we have seen throughout this chapter, the rhetoric of the 'new village society' that restores 'social bonds' coyly substitutes the choice of sharehouse living for the institutions that undergirded Japanese society in its most prosperous era. However, as a means for re-establishing social bonds amongst those excluded from the *hironami no seikatsu*, the sharehouse-as-village operates, as we have seen, according to an exclusionary logic.

Rather than focus on the concrete economic and political reasons for what Anne Allison terms the 'erosion of everydayness', sharehouse marketing responds to this deepening sense of precarity by substituting home-grown and partial 'connections' for the social welfare provisions of the past. This neo-liberal reimagining of 20th century understanding of the relationships between self, society, and state effectively displaces the obligations of the state to its citizens and the company to its employees (as evidenced by the dismantlement of social welfare programs and the erosion of normative lifetime employment) by privatising the social safety net as 'social bonds', theoretically available to all as a lifestyle commodity. The 'precarity' of those without stable employment and its collateral benefits, including the security of home ownership, becomes re-cast as a failure of Japanese sociality, of spirit, and of hope. In this way, political issues of social welfare provisioning become de-politicised, an indictment of Japanese social imagination rather than a failing system. Innovations in the private sector rush to fill the vacuum left by the institutions that provided support and belonging, but their inadequacies demonstrate the limitations of market responses to sociological problems.

結論

Chapter 8: Conclusion

‘To live is to leave traces. In the interior, these are accentuated.’

-Walter Benjamin, ‘Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century’, p. 155.

This thesis has discussed my experiences in a newly opened large-scale sharehouse in a mildly depressed, ageing residential area in Osaka Prefecture, and how they relate to the way sharehouses are presented (in marketing literature) and imagined (by my housemates). As Japan enters its third decade of economic stagnation in the midst of continuing population decline, what constituted a ‘good’ or a ‘normal’ life is no longer a realistic possibility for an increasing number of young people. The thesis has seen the present moment of social dynamism, and the so-called ‘sharehouse boom’, as a creative reimagining of categories like ‘home’ and ‘community’ that give meaning to an individual life.

Summary of chapters

Chapter 1 sets the stage for my observations in the sharehouse. It describes the particular conditions of my fieldwork, which took place in a newly-opened medium-scale property in an economically demoralised neighbourhood in Osaka Prefecture. The particularity of the property, and of my own experiences there, are noted here, and throughout the chapters that follow.

In this chapter, I also describe in some detail the broader context of sharehouses in Japan, with particular attention to the social changes that drove the sudden spike in sharehouse residency in 2007. Given the persistence of the stigma and the inevitable inconveniences of sharing living space with ‘strangers’, it is reasonable to conclude that housemates are driven to the sharehouse by pure economic rationality. I argue that, while economic considerations are surely involved in the decision to live in a sharehouse, the powerful rhetoric of the sharehouse’s ‘non-economic charms’ resonate with young Japanese for a variety of reasons related to changing social values, including a desire to restructure social relationships, a curiosity about alternative and foreign lifestyles, and a move away from personal ownership of resources (which I discuss below).

The six chapters that form the body of the thesis centre on the friction between the way the sharehouse is imagined, including residents’ personal reflections and content analysis of marketing discourses, on the one hand; and the realities of daily life in a space without a precise cultural template, on the other. Each of these chapters combines vignettes of individual housemates ethnographic reporting, and theoretical reflection. The focus in Chapters Two and Three is more strongly on the way the sharehouse was imagined prior to housemates’ entry into the house, including their reasons for moving to Cheznew; Chapters Four and Five on material practices within the house, and what these practices reveal about the way housemates understood in relation to existing socio-spatial categories; and Six and Seven on the present and potential implications of shared

housing within existing institutions like the marital home, local neighbourhood, and regional community.

One important theme is the idea that the sharehouse offers a respite from the demands of other spaces and a space for personal self-cultivation. Thus, much sharehouse marketing literature features compelling language about autonomy and freedom from social roles, specifically those associated with the family home and workplace. Chapters Two and Three play on the theme of 'longing' (*akogare*) that led many of my housemates, in particular young women, to Cheznew.

Chapter 2 discusses the way sharehouse marketing appeals ideas about self-transformation nurtured by young people who are marginalised in other spheres of life, especially employment. Nationwide, women outnumber men in sharehouses approximately by a ratio of approximately three to one, and amongst my housemates, women in unstable employment were overrepresented. In the sharehouse marketing I survey in this chapter, the sharehouse is distinguished from the workforce, where young women are thought to be hampered by institutional sexism. This marketing references the rhetoric that accompanied the neoliberal educational reforms that encouraged students, like my female housemates, toward the culture industries – to 'chase their dreams' without regard to their dim employment prospects.

Increases in women's workplace participation have accompanied changes in the structure of the home, with many women postponing or refusing marriage. The sharehouse offers a third option - between the suffocation of living in the family home and the loneliness of living alone – that has the additional advantages, according to sharehouse literature, of helping young women to develop their individuality and capabilities through daily interaction with others that will translate to greater 'power' in other spheres. In this way, the choice to live in a sharehouse is depicted an act of self-determination.

Dreaming of careers in the creative industries, many of my female housemates (like Haruko, the fashion school graduate) defined themselves through their dreams, rather than their part-time or contract employment. Theoretically a laboratory for self-development in anticipation of their big break, Cheznew became a space where they fantasised about the future instead of taking concrete action to realise these dreams. Like Vincent Crapanzano's 'passive hope' as a 'field of desire in waiting' (Crapanzano 2003: 19), these women's aspirations took the place of concrete achievement.

Chapter 3 considers another form of longing expressed by my housemates, for the experience of a 'foreign lifestyle' through contact with foreigners. As a space of respite from cultural norms associated with other spheres of activity, marketing imagines the sharehouse as a 'foreign' space, appealing to the popularity of foreign media imagery. According to a report by Recruit, the popularity of sharehouses is, in part, a response to the desire amongst young

people to travel overseas. As a result, sharehouse marketing emphasises the transformative effect of living with those of 'different values and backgrounds' with reference to the sharehouse as a site for 'international exchange' or 'studying abroad without leaving Japan'. Many properties make this analogy more literal by wooing foreign residents and in some cases providing English language classes onsite with a foreign resident. But not all foreigners are created equal, and 'international exchange' can be fraught. The extent of this domestic 'international exchange' appears to have been more intense and more authentic than my housemates, both Japanese and foreign, had anticipated. Protracted and constant 'international exchange' in the home was not as effortless as expected, as evidenced by the series of incidents I discuss in that chapter.

Chapters Four through Six move from discourse to a closer focus on practice. These chapters share a single theme: the difficulty of locating the sharehouse within traditional conceptual categories, especially between the poles of public and private. The distinction between public (*soto*) and private (*uchi*) is a central problematic in much post-war thinking about Japan, and these chapters consider the way residents and management reconcile the privacy of the house and the public-ness of social relationships outside the family. This became a central dilemma for residents at Cheznew, who found themselves without a template for appropriate interaction in a number of circumstances: how to deal with the division of domestic labour, whether and how to communicate dissatisfaction with others' use of shared resources, and to what extent conjugal intimacy was permissible. Despite the promise that the sharehouse defies the constraints of

other social spheres, residents' experimental solutions referenced existing cultural norms concerning these spheres, including the home and public spaces like the workplace. As a group, these chapters demonstrate that public and private are fluid and constructed in practice, even in more traditional settings

Chapter 4 describes housemates' attempts, through material practices, to locate the house on the continuum between public and private. The chapter discusses the handmade instructional posters housemates posted, modelled on the ubiquitous warning posters in Japanese public spaces and most famously on Japanese subways; the prohibition against the presence of private possessions in shared space; and the way women conformed to quasi-public conventions of dress and self-presentation.

Issues of privacy obviously correlate with but are not reducible to those concerning intimacy, and Chapter 5 discusses the way my housemates replicated the cultural norm that the home is a space of labour, not sexual play. In their disavowal of conjugal intimacy – even, in most cases, attraction – housemates invoked idioms of fictive siblingship, but Cheznew bore only a superficial resemblance to the family home. Instead, by preserving their independent identities, and assiduously upholding the prohibition against causing a nuisance to others (*meiwaku*), they replicated more civic understandings of their relationships to each other, individually and as a group. The quasi-corporate nature of social relationships at Cheznew was enhanced by the periodic and collective transgressions of social etiquette permitted at *nomikai* through

ritualised 'sex talk', which underscored the need, in daily speech and behaviour, to conform to standards of propriety, discretion, and social distance.

Chapter 6 discusses tensions within the sharehouse and between the sharehouse and local community, through a careful study of evolving waste disposal practices that mirrored changing understandings of the sharehouse as a social space: in particular, female housemates' rejection of naturalised assumptions about the division of labour and the development of more 'civic' relations through the personalisation of garbage. The garbage disposal area is also a key site of contact between the household and the community. I argue that the exclusion of Cheznew from full membership in the community was indicated by our exclusion from regimes of mutual surveillance that, under normal circumstances, would have resulted in our being reprimanded – officially or otherwise – for our non-compliance with local protocols.

As an ensemble, these two-and-a-half chapters demonstrate the socio-spatial ambiguity of the sharehouse and the *ad hoc* way that residents referred to both domestic and public templates in their material practices. On closer examination, however, it becomes more difficult to distinguish what constitutes 'public' and 'private', even in spaces, like the workplace or the family home, that are conventionally assumed to exist at one or other pole of the *uchi/soto* continuum. This material confirms what has already been suggested, that these categories are relative and intersecting rather than discreet spheres. Beyond this, they demonstrate my housemates' ambivalence with regard to the

normative Japanese family home, alternately importing certain features and consciously rejecting others.

The latter half of Chapter 6 questions the potential for the sharehouse to integrate into the Japanese urban landscape, traditionally comprised – as Ted Bestor depicted in some detail – of distinguishable, socially significant neighbourhoods (Bestor 1989). Chapter 7 follows on this more speculative note, to consider the possible forms the sharehouse could take, the effects (positive and negative) that it could have for current and future Japanese, and whether the sharehouse can fulfil its promise to restore social bonds through the resurrection of ‘village society’.

The structure of the chapters is intended to highlight some of the tensions between imaginative discourses around the sharehouse, on the one hand, and the material realities, on the other; and the extent to which these tensions are resolvable. To put it more concretely, the rhetoric of much sharehouse marketing, and the responses of sharehouse residents when asked their motivations for pursuing this ‘lifestyle’, gravitate around ideas about individual projects and aspirations that are conceived as incompatible with Japanese ‘cultural tradition’. This self-conscious progressivism breaks down to some extent in daily life and specifically material practices that deal with issues of privacy. Young sharehouse residents, finding themselves unmoored from the pressures of conventional living arrangements (specifically residence within the family home) also find themselves unmoored from reliable templates for suitable

interpersonal interaction. This unmooring may give rise to anxieties and what appear conscious efforts to retain elements of 'Japanese tradition' as a guide for appropriate and comfortable living.

Significance

It is reasonable to ask why anyone should be concerned with the decision-making processes of two dozen or so young, unmarried Japanese in a cheaply refurbished dormitory in a declining exurb of Osaka. Indeed, the beliefs and practices of Cheznew's residents described in the foregoing should not be taken as representative of the estimated 20,000 sharehouse residents in Japan, much less Japanese youth, much less contemporary Japanese. The particularity of fieldwork circumstances, including the relatively brief period of fieldwork; the effect of geography; and the presence of individual personalities like Yamada's are all detailed below under 'Limitations'. Nonetheless, in a dynamic social context like contemporary Japan, where 'traditional' institutions like the nuclear family and lifetime employment are no longer the norm, the story of how Cheznew hobbled into existence provides an ethnographic view of one important site where these changes are taking place – in the home.

The number of sharehouses remains relatively low – according to research by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, in 2014, the total number of sharehouses nationwide was 2,744, more than 75% of which were located in metropolitan Tokyo (Osaka Prefecture accounted for a scant 97 properties)

(MLIT 2014). Nonetheless, it has attracted enough attention to be the focus of studies by government agencies like the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport's 40-page 'Sharehouse Guidebook' (which recommends the sharehouse as a means to make use of vacant properties and provide care for the elderly and disabled), and at least one academic conference, at Toyo University in 2014.

The sharehouse has also been the theme or the setting of a disproportionate number of media products in Japanese media, demonstrating the extent of public curiosity about the sharehouse as a 'new' lifestyle. These include the 2011 films 'Sharehouse' and 'Parade', and the series 'Why I can't succeed in love', all set in sharehouses. In the year 2013 three new series based on sharehouses emerged, including a reality clip show starring members of the long-lived boy band Arashi who emerge from their bedrooms onto the living room sofa of their 'sharehouse'; and the now internationally popular 'Terrace House', an American-style reality show that follows the interactions amongst its six attractive young housemates/cast members.

Finally, *Sheahausu no Koibito* (Sharehouse Lovers), follows a single woman in her late twenties finding love with her quirky new housemate after frustrations at her home and workplace drive her to move in with two men. The sharehouse is a space of respite from conventional social responsibilities, the excessive attentions of her mother, and her inability to progress at work. Perhaps these themes resonate with young women who recognize these dilemmas at work in

their own lives. The story is complicated by her romantic interest in the mysterious salaryman and married father of one, Yukiya, who is driven by passions of his own to this unorthodox arrangement; specifically, it turns out, his unrequited homosexual desire for Tappei, who falls in love with Shio. Here, the sharehouse is depicted as a free space for the expression of desires prohibited elsewhere, particularly in the figure of Yukiya, who cloisters his sexual identity in this alternative space of fantasy and play.

What this indicates is that the sharehouse can be seen as both a real and an imagined place. As a material place, the sharehouse is a critical response to the dissolution of structural conditions like the flexibilised workforce and mainstream domesticity. The widespread unemployment and job insecurity among young people has made home ownership increasingly less viable for large numbers of young people; female participation in the job market has accompanied declining rates of marriage and childbirth; and the aging society has left nearly 14% of habitable rooms in Japan vacant. It should be noted that the consequences and context lurking behind much of the immediate action within the sharehouse - the persistent experience amongst young people of uncertainty and crisis in an era of widespread instability – is a global, not a local, phenomenon, and housing communities for working adults, like the sharehouse, are emerging in American cities as well. It is no coincidence that sharehouses are occupied overwhelmingly by young people who are structurally more vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the labour market than older people in established careers.

As a result, the present work contributes to the literature on the changing lifestyles and circumstances experienced by young people. Labour sociologists like Genda Yuji (2005) and Yamada Masahiro (2000) have recorded the changes in labour patterns due to the flexibilisation of work and the demographic burden of ageing workers. Cultural theorists, meanwhile, have focused on social change through the lens of consumption rather than production. Miura (2014) has emphasised changing consumption patterns amongst the so-called *satori sedai*, the ‘enlightenment generation’, who are depicted in retreat from the flagrant and conspicuous spending associated with their predecessors. The present work has demonstrated that young Japanese continue to define themselves primarily through their consumer habits, but the commodities through which they define themselves have shifted, partially in response to their decreasing spending power, to less substantial and more experiential commodities, including education and travel (when possible).

For baby boomers, home ownership signified paradigmatic social belonging through membership in the middle class. Since the dismantlement of government programs to promote widespread homeownership, however, purchasing a home – and the ‘normal lifestyle’ it emblematised – is, as Allison claims, possible for a declining minority. At the same time, the flexibilisation and mobilisation of labour has meant that purchasing immovable property, like a home, has become less desirable for a generation of workers who are under constant threat of transfer. The popularity of the sharehouse, which is described as a temporary and transcendent experience on the model of foreign travel,

symbolises the generational shift in values from ostentatious ownership to modest and transitory 'sharing'.

As the contributions to Ronald and Alexy's 2011 *Home and Family in Japan* demonstrate, and as I have emphasised throughout, ideas about the composition of the home and family are in transition, at least partially in response to the economic factors that make the 20th century two-parent household (with a dedicated stay-at-home housewife) less tenable. As I have stressed, the sharehouse is not, at present, seen as a permanent lifestyle; nonetheless, the sharehouse offers an opportunity to construct a new domestic space, seemingly from scratch. In my research, the space housemates constructed was a direct critique of the family home and its values, like the gendered division of labour.

As a result, the present work also contributes to the literature on young women and their changing role in society: in particular, the rise of female labour participation and the postponement or refusal of marriage. As I have pointed out, young women comprised the majority of residents at Cheznew, as in the aggregate sharehouse resident population in Japan. According to the Brookings Institute, female labour participation in Japan increased ten percent, from 66.5 percent to 76.3 percent over the period 2000 – 2016; during the same period, the rate of non-married 'prime-aged' women (aged between 25 and 44) increased from 20 to 25 percent (Shambaugh, Nunn, and Portman 2017). Even if many of these women are engaged in non-standard employment, which appears to be the case, they nonetheless marshal significant freedom and consumer power. In

particular, Laura Dales (2015) has written about the agency of Japan's single women. I do not present my housemates as feminist heroes. However, it is clear from interviews that longings (*akogare*) –for independence, for self-knowledge, for professional accomplishment – were central motivators for living in the sharehouse, because these longings could not be fulfilled in the family, nor the marital, home. In this way, the present work has demonstrated one way young women criticise the Japanese status quo.

One important 'longing' is for internationalism, as I have demonstrated at some length in Chapter 3. Another consequence of workplace changes is the so-called 'young people's separation from foreign travel' (*wakamono no gaikairyōko banare*), either because they lack the financial wherewithal or the ability to take time away from work (Nishimura, Takai, and Nakamura 2010). Yuiko Fujita has written about the increasing numbers of 'cultural migrants' from Japan, motivated by the desire to 'create a more fulfilling life and thus transcend their old identities' (Fujita 2009: 169). The sharehouse capitalises on this desire amongst those young people, like my housemates, whose ability to travel internationally is limited, through the rhetoric of 'study abroad at home'. Again, the desire for international travel shared by Fujita's 'cultural migrants' and sharehouse residents is not merely the draw of the ill-defined 'foreign lifestyle' as it is a criticism of Japanese society and the constraints it is seen to exercise against young people's self-expression and -realisation. Thus, the decision to live in a sharehouse has significance beyond the individual's experience, but indicates a more thorough-going social critique.

Thus, as an imagined space, the sharehouse is invested with the *zeitgeist* of a generation in pursuit of new alternatives to the lifestyles that seemed, until recently, inevitable. While there have always been a minority of households – classified in government statistics under the category of ‘other’ – at the margins of the normative paradigm, these were not marketed and received in the way the sharehouse is: as an aspirational lifestyle; as a space for the assertion of individual prerogative, social experimentation, and the transcendence of social roles and conventions.

In recent years, social scientists have begun a robust programme of enquiry into questions of ‘hope’ and changing conceptions of the ‘good life’, including more subjective definitions of well-being, in light of a widespread change in material circumstances, particularly security in the family and workplace. As Gordon Mathews describes, recent discourses about hope and happiness in Japan follow two broad themes: the unsustainability of older ideas about the good life, like the nuclear family model, and the resulting focus on individualism. He concludes that these discourses, like the American happiness industry, obscure the injustices of neoliberal Japan through an insistence on individual agency aided by the concept of lifestyle pluralism (Mathews 2017: 233-238). My research into the frictions between the discourses of happiness and freedom in sharehouse literature and the real constraints on my housemates’ actual prospects has supported these conclusions. In addition, it has considered the way even

rhetoric about promoting 'community' and restoring social bonds are rooted in individualistic desire and neoliberal market processes.

In short, this research has contributed to our understanding of the way young people are, as Gordon and White suggest (Mathews and White 2004a), creating a new society. First, it has demonstrated that this process, while creative, is largely in response to structural changes, like a lack of access to a middle-class lifestyle. It has demonstrated how, in accordance with the neoliberal logic of the post-reform era, young people like my housemates come to see their exclusions – from full-time salaried employment or home ownership – as the expression of individual choice. Second, it has demonstrated that the 'new society' young people are creating – in Japan as in the microcosm of Cheznew – emerges out of incremental and iterative, rather than revolutionary, practices. Thus, while what its promoters have called the 'sharehouse boom' does not involve great numbers of young people, the visibility of the sharehouse as a phenomenon that responds to young people's experience of their position in a changing Japan makes it worthy of sociological interest.

At the same time, however, this research has shown the persistent influence of more 'traditional' cultural norms over experimentation. While Cheznew was theoretically a space to escape from social roles and expectations in other spheres of social activity, in fact housemates referred to these existing templates for guidance. The eventual result, which was more 'civic' and individualistic than

a communal, arose out of negotiations amongst competing theories of space held by housemates and management.

Finally, this research has contributed to the limited body of ethnographic work in the domestic sphere. Anthropological thinking about the home, in particular the Japanese home, has tended to focus on its symbolic and structural attributes (see, Hendry 2013: 23-40). The result is often a static view of the home as the embodiment of socio-spatial categories relating to the fundamental opposition of inside and outside. The present work has followed the ethnographic research by Inge Daniels (Daniels 2008; Daniels 2010) in describing the way spaces within the home defy these categories in practice, through the daily movement of people and objects.

Limitations and topics for future research

The present work, based on daily observation of and interaction with a small number of participants, is not intended as a definitive commentary on the thousands of sharehouses and the tens of thousands of sharehouse residents estimated at present. I have taken pains to relate my observations at Cheznew to nationally available, and widely consumed, sharehouse marketing discourses; observations during visits to sharehouses in Osaka and Tokyo; and comments by sharehouse industry professionals. However, the themes and conclusions of this research were determined by my observations at Cheznew, the experiences and desires of my housemates. The implications of the present research are limited

by the specificity of Cheznew as a fieldsite and the comparatively short period of direct fieldwork.

As I have indicated, Cheznew is not centrally located. On the contrary, it lies fifteen minutes outside Osaka proper on a branch line, making it a relatively undesirable location. The physical structure, though bright and clean, was not luxurious; and the amenities were fairly basic. Accordingly, the monthly cost of a room at Cheznew was lower than the equivalent in an urban hub, like Umeda or Nanba, which surely affected membership in the house. While, as I have indicated, the majority of my housemates (the female housemates in particular) worked in unskilled and precarious roles, we can expect that a glitzier property in a more central area would attract more professionals (*seishain*). At the Expo House properties I visited in Kyoto, on the other hand, nearly half of the residents were college students or recent graduates. As a result, this is not an ethnography of 'the Japanese sharehouse', but of Cheznew; and, moreover, of a newly-opened Cheznew then still finding its identity as a property. This particularity was both a strength and a limitation of the present research, but it should be emphasised that research conducted at a younger, or a female-only, or a more established, property may have prompted very different conclusions about and images of the sharehouse.

In addition, my period of direct participant-observation was relatively short (and followed by another year of less intensive research from a private flat within the neighbourhood). The nearly sixteen hours a day I spent, on average, observing

and interacting with my housemates is equivalent in hours to more prolonged but less intensive research in another setting. However, due to the brevity of observation, this research does not account for longer-term processes at work in Cheznew.

Chapter 7 discusses the recent emergence of shared housing designated for certain demographics, especially the elderly. At present, there is limited evidence that these properties will have the desired effect of ameliorating social isolation, in part because of the lingering stigma against living with non-kin (Platz 2012: 268). However, sharehouses are too new, and these properties in particular, to make a definitive prediction. It remains to be seen whether the sharehouse model can be adapted in this more socially helpful way, and this is a possible direction for future research.

Finally, while the Japanese cultural context has been relevant to the expectations my housemates brought to Cheznew, the social context of late capitalism and its effects, is present everywhere in the developed world. In expensive cities in the US and Europe, shared housing schemes like the Japanese sharehouse are emerging, promising young, urban singles a space to restore social bonds. Multi-sited, comparative research in these various contexts would examine the way 'community' becomes commodified through the principles of the free market and transcends the local cultural milieu.

Final conclusions

Between 1975 and 2014, the average household size has number of single-person households grew from 18.2 percent to 26.5 percent, and two-person (couple-only) households from 11.8 to 23.2 percent of households, while nuclear and multi-generational households have dramatically decreased. (MHLW 2014: 6). The 'average household' now consists of one to two individuals, as opposed to forty years ago. The sharehouse should be seen as part of this development. It is ideologically compatible with the increasingly individualistic conception of the household: despite our single *genkan*, this research demonstrated how the house functioned as a series of micro-households under one roof. Sharehouses may also support this demographic development by encouraging its residents – particularly women - to postpone finding partners and establishing families, although that connection remains unclear.

The home is a microcosm, a space where ideas about the order of the world are made material through consumer choices and ritual practices. This process is always constrained in some way – by space, by budget, and, through the mechanism of individual taste, by social class (Bourdieu 1984). In the sharehouse, as the present work has demonstrated, this process became at once collaborative and contested. In contrast with the family home, where it is presumed that family members share a more or less consistent set of values and where, moreover, those values are expressed through both material and ritual conventions, residents came to Cheznew with differing ideas about what type of

place it could and should be. Over time, however, the housemates – with intervention from management – negotiated a consensus about the nature of spaces within the home and the types of relationship appropriate to those spaces. By the time I left Cheznew, relationships within the house were more civic than familial, more individualistic than communitarian. While many housemates chose the sharehouse because living alone was seen as ‘lonely’ and ‘sad’, they remained faithful to the mandate, set forth in the Cheznew Sharehouse Manual, to ‘live life like an international café: together, but alone’.

Appendix: Cheznew housemates*

NAME	AGE	OCCUPATION	EDUCATION	SEX	NATIONALITY	TENURE	CURRENT HOUSING
Tanaka	24	entertainment management	university	m	Japan	2 months	parental home
Yume	28	graphic design	vocational	f	Japan	2 years +	private flat, with partner
Haruko	25	retail (later secretarial)	vocational/study abroad	f	Japan	2 years +	marital home
Matsuhiko	35	cameraman	vocational	m	Japan	1 year +	overseas
Sachiko	24	retail	high school	f	Japan	4 months	parental home
Kiyoshi	24	retail	high school	m	Japan	3 months	parental home
Akiko	22	customer service	high school	f	Japan	2 months	parental home
Kenichi	30	it	university/study abroad	m	Japan	1 year +	marital home
Akari	25	non-profit (ymca)	university/study abroad	f	Japan	2 years +	marital home
Chie	26	customer service	high school	f	Japan	2 years +	unknown
Ueno	27	interior design	university	m	Japan	2 years +	private flat, alone
Ryunosuke	19	administrative	unknown	m	Japan	2 years +	parental home
Hina	19	retail	high school	f	Japan	2 years +	private flat, with roommate
Fumiko	45	<i>hakken</i>	high school	f	Japan	6 months	parental home
Honda	60	<i>hakken</i>	high school	f	Japan	2 years +	unknown
Hiromi	25	manufacturing/clerical	vocational	f	Japan	2 years +	private flat, with roommate
Hana	25	<i>hakken</i>	university	f	Japan	2 years +	parental home
Sotarō	29	urban planning	university	m	Japan	2 years +	marital home
Yamada	45	Business owner	university	m	Japan	2 years +	marital home
Riyu	25	Customer service	vocational	m	Japan (Okinawa)	6 months	unknown
Baekyong	23	unemployed	high school	f	Korea	less than 1 month	elsewhere in Japan
Cheng	24	student	unknown	f	Australia	1 year +	home country
Wong	26	government	university	m	Hong Kong	2 months	elsewhere in Japan
Jenny	29	manufacturing	unknown	f	Hong Kong	1 month	home country
Hung	23	unemployed	unknown	m	Hong Kong	1 month	elsewhere in Japan
Eunjoo	45	general clerical	university	f	Korea	less than 1 month	home country
Kevin	22	unemployed	high school	m	Malaysia	2 months	home country
Yoji	24	service	high school	m	Taiwan	1 year	home country
Yeh	24	service	high school	m	Taiwan	1 year	home country
Chihau	24	student	university	m	Taiwan	1 year	home country
Ryang	24	retail	high school	f	Taiwan	1 year	home country
Brian	30	student	some college	m	United States	6 months	home country

* All names are pseudonyms

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Changes to thesis

I have extensively rewritten the thesis, incorporating examiners' comments from the viva in 2015. The more substantive changes are summarised below.

In addition to rewriting and revising individual sections, I have deleted an entire chapter (7, 'Body, Group, Self'), moved Chapter 4 to Chapter 6 (then 'Community', now titled 'Waste'), and have written a new Chapter 7 ('Village Society'), using material from the previous submission's Conclusion. In response to the examiners' comments, I have aimed to make the thesis: 1) more solidly ethnographic; 2) better substantiated through the use of empirical (statistical) data; 3) more theoretically cohesive; and 4) more economical. As a result, this submission is significantly shorter than the previous submission and contains a significant amount of new material.

I have eliminated all instances of *IBID*, per professor Kinsella's suggestion, and have added page numbers wherever appropriate. Where I am citing the argument of an entire work, I have omitted page numbers in accordance with the University of Oxford's Guide to Referencing and Citations.

p. ix – xi provided a profile of major characters in the ethnography for reference

Chapter 1

pp. 18-19 added language about method
pp. 23-24 added commentary about regional differences and the implications of field site location
pp. 25-28 added an expanded section on sharehouse demographics
pp. 28-29 added an expository section about origins of the sharehouse
pp. 30-36 added a more empirically robust analysis of political economics, clarifying the role of economic factors
pp. 36-43 revised the historical background of modern Japanese housing, replacing less relevant sections with more recent and more empirical data
pp. 49-52 rewrote the section on gender, with more empirical data
pp. 55-57 abbreviated section on hope and uncertainty
pp. 57-63 revised 'structure of the thesis' to reflect reorganisation and revision of subsequent chapters

Chapter 2

(Entire chapter restructured/revised/rewritten, deleted sections 'comforts of home/dangers of being alone', and 'Western rhetoric in a traditional idiom: educating the heart', '*Ikigai* and the Japanese imagination', 'Frustrated aspiration and the realities of contemporary Japan: the "type who follow their dreams"', and 'Marketing the sharehouse to *Yumeoigata*: Sharehouse as workshop'; some material from these sections have been incorporated into new sections)
pp. 64-77 rewrote introduction and expanded vignettes of housemates Haruko and Yume
pp. 78-84 rewrote/expanded section on 'women as non-paradigmatic labour'

pp. 90-94 rewrote/condensed section on '*amaeru*'
pp. 94-99 rewrote Conclusions, linking the ethnographic data more closely to the overall theoretical trajectory of the thesis

Chapter 3

(Entire chapter restructured/revised/rewritten; deleted sections 'The foreign origins of the sharehouse: the *kikake* narrative', 'Cosmopolitan women' and 'Japan through foreign eyes: the foreigner as mirror')

pp. 100-103 deleted introduction about sharehouse management pursuing me for publicity; added ethnographic account of 'Alan's' arrival in house

pp. 103-109 rewrote and condensed material linking sharehouse marketing to government and private English language marketing campaigns, introducing more voices from housemates and outside research on Japanese study abroad

pp. 112-116 new section, combining housemate voices about influences of Western media, Appadurai's 'imagined worlds'

pp. 116-121 rewrote/condensed section on 'erotic internationalism' to link desire/power

pp. 121-129 – three new ethnographic vignettes titled 'The Wrong Kind of *gaijin*', demonstrating the limits of 'internationalism'

pp. 129-132 new Conclusion, 'Buyer's remorse', summarising the conflict between expectations of international exchange and the realities, in the idiom of consumption, linking chapter to overall theoretical trajectory

[Chapter 4, 'Community' in previous submission renamed 'Waste' and moved to Chapter 6]

Chapter 4

[Formerly Chapter 5, 'Privacy', renamed 'Public and Private']

pp. 133-137 revised ethnographic section with greater detail and specificity about housemates; moved ethnography to beginning and analysis later

pp. 137-148 expanded ethnographic section on display in the house

pp. 148-151 revised /condensed discussion of *uchi*, *soto*, and the home

pp. 152-158 rewrote section for clarity and relevance

pp. 158-163 moved a condensed version of now-omitted Chapter 7 on self-presentation; included more detail and housemates' voices

Chapter 5

[Formerly Chapter 6, 'Intimacy', now 'Nuisance'; thoroughly restructured/revised/rewritten/condensed; deleted Part II: 'Commensality and food exchange' and subsections]

pp. 165-170 extended ethnographic section on Sachiko and Kiyoshi's romance

pp. 170-172 rewrote section on *meiwaku*

pp. 172-176 extended section on Haruko and Sotarō, with profile of Sotarō

pp. 176-180 condensed and revised section on love hotels and prohibitions against sex in the home

pp. 180-186 rewrote/condensed 'sex talk' section with reference to *bureiko* and segregation of sexual from everyday discourses

Chapter 6

[previously Chapter 4]

pp. 189-224 few changes to this chapter, which Professor Goodman has previously read and accepted; 'village society' section expanded and moved to [deleted Chapter 7 of previous submission, 'Group, Body, Self']

Chapter 7

[new chapter]

pp. 226-230 moved profiles of Honda and Fumiko from Conclusion of previous submission; expanded

pp. 230-235 new research into sharehouses as 'intergenerational facilities'

pp. 235-242 new sections on the sharehouse as a response to demographic change

pp. 242-248 moved section on rhetoric of the 'new village society' from Chapter 6 [Chapter 4 in previous submission]/expanded

pp. 248 – 255 new analytical section on the sharehouse and the ideology of late capitalism

Chapter 8

pp. 256-263 rewrote summary of chapters to reflect changes

pp. 263-275 added sections on contributions, limitations, and future research

I hope that these changes are satisfactory to the examiners, to whom I am thankful for their time, patience, and thoughtful comments.